Impact of Trauma at Different Developmental Ages

Adolescent Years
The ACE Study
(Adverse Childhood Experiences)

One of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being
New ACE Studies Include More Adversities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACE Scale Adversities (Lifetime)</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Revised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical neglect</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional neglect</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother treated violently</td>
<td></td>
<td>Household mental illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household substance abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Property victimization (nonsibling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household mental illness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peer victimization (nonsibling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated household member</td>
<td></td>
<td>Exposure to community violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental separation or divorce</td>
<td></td>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Someone close had a bad accident or illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Below-average grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents always arguing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No good friends (at time of interview)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finding your ACE Score

• Answer the 10 questions about your childhood experiences
• This is confidential information; we will not be sharing this with others
• The goal of this activity is to learn more about yourself and the prevalence of trauma in everyday lives
Impact of ACEs on Life Outcomes

Possible Risk Outcomes:

**BEHAVIOR**
- Lack of physical activity
- Smoking
- Alcoholism
- Drug use
- Missed work

**PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH**
- Severe obesity
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Suicide attempts
- STIs
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stroke
- COPD
- Broken bones

Infographic: The Truth About ACEs, May 12, 2013
## Impact of ACEs on Life Outcomes (Percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE Score)</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Middlebrooks JS, Audage NC. The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2008.
Consequences of Trauma:
Impact on Developmental Competency
Trauma’s Dual Influence on Development

• **Prioritization** of skills, behaviors, adaptations which help the child **survive their environment and meet physical, emotional, and relational needs**

• **De-emphasis** of domains of development which are less immediately relevant to survival
What helps the child survive?

- Assumption of danger
- Rapid mobilization in the face of perceived threat
- Self-protective stance
- Development of alternative strategies to meet developmental needs
What roles can families play?

• Make school staff aware of child’s needs
• Establish a communication plan with child’s teachers
• Tell teachers any approaches or techniques that work at home
• Find out from the child’s teachers if child is making effective progress
• Visit child’s program often
Developmental Stage: Adolescence

**Normative:**
- Striving for independence; separation/individuation
- Peer group important source of support, information, and reference
- Self-conscious; belief in self as focus of attention
- Body image, sexual image, self-image all important
- Black-and-white view; extremes, judgments
- Able to see future but less able to see consequences

**Trauma Impact:**
- Premature separation or age-inappropriate dependence
- Risk for negative peer influence and affiliation
- Significant risk for high-risk behaviors
- Over-control/perfectionism
- Ongoing reliance on primitive coping strategies, with failure to develop age-appropriate strategies
- Crystallization of negative self-identity
What Can We Do?
A Toolbox for Teaching Children with Trauma
Unconditional and Nurturing Relationships

• Know your own level of reactivity: how high are your ACEs?

• Take care of yourself before you take care of others

• Ask yourself: “What happened to this child?” and “How can I help?” rather than “What’s wrong with this kid?”
Understanding the Problem Leads to the Solution

• Become behavior detectives
• See every challenging behavior as a communication event
• Understand that behaviors are the result of underdeveloped skills
## Reframing Our Understanding of Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBVIOUS</th>
<th>HIDDEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom disruptions</td>
<td>On-going neuro delays in self regulation (due to changes in brain architecture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t follow verbal instructions</td>
<td>On–going neuro delays in audio processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presents with inability to solve social problems</td>
<td>Possible unidentified non-verbal language delays and inability to read social cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggles with organizing personal environment</td>
<td>Home is chaotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has to be in control at all times</td>
<td>No early skill-building on taking others perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Reframing Our Understanding of Behavior

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBVIOUS</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inattentive and unfocused</td>
<td>Doesn’t sleep deeply or long enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanders in halls and school campus or disappears from school</td>
<td>Not a strong sense of self and always feeling unsafe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t seem to learn from consequences, positive or negative</td>
<td>Has not learned the basic correlation between cause and effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always wants to go to nurse, has many sick days or school refusal</td>
<td>Somatization due to stress at home or school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosive behaviors without a clear trigger</td>
<td>Internal sensory trigger creates a primitive response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tools to Use: During a Crisis

- Keep calm and use the “mirror neurons”
- Move slowly with obvious deep breathing – create a body rhythm that the youth can replicate
- Engage the youth in simple tasks that engage the cortex – “I can see you are getting upset; what’s up?”
Tools to Use: Before a Crisis Happens

- Over teach routines and post schedules frequently
- Give students plenty of time to transition out of class and into hallway
- Greet each student in the morning with high fives or other acknowledgement
- Use daily check-ins with student and family, especially those students in jeopardy
Build Skills Before Behaviors Occur

• Assess “Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems”*
• Teach social emotional learning throughout the day, in natural environments with natural consequences
• Redirect whenever possible
• Conduct discipline and behavior critiques in private

Ask for Help!

- **Flock**: Create teacher teams to discuss creative ways to make classrooms safe and supportive
- **Encourage peer support through morning meetings or classroom clubs**
- **Explore new ways to maintain classroom calm through restorative justice techniques or conflict resolution**
Connect with Families

• Understand that the results of trauma (anxiety, hyper-vigilance, feeling unsafe) can be passed to children genetically

• Know that many parents of traumatized children have suffered/are suffering trauma themselves

• Traumatized parents are hesitant to partake in school affairs due to their own fears, anxiety and lack of self-esteem
Community Connections

• Collaborate with local food banks, pantries, shelters, or churches to provide food for family breakfasts or dinners and invite all parents to participate

• Make the school community a welcoming, safe and supportive haven for everyone

• Connect with community supports (family clinics, CBHI agencies, supports for homelessness, MassHealth enrollment) to offer services in the school
Classroom interventions to support regulation throughout development
Increase modulation in the classroom for all students

• Actively engage class in setting key values/goals:
  – Work in individual classrooms to implement projects that explore modulation in the classroom (i.e., safety, respect, etc.)

• Develop in-class tools to support modulation:
  – Create developmentally-appropriate tools that are accessible to students (i.e., quiet “fidgets”, using headphones during writing periods)
  – Set rules and structure around these

• Set routines and structure:
  – Develop in-class routines to support modulation (i.e., yoga or stretching breaks, mindfulness exercises)
  – Develop structure around ways students can “take a break”, etc.

• Build resources for staff:
  – Create ongoing supervision/process forums for staff to problem-solve; self-care forums; etc.
High School: Regulation, Self and Identity

• **Most important time for students to have engagement and investment in school**
  - School meetings and classroom rituals (i.e. journaling, playlists, identity shields, poetry/songwriting) remain essential

• **Regulation is all about the individual application**
  - Partly about coping skills and partly about forging sense of self expression and self exploration

• **Essential that adolescents are part of the solution**
  - Attending meetings which pertain to them
  - Having a role in their own IEP or behavior plan

• **The goal is for adolescents to start using coping skills autonomously with more support for those students in jeopardy**
  - On-going social/emotional remediation with school based clinicians
  - Development of self-monitoring tools and regular check-ins with a respected adult
“It’s not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It’s our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless.”

~L.R. Knost~