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Arizona's Sixteenth Annual Transition Conference
Creating Trauma Sensitive Arizona Schools
Marcia Stanton, MSW
August 29, 2016



The Birth Lottery

"The family into which a child is born plays a powerful role in determining lifetime opportunities... Some kids win the lottery at birth, far too many don't — and most people have a hard time catching up over the rest of their lives."



James Heckman
Nobel Laureate in Economics



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Scientific Advances



Are driving a paradigm shift in understanding how child development impacts human health and disease across the lifespan



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The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study



- “Probably the most important public health study you never heard of.”
- ACEs sometimes referred to as toxic stress or childhood trauma

Your Awareness of ACE Study?



- No Knowledge of ACE Research
- Some Knowledge
- More Than Most
- Expert

Two Categories of ACEs



- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1) Abuse or Neglect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recurrent physical abuse - Recurrent emotional abuse - Sexual abuse - Emotional or physical neglect | <p>2) Household Dysfunction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alcohol or drug abuser - Incarcerated household member - Someone chronically depressed, suicidal, institutionalized or mentally ill - Mother being treated violently - One or no parents |
|--|---|

What Do ACEs Look Like?



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Science is Clear



- Toxic stress caused by ACEs can profoundly alter the otherwise healthy development of a child
- “Children’s exposure to ACEs is the **greatest unaddressed public health threat of our time.**” Dr. Robert Block, former president, American Academy of Pediatrics



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Many Other Types of Trauma

- New Research is Examining:
 - Bullying
 - Homelessness
 - Growing Up in Foster Care
 - Extreme Illness or Injury
 - Historical Trauma
 - Community Violence



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Why is This Study So Important?

ACEs are:

- Surprisingly Common
- Strong Predictors of Later Social Functioning, Well-Being, Health Risks, Disease, and Death





ACEs Revealed 5 Main Discoveries

- 1) ACEs are common - 64% adults have at least 1
- 2) They cause chronic disease, mental illness, violence and being a victim of violence
- 3) ACEs don't occur alone
- 4) The more ACEs, the greater the risk
- 5) ACEs contribute to most of our major chronic health, mental health, economic health and social health issues



<https://acestoohigh.com/aces-101/>



ACE Scores

- Think of ACE score as cholesterol score for childhood trauma
- The more ACEs, the greater the risk
- People have ACE score of 0 to 10. Each type of trauma counts as one, no matter how many times it occurs



- **4 or more** may result in **multiple risk factors** for chronic diseases or **disease** themselves
- **6 or more** may result in a **20 year decrease** in life expectancy



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ACE Score of 4

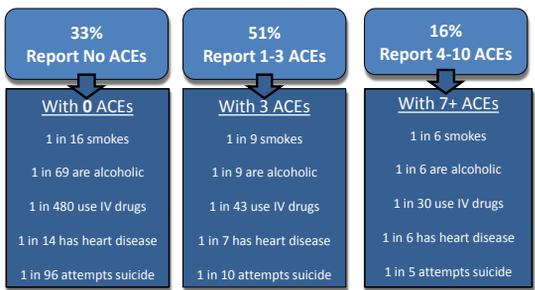
Compared with People with Zero ACEs:

- **Twice** as likely to be Smokers
- **12 times** more likely Attempt Suicide
- **Seven times** more likely Alcoholic
- **10 times** more likely Inject Street Drugs
- **240% greater** risk of Hepatitis
- **240% higher** risk Sexually-Transmitted Disease
- More likely to be **Violent**, to have more **Marriages**, more **Depression**, more **Auto-immune Diseases**, and more **Work Absences**



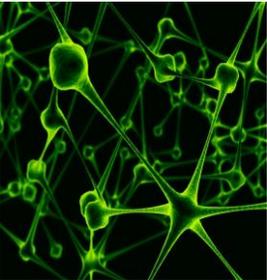
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Out of 100 people...



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ACEs are Interrelated and Predictive



Without interruption, ACEs escalate across generations



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ACEs Have Cumulative Stressor Effect

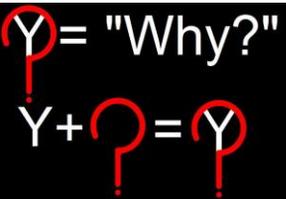


It's the Number of **Different Categories**, Not Intensity or Frequency, that Determine Health Outcomes



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ACEs Don't Explain Everything



Many Individuals with High ACE Scores Do Not have Poor Health Outcomes.



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Coping Solutions

- What are conventionally viewed as Public Health **problems** are often personal **solutions** to long concealed embarrassing, shame filled adverse childhood experiences.

By Adolescence Children Seek Relief

- Drinking alcohol
- Smoking tobacco*
- Sexual promiscuity
- Using drugs*
- Overeating/eating disorders
- Delinquent behavior, violence
- High-risk sports, etc.



*Note: nicotine and methamphetamines are anti-depressants

High Risk Teen Behaviors

- May not be core **problem**
- They may be **coping** devices
- A way to feel safe or just feel better
- Dismissing as "bad habits" or "self destructive behavior" misses their functionality



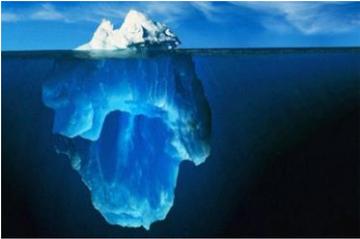
What We See





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What We Don't See



We need to ask **"What happened first?"**



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It's Not **All** About High Risk Coping Measures

- Even if individuals with high ACE Scores **do not** adopt high risk behaviors, they are still **much more likely** to have negative health consequences





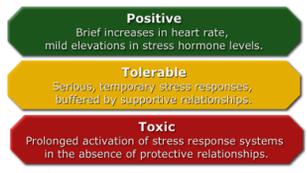
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What Do ACEs Have to Do with Education?

- Nothing
- And, Everything . . .



Toxic Stress



- “Extreme, frequent or extended activation of the body’s stress response, **without the buffering presence of a supportive adult.**”

Sara B. Johnson, et al., The science of early life toxic stress for pediatric practice and advocacy, 131 PEDIATRICS 319 (2013), available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/131/2/319.full>



Stress Response System

- Trauma results in over activation of the threat or stress response system
- Behaviors considered pathological are often an adaptive reaction to this over utilized system



“The 4th Vital Sign”



- 1) Respiration
- 2) Heart Rate
- 3) Blood pressure

4) Relationships

To heal from toxic stress, children need recognition and understanding from their caregivers



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Getting It Right the First Time

- Creating the right conditions in early childhood is **more effective** and **far less costly** than addressing a multitude of problems later on



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Consequences of Not Getting It Right



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Impact of Stress on Children

- Flight, fight or fright (freeze) response
- Short attention span
- Struggle learning; fall behind in school
- Respond to world as constant danger
- Distrustful of adults
- Unable to develop healthy peer relationships
- Feel failure, despair



ACEs in the Classroom

- Greatest single predictor for health, attendance and behavior
- Second strongest predictor, (after special education status), for academic failure



“Dropouts Cost AZ \$7.6 Billion”

The Arizona Republic, June 26, 2014

- AZ Dept. of Education: **22 percent** of Arizona 9th graders will **not** finish high school
- By 2018, more than **60 percent** of jobs in AZ will require some post-secondary education



ACEs are a Pipeline to Prison



Childhood and Adult Trauma Experiences of Incarcerated Persons and Their Relationship to Adult Behavioral Health Problems and Treatment Intl. Journal of Environ Res Public Health. 2012 May; 9(5): 1908-1926. Published online 2012 May 18. [Healing Invisible Wounds: Why Investing in Trauma-Informed Care for Children Makes Sense](#)



ACEs and Addiction

Findings suggest:

- A **major** factor, if not the **main** factor, underlying addiction is **ACEs that have not healed and are concealed from awareness by shame, secrecy, and social taboo.**



"It's hard to get enough of something that almost works." Vincent Felitti, MD



ACEs in Foster Care

- **More than half** of kids reported for child abuse experienced **4 or more** ACEs by time of contact with child welfare
- **More than 90%** referred to child welfare have experienced **multiple ACEs**



(Nat'l Survey Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), No. 20: Adverse Child Experiences in NSCAW, 2013)

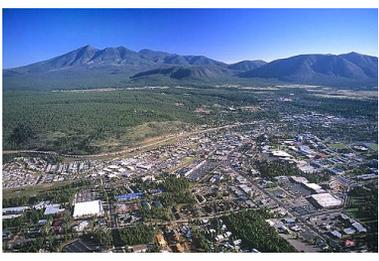


AZ Kids with 5+ ACES Would Fill University of Phoenix Stadium



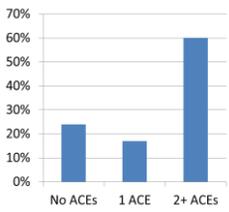
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Or, Equal Population of Flagstaff



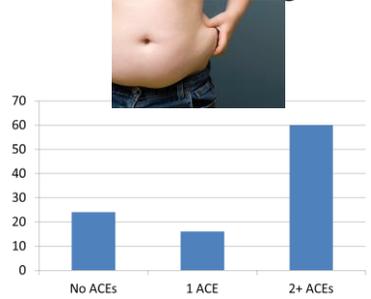
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Presence of Emotional, Behavioral or Developmental Needs



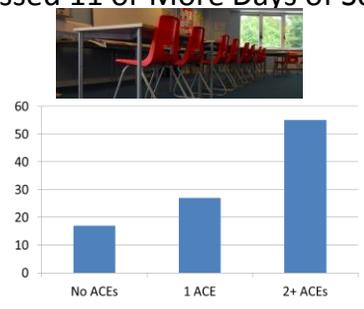
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AZ Children Overweight or Obese



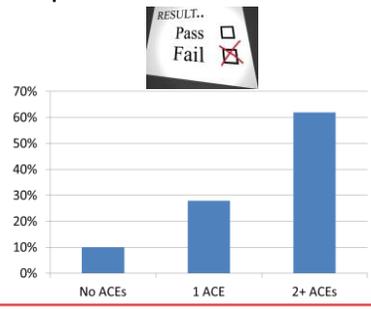
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Missed 11 or More Days of School



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Repeated 1 or More Grades



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Stress Activates the "Hot" System



- Sympathetic Nervous System = "Hot" System
- Behaviors are Unconscious, Automatic, Involuntary
- When Hot System Perceives Threat it Responds with Survival Strategies
- Hand on Hot Stove – is Behavior Reactive Adaptation or Planned Intentional Response?





Trauma

- Activation of threat response systems shove entire body into reactive adaptation
- Activation does not require actual trauma; just the repeated perception of threat is adequate





Repeated Activation

- Threat Perception Enhanced
- More Things Activating
- Faster to React
- Self-Sensing System gets Blunted, Making Accurate Self-Evaluation Difficult
- Become Externally Focused
- Increases Self-Centeredness and Failure to See Self as a Causal Agent in Reactions





If Alarm System Has Been On a Lot



- Reactive Behaviors are **Physiologically Correct**, Regardless How Annoying, Illegal or Immoral
- We Have to Get Youth Out of the Alarm System to Improve Outcomes



Assumptions

- Kids are Acting Exactly as Their History has Wired Them to Act
- Most Poor Behavior is Consequence of Reactive Adaptation
- Most People Aren't Strong Enough to Overcome Their Environment
- Growth and Change Require Ability to Stay in **Cool** System
- Behavior Shouldn't Be Starting Point of Intervention (*except for immediate danger, etc.*)





Trauma in the Classroom

- Classrooms are Designed for Regulated Kids
- 1/3 of Kids in Classrooms have Trauma History
- "Universal Precautions"
- Can't Teach Kids in Dysregulation
- Kids Can't Reflect on Their Behaviors Until They are Regulated





Trauma Informed Care

- Not “What’s **wrong** with you?”
- Instead “What happened **to you**?”
- Symptoms are adaptations to trauma



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Essential Interventions

- Avoid Activating Stress Response System
- Regulate Youth Relationally
- Love and Relationship Before Rules - “**Connection Before Correction**”
- Create Environment of Felt and Real Safety



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Essential Interventions

- Adults Must Regulate Themselves No Matter What Kids Do
- When Environment is Regulated, Behaviors Will Change



- **Change Takes Time**
 (after child is regulated it can take 2 – 3 months per year for behaviors to stop.
 Ex: 7 year-old could take 14 -21 months)

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Using a Trauma Informed Lens



Educators need:

- Knowledge of own ACEs, to be sensitive
- Self regulation skills, ability to co-regulate
- Be fully present, not distracted/distracting
- Access to reflective supervision





Trauma as a Disability?



- Peter. P. vs. Compton Unified School District
- Federal Class Action Lawsuit - violence impaired ability to learn at school
- Allege District failed to recognize and address trauma-induced disabilities, and therefore denied legal right to an equal education





ACEs in Action

- Jim Sporleder, Lincoln High School - using a more trauma sensitive approach changed entire culture of the school
- Paper Tigers - <http://kpirfilms.co/paper-tigers/>



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“Pyramid of Hope”

“Before we can get our students prepared for learning, we have to focus on their wounds and history of failures”

Jim Sporleder (principal of Lincoln High School)



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Visual Tool to Help Students Identify When They are Ready to Talk or to Learn



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Trauma Sensitive Elementary School

- Principal Suzanne Savall, Otis Orchards
- Outcomes of Trauma Sensitive School Initiative
 - Decreased Suspensions
 - Improved Test Scores
 - Increased Teacher Retention

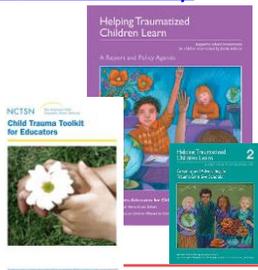


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Trauma Sensitive Schools

<http://traumasensitiveschools.org/why-trauma-sensitive-school/>

- School-wide Policies & Practices
- Classroom Strategies
- Links to Mental Health Services
- Family Partnerships
- Community Links



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Classroom Strategies



- Practice Calming & Relaxation Strategies (Yoga4Classrooms, mindfulness, breathing)
- Create Safe Environments (soft lighting, artwork, bean bag chairs)
- Built in Breaks (movement is regulating)
- Opportunities to be Successful in Non-academic Activities

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Self Regulation Tools

- Meditation
- Rocking
- Music
- Breathing
- Yoga
- Movement
- Writing/Art





Downtime

- Everyone can benefit from mental rest, daydreaming, and opportunities to process new information
- Traumatized children need downtime in order to regroup, relax, and get a break from both the cognitive exertion of the academic day and emotional stress of chaotic home life





Listen

- Teachers don't need to solve children's problems in order to help
- Listening to students can make all the difference to a child struggling with ACEs
- Listen, reflect back to them that they have been heard, validate the child's feelings without judgment, and thank child for sharing with you

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/12/how-teachers-help-kids-heel/383325/>



Positive Factors That Counterbalance Adversity



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At Least 1 Stable, Caring and Supportive Relationship



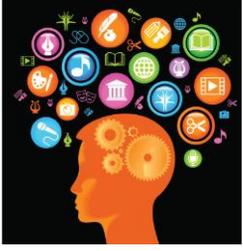
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Building Sense of Mastery over Their Life Circumstances



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Strong Executive Function and Self-Regulation Skills



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Affirming Faith or Cultural Traditions



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Creating Trauma Sensitive Schools in Arizona

- Work Group Formed Dec. 2015
- To Be Added to Contact List: email: mstanto@phoenixchildrens.com



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Here's the Hope



- Better Understanding of Mechanism
- ACEs are Not Destiny
- Helps us Develop Better Responses and Reduces Judgment
- Multiple Evidence-Based Approaches to Healing



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

- Healing can occur
- The cycle can be broken
- Safe, stable, nurturing relationships heal



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In Summary

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men"
~ Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)



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