Strong Communities Raise Strong Kids

Adverse Childhood Experiences: The Impetus for Change

Regional Child Abuse Prevention Councils 2011

“The solution of all adult problems tomorrow depends in large measure upon the way our children grow up today.”

- Margaret Mead, Anthropologist

What Are ACEs?
Adverse Childhood Experiences

• ACEs are experiences in childhood that are unhappy, unpleasant, hurtful.

• Sometimes referred to as toxic stress or childhood trauma.

ACEs Often Last a Lifetime . . . But They Don’t Have To

• Healing can occur
• The cycle can be broken
• Safe, stable, nurturing relationships heal parent and child.
Complete ACE Questionnaire

• What does it make you think about?

• Keep in mind your thoughts as we present the ACE Study

What are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)?

• Growing up (prior to age 18) in a household with:
  • Recurrent physical abuse.
  • Recurrent emotional abuse.
  • Sexual abuse.
  • Emotional or physical neglect.

Growing up (prior to age 18) in a household with (cont):

• An alcohol or drug abuser
• An incarcerated household member.
• Someone who is chronically depressed, suicidal, institutionalized or mentally ill.
• Mother being treated violently.
• One or no parents.

Why is This Important?

Because ACEs are:

• Surprisingly common
• Occur in clusters
• The basis for many common public health problems
• Strong predictors of later social functioning, well-being, health risks, disease, and death
ACE Scores

• 1/3 of adults have an ACE score of 0
• The majority of adults with an ACE score of 0 have few, if any, risk factors for diseases that are common causes of death in the US.

An ACE Score of 4 or more results in having multiple risk factors for these diseases or the disease themselves.
• An ACE score of 6 or more results in a 20 year decrease in life expectancy.

ACE’s are Highly Interrelated

Top 10 risk factors for death in the USA

- smoking,
- severe obesity,
- physical inactivity,
- depression,
- suicide attempt,
- alcoholism,
- illicit drug use,
- injected drug use,
- 50+ sexual partners,
- history of Sexually Transmitted Disease
Evidence Suggests:

• Many chronic diseases in adults are determined decades earlier, by experiences in childhood

• Risk factors/behaviors for these diseases are initiated during childhood or adolescence and continue into adult life.

Seeking to Cope

• The risk factors/behaviors underlying these adult diseases are actually effective coping devices.

• What is viewed as a problem is actually a solution to bad experiences.

• Dismissing these coping devices as “bad habits” or “self destructive behavior” misses their functionality.

Behavior is Predictable

All behavior has meaning - both good behavior and bad behavior

We need to look closely at what preceded the behavior - What happened first that is causing this behavior?
Life in a Tough World

If trauma/toxic stress occurs early in life, the brain becomes wired to survive it.

Early Brain Development

- Nurturing, responsive, and individualized interactions from birth build healthy brain structure.
- Healthy brain architecture is the necessary foundation required for optimal future learning, behavior and health.

Stress and the Brain

- Excessive and repeated stress:
  - Neglect, violence
  - Chaos, unpredictability
  - Hostility, rejection
- Causes disruption of brain architecture:
  - Impairs cell growth
  - Interferes with healthy neural circuits
What Does This Look Like?

Teen that is:
- Edgy, hot tempered
- Impulsive
- Hyper-vigilant

By adolescence, children seek relief through:
- Drinking alcohol
- Smoking tobacco
- Sexual promiscuity
- Using drugs
- Overeating/eating disorders
- Delinquent behavior

High Risk Teen Behaviors

- May not be the core problem
- They may be the coping devices
- A way to feel safe or just feel better

Adverse Childhood Experiences vs. Smoking as an Adult
Adverse Childhood Experiences vs. Adult Alcoholism

ACE Score vs. Intravenous Drug Use

Adverse Childhood Experiences vs. Likelihood of > 50 Sexual Partners

ACE Score vs. Unintended Pregnancy or Elective Abortion
Childhood Experiences Underlie Chronic Depression

- **ACE Score vs. Serious Job Problems**

- **Health Care Costs**
  - US Health Care Spending was $7,600 per person for total of $2.3 Trillion (2007)
  - 75% nations health spending was for chronic diseases (heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes)
  - 2.8 million cases of 7 most common chronic diseases reported in Arizona costing 4.2 billion (2003)
Reducing Costs

Research shows that just asking about ACEs – significantly decreases doctor office visits and costs.

Pay Now or Pay Later

• Pay now for programs that have been proven to buffer the stress, or pay later in rising health costs.
• “Early childhood investments of high quality have a lasting effect.”

“$10 return on investment for every $1 spent.”

(James Heckman, Noble Laureate, Economics)

Our Challenge

• We can and must “immunize” kids against the effects of ACEs.

• We can and must reduce the numbers of ACEs for all children!

How Do We Meet the Challenge?
It Starts With US!

• Identify and understand the importance of protective factors
• Utilizing protective factors in your own life
• Empower others by educating and encouraging them to use protective factors

Protective Factors

• Are conditions that increase health and well being
• Are critical for everyone regardless of age, sex, ethnicity or racial heritage, economic status, special needs, or the dynamics of the family unit
• Are buffers that provide support and coping strategies

Caring Communities Can Help Reduce ACEs

Protective Factors that Strengthen Families and Communities

• Nurturing and Positive Relationships
• Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
• Parental Resilience
• Social Connections
• Concrete Support in Time of Need
#1 = Nurturing and Positive Relationships……
are the key to mentally healthy children and adolescents

Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships
SAFE = free from harm
STABLE = a high degree of consistency
NURTURING = compassionate, responsive caregiver(s)

What does it look like?
Someone you turn to:
• Who?
• How you feel?
• What she or he does?

Building Supportive Relationships
It Starts with Modeling
• Asking questions and wondering
• Becoming an active listener
• Pointing out the positive
• Being empathetic
Empathy

• Is not sympathy
• Empathy is connecting with your own life
• “The power of empathy” video

Building Nurturing and Attachment

• Observe, attend and listen to children
• Provide safe and stable home and school life
• Model caring behavior
• Respond to child’s needs
• Use positive discipline
• Notice and reinforce child’s strengths

#2 - Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Why Important?

Parenting is not static
If you don’t understand behavior you tend to interrupt it as negative
Normal challenges can lead to frustrations and harsh discipline
Increasing Knowledge ...........

Begin where parents are at:
- discuss hopes and dreams for their children
- identify strengths and build on them
- set up a time or place where parents can discuss and get information
- provide educational materials, websites

• Educate parents on what to expect next
• Model and teach positive ways to manage challenging behaviors: routines, limits, redirection, logic consequences
• Attend or set up parenting classes
• Learn about or educate others on the signs and symptoms of child abuse
• Provide education on ACE’s

#3 – Parental Resilience

Good outcomes in spite of serious threats, toxic stress

Resilient people:
- are prepared to be effective in the world
- can adapt to challenges
- are mentally healthy

Resilience is ...

• Feeling connected to caring family and community
• Self-regulation skills
• Positive view of self
• Motivation to be effective in your environment
Begin with yourself

- Take care of own mental health
- Develop healthy coping devices (regular exercise, reading, listening to music, nature, etc.)
- Seek out healthy family/friends for support
- Use community supports (counseling, substance abuse treatment, self-help programs, etc.)

Teach the Seven C’s

You didn’t CAUSE it
You can’t CURE it
You can’t CONTROL it
You can help take CARE of yourself
By COMMUNICATING your feelings,
Making health CHOICES, and
CELEBRATING being yourself

Building Resilience

- Recognize early signs of stress and connect people to resources
- Develop a trusting relationship and provide support
- Be a good neighbor
- Look for and point out inner strengths

- Teach skills to youth
- Plan activities that focuses on nutrition, exercising or relaxation techniques
- Help children develop healthy relationships
• Volunteer – reach out and help others
• Be a mentor
• Start a Community Circle of Care
• Model/teach problem solving skills, planning ahead, goals

Building Social Connections
• Identify what parents already have in place and build upon it
• Provide opportunities for parents to get together – use parents skills, abilities and interest
• Look for opportunities – faith based, schools, community centers, support groups
• Provide encouragement and support to try new groups
• Teach social skills

#4 - Social Connections

Network of emotionally supportive friends, family and neighbors
Important because:
– Ease burden of parenting
– Decrease isolation
– Children have a broader access to supportive adults and positive role model
– Provide opportunities to help

#5 Concrete Supports in Time of Need

• Food, shelter, basic services critical to child well-being
• Link caregivers to community resources and extended family
• Work on sustainability
7 Strategies to Build Strong Communities

1. Provide Information
   - Educational workshops
   - Radio announcements
   - Community meetings
   - Web-based
   - Written material
   - Conversations

2. Enhance Skills
   Workshops or activities that are designed to increase the skills of participant
   - Training
   - Classes
   - Consultation
   - Counseling
   - Team sport, scouting, 4H

3. Provide Support
   - Be a good neighbor
   - Offering mentoring or support groups
   - Offering to help
   - Spend quality and quantity time with a child; read a book, share a meal
4. Enhance Access and Reduce Barriers

- Seek grants, build local collaborations
- Offer food, shelter, seek professional help if needed
- Link clients to effective faith based activities, recreation, parenting classes, domestic violence shelters/education

5. Change Consequences

- Thank someone for their hard work
- Publicly recognize a community group that strengthens families
- Publish an article in a newspaper highlighting someone in the community
- Give rewards to individuals or businesses for helping in the community

6. Change the Physical Design

- Lead or participate in a clean up effort
- Initiate a change making your community safer
- Set up a place where parents can gather and get information
- Volunteer to paint a home
- Support your Child Abuse Prevention Council

7. Modify/Change Policy

- Talk to legislators and philanthropists about supporting effective programs
- Contribute to child abuse prevention programs via a tax check off
- Support positive parenting programs, and services for domestic violence and mental health education
If our **society is to prosper in the future**, we will need to make sure that all children have the opportunity to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally.

**Core elements of positive developmental, educational and therapeutic experiences**

- Relational (safe)
- Relevant (developmentally matched)
- Repetitive (patterned)
- Rewarding (pleasurable)
- Rhythmic (resonant with neural patterns)
- Respectful (child, family, culture)

Dr. Bruce Perry,
[www.childtrauma.org;www.childtraumaacademy.com](http://www.childtrauma.org;www.childtraumaacademy.com)

**Neuroarcheology**

- The age at which an adverse event takes place will influence the neurodevelopmental impact and the resulting functional consequences
- A developmental history of adverse experiences is crucial to understanding current functioning
- A developmental review of adverse experiences AND the buffering effects of relational health is critical

**Multiple Forms of Neglect**

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Current Relational Health

• A major factor in healings appears to be the nature, quality, intensity and stability of a person’s relationships
• Good relational stability predicts positive outcome—and poor relational health predicts poor outcomes

Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey

Let’s Review the Implications

Stress – Wigs Kids Out (and us too)

• Homeostatic balance (a state of homeostasis): having an ideal body temperature, an ideal level of glucose in the bloodstream, an ideal everything
• Stressor: anything that knocks you out of homeostatic balance

Allostatic Load

When Stress Becomes Too Much

• Allostatic load: the wear and tear on the mind and body that results from either too much stress or inability to manage stress.
  – Not turning off the stress response when it is no longer needed
  – Response to perceived stressors that never even happen
  – Inability to manage the intensity of stressors in the moment
Negative Impact of High Allostatic Load

On our body:
- Headache
- Muscle tension or pain
- Cardiovascular
- Fatigue
- Change in sex drive
- Stomach upset
- Sleep problems

On our mind:
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Lack of motivation
- Memory problems
- Irritability & anger
- Sadness or depression

On our behavior:
- Angry outbursts
- Avoidance of important activities
- Overeating or undereating
- Social withdrawal
- Drug or alcohol abuse

Findings

Of the 17,000+ respondents...
- Two-thirds had at-least 1 adverse childhood event
- 1 in 6 people had four or more ACES
- More than 25% grew up in a household with an alcoholic or drug user
- 25% had been beaten as children

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Study

Of 17,000 respondents, two-thirds had at least one adverse childhood event
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Emotional or physical neglect
- Growing up with family members with mental illness, alcoholism or drug problems
- Family violence
- Incarcerated family member
- One or no parents
- Parental divorce

Findings Continued

- People with ACE scores of 4 or more:
  - Twice as likely to smoke
  - Seven times as likely to be alcoholics
  - Six times as likely to have had sex before age 15
  - Twice as likely to have cancer or heart disease
  - Twelve times more likely to have attempted suicide
  - Men with six or more ACEs were 46 times more likely to have injected drugs than men with no history of adverse childhood experiences
**ACES Findings**

51% of children with 4+ ACE scores had learning and behavior problems in school

Compared with only 3% of children with NO ACE score


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**Educators Must Help!**

- **Reason:** The child is in a place to learn, problem-solve, and reason
- **Relate:** Connect with Empathy because until a child is able to relate they cannot problem-solve and reason
- **Regulate:** Until a child is able to regulate via physically and emotionally cannot relate well

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**Parenting Resources**

- **1-877-705-KIDS (5437)**
  Birth to Five Parenting Questions Helpline
- **1-800-4-A-CHILD (422-4453)**
  Crisis Line for emotional needs and information about child abuse and neglect. Also go to [www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)
- [www.apa.org/books](http://www.apa.org/books)
- [www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopment](http://www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopment)
- [www.cdc.gov/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/parents)
**Information & Resources**

- ACE Study findings and information
  - [www.acestudy.org](http://www.acestudy.org) or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child at Harvard University
  - [www.developingchild.net](http://www.developingchild.net)
- Academy of Pediatrics
  - [www.brightfutures.aap.org](http://www.brightfutures.aap.org)

**More Information & Resources**

- National Center for Trauma-Informed Care – [www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/nctic](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/nctic)
- Center for Injury Prevention and Control – [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention)