



early risers

Waking up to racial equity
in early childhood.

Discussion Guide

Season 7, Episode 6: [Rupture and Repair, Part 1](#), released August 6, 2025

Learning Goal: Explore Dr. Anne Gearity's Developmental Repair method and how it supports self-regulation and identity in young children. Hear real-world examples that show how the model works in practice. Reflect on how trauma — including adverse experiences, racialized, historical, and generational trauma — affects children's behavior and development. Learn how to reframe challenging behaviors, build resilience and support healing. Take away practical strategies to help children, and families, develop skills and a stronger sense of identity.

Suggested Conversation Length: 60 minutes



[Early Risers](#) is a podcast focused on how to talk with young children about race. The podcast invites early childhood experts into conversations about how parents, caregivers and early childhood educators can tackle this big topic with the little ones in their lives.

Background

When Dr. Anne Gearity earned her master's in social work in 1974, the field of Early Childhood was just beginning. As she puts it, "We started to pay attention and really think about what children need not just to survive, but to thrive—and that they can be resilient." That focus on the child has guided her work ever since. Over five decades, her research led to a new approach for treating childhood trauma:

Developmental Repair. In part one of this two-part series, host Andre Dukes talks with Dr. Gearity about what she's learned from working with children and how caregivers can better understand behavior as a form of communication.

Guest Bio

Dr. Anne Gearity earned her Ph.D. in clinical social work from the Institute for Clinical Social Work in Chicago, IL. Research from her dissertation was foundational for Developmental Repair, an intervention manual for behaviorally challenged and challenging children, written in collaboration with the Washburn Center for Children in Minneapolis. This manual is now used extensively throughout the state. She taught for 25 years in the University of Minnesota School of Social Work and was faculty of the U of M's Infant and Early Child Mental Health Certificate program in the Institute for Child Development. She completed a master's in social work from the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Work of New York, NY, and has had an independent mental health practice that serves children, adolescents and adults since 1987.

Her initial role in psychiatry was teaching normal child development to child and adolescent psychiatry fellows. In 2017, she started the family consult clinic to help families navigate potentially confusing diagnoses, treatment plans and related family needs, and provide fellowship with family engagement experiences.

Discussion Questions

- Childhood trauma hasn't been seriously studied until the last 35 years. Dr. Anne Gearity explains that while kids can be resilient, they still need support from adults. As you listen, note the mindsets, myths, and methods she shares for helping children heal through Developmental Repair.
- Dr. Gearity's Developmental Repair is a model where adults stay calm and help kids regulate when they're overwhelmed or stressed. She also talks about the importance of identity repair. What identity struggles might kids face after trauma, and how can we help them build a positive sense of self?
- Dr. Gearity's approach to Developmental Repair supports both identity and agency in kids, as host Andre Dukes points out. Why do you think this method works? How might you use these ideas in your own work with children?
- Dr. Gearity explains that even preverbal children remember early experiences through their bodies—and may actually retain more than older kids. Does that idea surprise you? How do her insights and stories shape or challenge your beliefs about how trauma and identity form in young children?

- Dr. Gearity says children “talk to us with their behavior,” and it’s our job to listen. What strategies does she suggest for helping kids process big feelings and build self-regulation? What approaches are you currently using with young children to support these skills?
- Dr. Gearity spends some time unpacking and defining childhood trauma and how it impacts children. How do you define trauma? How does her definition differ from yours? What do you think the adult's role is in supporting children's resilience?
- Dr. Gearity emphasizes that simple acts, like showing interest and kindness, can shape how children respond to stress and trauma. Does that feel too simple to you, or do you think it’s true? How does this idea align with your own experiences with children who’ve faced challenges?
- Dr. Gearity says regulation is “hardware that needs software”—and trauma can disrupt both. How does this idea connect to the importance of cultural representation in a child’s life? What role do adults play in shaping a child’s sense of self and safety, especially when that representation is missing?
- Dr. Gearity affirms the reality of racialized trauma, noting that feeling “endangered, unsafe, and unvalued” due to race has lasting impact. How do her insights on historical and generational trauma shape your understanding of racialized trauma? What responsibilities do you hold in supporting young children and families in healing? Cite strategies from the episode or your own learning.

Closing the Discussion

As you wrap up the discussion, encourage continued conversation and learning around key concepts from the episode, like Developmental Repair, Protective Factors, types of trauma and the “rocket science” of identity development. Set a clear goal for responding to challenging behavior in ways that repair and support positive identity in young children. Share your own takeaways or “ah-ha” moments and offer relevant resources. You might also consider a follow-up conversation in the next episode of the Early Risers podcast.

Additional Resources

- Seminal 1991 [report](#) on Childhood Trauma
- [Romanian Orphans](#)
- [Developmental Repair Manual](#) (2012, Gearity)
- [Dr. Anne Gearity](#) University of Minnesota Dept of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

General Facilitator Tips

- Read through all the questions first.
- Reiterate the purpose of the discussion is to learn from each other.
- Create an agreement with everyone in the discussion group that helps create a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere. Acknowledge that talking about race can be difficult.
- Be sensitive to how people identify.
- Be prepared for a response to any remarks that might be offensive. The person saying it may not be aware that it is offensive, so be gentle in pointing it out.

Group Agreements

Ground rules and group agreements are a way to respect safety. Ask members to brainstorm and collectively determine group agreements. Here is some information you can reference:

- [Group agreement information from Seeds for Change](#)
- [Community Agreements tool from Just Lead Washington](#)
- [Sample group agreement from GSAFE](#)

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