Building Resilience through the 40 Developmental Assets

"What you do to children matters.
And they might never forget…"
spoken by Sweetness (as written by Toni Morrison)
in *God Help the Child,* 2015

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- Most children are fortunate to grow up in nurturing environments. Nurturing environments help children develop cognitive and emotional skills as well as the resilience they need to thrive as adults.
- Unfortunately, negative experiences can hinder this development, often leading to risky behaviors and health problems in adulthood.

Also unfortunately, negative childhood experiences are NOT uncommon and can have devastating long-term consequences.

Our discussion today: an outline……

Part 1: Sobering numbers regarding Childhood, Childhood Stress, Adverse Childhood Experiences
Part 2: Resilience, Developmental Assets
Part 3: General strategies for Asset Development, Specific Strategies for Educators

And please remember, this is a discussion.
Please ask questions and provide comments throughout.

- Child abuse or neglect usually takes place in the home at the hands of a person the child knows well—a parent, relative, babysitter, or friend of the family.

There are four major types of child maltreatment. Although any of the forms may be found separately, they often occur together. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

American federal minimum reporting standards include the following:

1. Neglect : failure to provide for a child's basic needs.
2. Physical abuse : physical injury as a result of hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or otherwise harming a child.

(cont.)

3. Sexual abuse : any situation where a child is used for sexual gratification. This may include indecent exposure, fondling, rape, or commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

4. Emotional abuse : any pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth, including constant criticism, threats, and rejection.

Some sobering statistics (from the U.S. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, 2013) follow:

Abuse: In 2013:

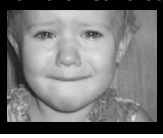
>28.3% of American children were victimized by physical child abuse.

>16.7% of American children suffered some form of sexual abuse.

>10.6% of American children suffered emotional abuse.

>9.9% of American children were victims of physical neglect.

>14.8% of American children suffered from emotional neglect.



Extreme Abuse:

In 2013, state agencies identified an estimated **1,640 children who died as a result of abuse and/or neglect — between four and five American children a day.**

Youth Violence:

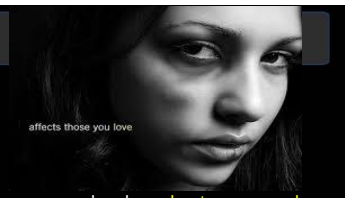
Of 8,000 American high school students surveyed in 2012:

- 32.8% reported being in a physical fight in the 12 months preceding the survey

-16.6% reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife or club) on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey

- About 1 in 3 said they had been bullied at school in the past year

Domestic violence:



At least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime. Most often, the abuser is a member of her own family.

- Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women—more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.

More than 10 million American children witness domestic violence in their homes every year.

Divorce and Abandonment:

- 50% of all American children born to married parents today will experience the divorce of their parents before they are 18 years old.
- About 1 in 3 children growing up in America today are being raised without their fathers seeing them on a regular basis.

Parental Drug Abuse:

- 24% of American children live in homes with an alcoholic present.
- An estimated 4-5% of American children live with at least one parent who abuses or is dependent on illegal drugs.

Parental Mental Illness:

More than five million (8-10%) children in the United States have a parent with a serious mental illness (SMI) such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

Parental Incarceration:

-More than 2.7 million children in the U.S. currently have an incarcerated parent. That is 1 in 28 (3.5%) children.

---Approximately 10 million American children (12-15%) have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.

Stress and Childhood

Research on the biology of childhood stress shows that exposure to toxic levels of stress harms the developing brain and other organs.

Toxic stress occurs when a child experiences strong, frequent or prolonged adversity, such as extreme poverty, abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence, substance abuse or mental illness.

"We wouldn't ask why a rose that grew from the concrete has damaged petals. In fact, we would all celebrate its tenacity. We would love its will to reach the sun. Well, we are the roses, this is the concrete and these are my damaged petals."

Tupac Shakur, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*

Toxic stress affects the architecture of young children's developing brains. In short, early experiences factor into how children learn, how they cope with stress, how they form friendships and adult relationships, and how they view themselves and their world.

Toxic stress can also be manifested in physiological differences as well.

Though our brains retain the capacity to change and adapt as we grow older, the neurological response to early toxic stress may never go away.

Nevertheless, for overly stressed children, nurturing relationships can be key to physical and psychological health. (CDC, 2013)

- Stable, nurturing relationships with caring adults can prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress.
- Therefore, "the call to action must be to create safe spaces and strong, healthy, supportive communities for children." (CDC, 2013)

An Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is trauma that takes place in a child's life before age 18.

This can include:

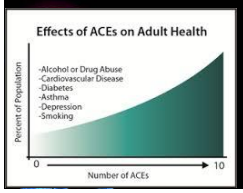
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Alcohol and/or drug abuse in the household
- An incarcerated household member
- Someone in the household who was depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized or suicidal
- Mother who was treated violently
- One or no parent present
- Emotional or physical neglect

(Robert Anda & Vincent Felitti)

A growing body of research suggests that adverse childhood experiences can lead to poor mental and physical health, less success at school and work, and lower socioeconomic status in adulthood. ACEs activate the stress response system, disrupting brain and organ development and weakening the defense system against diseases.

The more ACEs a child experiences, the greater the chance of health problems later in life.

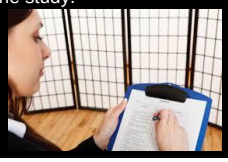
- ACEs trigger stress hormones and children enter flight, fright or fight mode. They don't learn well and they have difficulty trusting adults or developing healthy relationships with peers.
- To relieve their anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, and/or inability to focus, children may turn to biochemical solutions (nicotine, alcohol, illegal drugs) or activities in which they can attempt to escape their problems (high-risk behaviors including high risk sports, proliferation of sex partners, overeating, violence, etc.).



- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being.

- The study involves a collaboration between the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego. (Robert Anda & Vincent Felitti)

- More than 17,000 study participants have provided detailed information about their childhood experiences which may have included abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction.
- Each study participant completes a confidential survey that contains questions about childhood maltreatment and family dysfunction, as well as items detailing their current health status and behaviors. This information is combined with the results of their physical examination to form the baseline data for the study.



- The ACE Study findings suggest that adverse childhood experiences are major risk factors for the leading causes of illness and death as well as poor quality of life in the United States. (Robert Anda & Vincent Felitti)

These include:

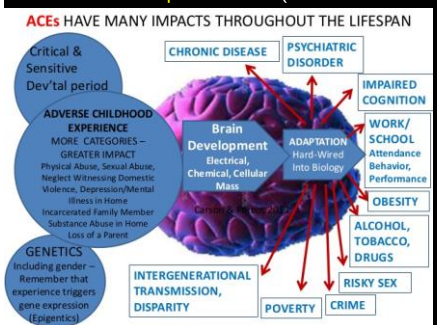
>heart disease
>lung cancer
>diabetes
>autoimmune diseases
>depression
> other mental health issues
>perpetrating violence
>being a victim of violence
>suicide
>adult incarceration
>substance abuse
>homelessness

- There are 10 types of Childhood Trauma measured in the ACE study:

Personal	Family Members
physical abuse	alcoholic parent
verbal abuse	parent victim of domestic violence
sexual abuse	parent incarcerated
physical neglect	mentally ill family member
emotional neglect	loss of parent (death, divorce, etc)

(Robert Anda & Vincent Felitti)

The study's researchers developed an ACE Test and an ACE Score to explain a person's risk for maladjustment or chronic disease. The higher your ACE score, the higher your risk of health and social problems. (Robert Anda & Vincent Felitti)

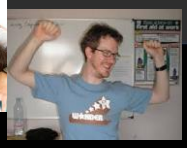


Resilience:

The following ideas on resilience come from the American Psychological Association (APA).....

- How do people deal with difficult events that change their lives? The death of a loved one, loss of a job, serious illness, divorce, other traumatic events: these are all examples of very challenging life experiences.

Some people react destructively to such events while others generally adapt well to life-changing situations and stressful conditions. What enables them to do so? This involves resilience, an ongoing process that requires personal mental effort and emotional support from others.



Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress. Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. Rather, people with resilience are able to cope more successfully.

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. Rather, it involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in almost anyone. This learning is probably most important for those who have experienced adverse experiences, especially in childhood.

Characteristics of Resilience:

- Capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses (even during difficult or traumatic experiences)
- Ability to acknowledge problems and meet the demands of daily living, while also relaxing and reenergizing
- Maintaining a positive view of oneself and confidence in one's strengths and abilities.
- Ability to trust and rely upon oneself to make good decisions and maintain a healthy, positive lifestyle
- Ability to trust and rely upon others so as to gain support

Building Resilience: The 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents

For more than 50 years, Search Institute has been a leader and partner for organizations around the world, discovering what children need to succeed.

A primary factor in overcoming adverse childhood experiences and building resilience is having supportive relationships within and outside the family.

According to Search Institute research, relationships that create love and trust can mitigate negative life experiences.

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
HEALTHY YOUTH®

Search Institute has identified building blocks of healthy development—known as the 40 Developmental Assets—that help young adults grow up healthy and responsible.

The framework of the 40 Developmental Assets identifies a set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults.

» Data has been collected from over 25 years of Search Institute surveys including more than 4 million children and youth from all backgrounds and situations.

» **This data has consistently shown that the more Developmental Assets young people acquire, the better their chances of overcoming ACEs, succeeding in school, and becoming happy, healthy, contributing members of their communities and society.**

» **Indeed, developmental assets can assist youth in developing Resilience!**

Five Action Strategies for Transforming Communities

Engage Adults — Engage adults from all walks of life to develop sustained, strength-building relationships with children and adolescents, both within families and in neighborhoods.

Mobilize Young People— Mobilize young people to use their power as asset builders and change agents.

Activate Sectors— Activate all sectors of the community—such as schools, congregations, youth, businesses, human services, and health-care organizations—to create an asset-building culture and to contribute fully to young people's healthy development.

Invigorate Programs— Invigorate, expand, and enhance programs to become more asset rich and to be available to and accessed by all children and youth.

Influence Civic Decisions — Influence decision makers and opinion leaders to leverage financial, media, and policy resources in support of this positive transformation of communities and society.

Developing Family Support/Family Communication/Family Boundaries Assets :

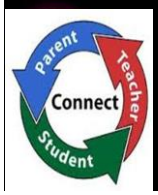
>>Respect and engage family & cultural values, customs, traditions, and rules when working with youth.

>>Talk with parents about standards for their children's conduct.

>>Educate parents on how to be supportive of their children.

>>Regularly contact parents to give positive messages about their child's attitude or progress or to report on something the child did that deserves praise and recognition. During parent meetings, focus on the positive.

>>Involve parents in classrooms and youth activities as often as possible.



Ideas for Building the Constructive Use of Time Assets at School

>>While exploring different cultures and languages, make music and art part of your lessons. Sponsor performances by local artists. Arrange for master classes where performers share techniques and expertise with students.

>>Create a clearinghouse of school & community youth activities. Post information about them on bulletin boards and daily school announcements.

>>Ensure that all students are actively recruited for participation in school-sponsored after-school programs.

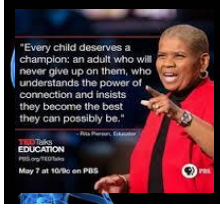
>>Keep the school building open for activities more hours in evenings and on weekends.

>>Collaborate with community resources to expand the variety and the duration of youth programs.

>>Assess each student's talents and interests in order to make appropriate recommendations for constructive after-school activity programs.

Building Adult Relationships/Adult Role Models:

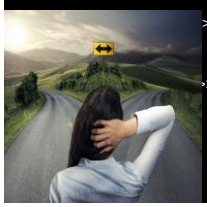
- Have an open-door policy for students who want to talk. Be available as often as you can before and after school.
- Take time to ask students at least one question about themselves at every student conference or one-on-one meeting.
- Support teachers spending time talking informally with students.
- Occasionally eat lunch in the cafeteria with students.
- Be the faculty sponsor for a new student club or event.



>Work with people in your community to arrange mentoring, internship, and service learning opportunities for students.

Developing Youth as Resources/Build Decision-making

- Include students in school and community decision-making (i.e. sitting on planning committees, producing the school handbook, etc.)
-
- Engage students as active planners in some aspects of their education: Let them choose independent study projects or report topics. Give student councils authority. Provide for student input about extracurricular activities.
- Empower teens by teaching them how to teach others. Cultivate leadership skills in many students, not just a select few.



>Help students make long-term plans for continuing their education and choosing a career.

>>Have students discuss various types of decisions. Help them predict possible outcomes and consequences. Talk with them about decisions you've made.

Developing A Caring Nature & Willingness to Serve Others

- Encourage all students to participate in service activities . Work with your community to learn where students can be of service, and then offer a range of options.
- Place as much emphasis on celebrating service as on rewarding athletic or academic achievement.
- Train teenagers how to tutor and befriend younger children.
- Create a peer counseling/ mediation program in your school. Train students to guide their peers in resolving conflicts and making good decisions.
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Commitment to Learning: School Achievement, Engagement, & Bonding

- Have students work on projects related to their interests. Implement exploratory programs that keep students interested.
- Balance quality & quantity of homework.
- Provide opportunities for students to celebrate and boost school spirit: decorate bulletin boards and walls with school spirit slogans/symbols, provide Spirit Awards" to the most caring, enthusiastic, and involved students, teachers, and staff. Include Academic Awards.

>Don't limit school spirit to one type of activity (often sports). Celebrate the many strengths of your school.

>Make sports, arts, drama, band, choir, and other school programs as inclusive as possible so more kids can participate.

> Facilitate intramural programs.

Encouraging Honesty, Integrity, & Social Justice

>Include honesty and integrity as expressed values and expectations for your school.

>Establish clear boundaries and consequences for honest and dishonest behavior.

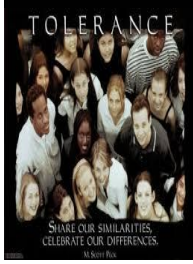
>Encourage and expect all faculty and staff to model integrity.

>Highlight men and women in history and current events who acted with integrity. Find examples in literature and discuss them as a class.
>Include equality and social justice as ongoing topics in class discussions and research projects.

>Study people who make a difference in the world through activism and service. Invite representatives from service, relief ,and human rights organizations to speak.

Developing Interpersonal & Cultural Competence

- Hold discussions about social and emotional experiences,. Encourage students to talk about their feelings and explore appropriate ways to express them. Use role-playing/simulations to teach empathy, cultural sensitivity, and interpersonal skills.
- Mix students in groups that reflect the diversity of your school. Hold a "Mix-it-Up" Day at lunch.



>Talk with your students about the importance of friendship in your life. Share stories and anecdotes about your friends.

>Model acceptance and appreciation of differences. Don't tolerate racism, bias, or prejudice.

>Educate teachers and other staff about respecting and working with cultural differences.

>Celebrate diverse cultural holidays and events.

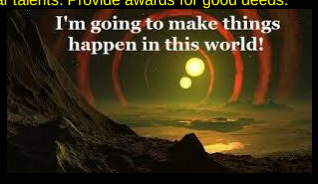
Facilitate a Sense of Purpose & Personal Power

- Encourage students to write down their dreams and goals, both short-term and long-term. Discuss these frequently with multiple adults.
- Discuss how to bring about change: individual, local, and global.
- Reinforce the message of "the power of one" to make a difference, using real-life stories of people who have overcome adversity, spoken out, or changed the lives of others.
- Emphasize each student's ability to control his or her own behavior. Get help for students who have difficulty doing this.
- Actively involve students in decision-making within the school. Invite their participation in determining issues of school climate & school policies.

Working on Self Esteem/Optimism for the Future

- Critique papers, reports, and tests constructively. Offer suggestions for improvements. Add positive comments. Use grading as an opportunity to affirm.
- Take students seriously. Ask for their opinions; listen to their comments and suggestions; affirm their abilities and achievements.
- Encourage everyone to contribute to class discussions.

>Treat all students with respect. Encourage everyone to contribute to class discussions. Identify and affirm individual talents. Provide awards for good deeds.



Ideas for Building the Boundaries and Expectations Assets at School:

>Provide clear guidance and instruction on standards for performance.

>Develop with student input, and regularly communicate, clear school expectations.

>Enforce the same expectations for behavior in co-curricular program as for during the school day.

>Expose all students to community resources and businesses (and their expectations) through experiential education.

>Provide numerous activities with adequate adult supervision in the lunchroom, in hallways, and other places where students gather.

>Plan activities involving many or all students!

Community Asset Building:

Neighborhood Boundaries & Relationships:

>> Talk with students about neighborhood boundaries. Do their neighborhoods have boundaries for young peoples' behavior?

>> Find out what boundaries exist in the school neighborhood—or set reasonable boundaries and communicate them to students. Examples: no loitering, no cutting across neighbor's lawns, no loitering on private property, no booming car stereos.

>>Survey the school neighborhood to learn if neighbors have any concerns or complaints about student behavior. Communicate these to students and set boundaries to address them.

>> Educate all staff about the importance of modeling positive, responsible behavior at school and in the community.

>>Facilitate projects that promote interactions between students and their neighbors. Promote neighborhood service.

Some final thoughts …..

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (yes, too many for too many!)
- Resilience (our own, our loved ones, our students!)
- Providing Developmental Assets for our Youth….

Individually we have power.
Together we change the world!