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2016 Directors Institute
Adverse Childhood Experiences in Arizona Children
Marcia Stanton, MSW
September 15, 2016



Today's Purpose



- Increase Understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Influence of Trauma in the Classroom



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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

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Your Awareness of ACE Study?



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

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Group Question

- Any “Challenging” Students in Your School?
- Any “Challenging” Parents?
- Challenging Staff? Co-workers?

Keep Them in Mind . . .



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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 |
|--|---|

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What Do ACEs Look Like?



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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/>



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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



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Physical, Mental & Behavioral Outcomes of ACEs



- Alcoholism & alcohol abuse
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease & ischemic heart disease
- Depression
- Fetal death
- High risk sexual activity
- Illicit drug use
- Intimate partner violence
- Liver disease
- Obesity
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts
- Unintended pregnancy

*** The higher the ACE Score, the greater the incidence of co-occurring conditions from this list.



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ACE Scores

- 1/3 of Adults have ACE Score of 0
- Majority of adults with ACE score of 0, have few, if any, risk factors for diseases that are common causes of death in US



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If Any **One** ACE is Present

- 87% chance *at least* one other ACE is present, and
- 50% chance of 3 others



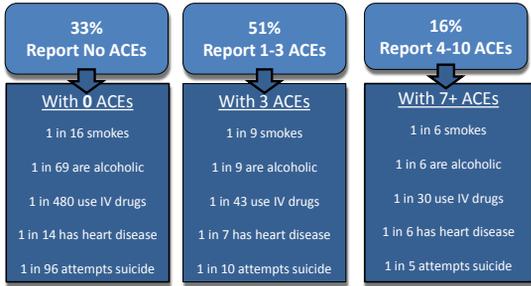
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- **4 or more** may result in **multiple risk factors** for chronic diseases or **disease** themselves
- **6 or more** may result in a **20 year decrease** in life expectancy



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Out of 100 people...



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ACEs are Interrelated and Predictive



Toxic stress can alter genes and cause long-term changes in all parts of bodies and brains

Changes can be transferred from generation to generation



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ACEs Have Cumulative Stressor Effect

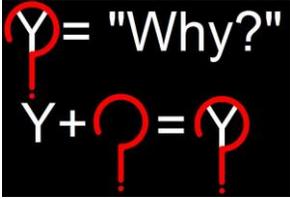


It's the Number of **Different Categories**, Not Intensity or Frequency, that Determine Health Outcomes



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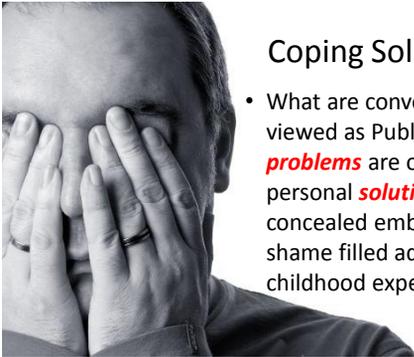
ACEs Don't Explain Everything



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.



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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



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High Risk Teen Behaviors

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





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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

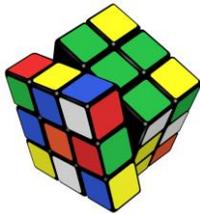
- Even if individuals with high ACE Scores **do not** adopt high risk behaviors, they are still **much more likely** to have negative health consequences



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What Do ACEs Have to Do with Education?

- Nothing
- And, Everything . . .



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Toxic Stress

Positive
Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable
Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.

Toxic
Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.

- “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>



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Stress Response System

Trauma Results in Over Activation of Threat or Stress Response (**Hot**) System

Behaviors Considered Pathological are Often Adaptive Reaction to this Over Utilized System



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Toxic Stress Early in Development

- Affects functioning of 3 highly integrated systems:
 - the **immune** system
 - the **neuroendocrine** system
 - the **central nervous** system
- (Danese & McEwen, 2012)



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Children and Stress



- Biologically predisposed to more physiologic stress
- Brain structures that modulate this stress mature later
- Young children need **safe, stable, and nurturing relationships** to assist them in regulating their stress



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“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





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ACEs in the Classroom

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





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“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



How Arizona's Dropout Crisis Affects Communities, Creates Economic Losses for the State of Arizona



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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](#).



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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.**

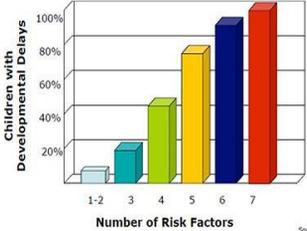


"It's hard to get enough of something that almost works." Vincent Felitti, MD



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Significant Adversity Impairs Development in the First Three Years



Children exposed to **5+** significant adversities in first 3 years face a **76%** likelihood of having **one or more delays** in development.



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Arizona Children

- Ethnic minority children have disproportionately higher share of **6+** ACEs
- Estimated 69,213 have **5+** ACEs





Arizona Children, 0 – 17

(2011/2012 National Survey of Children's Health)

- No ACEs - 42 %
 - One ACE - 26 %
 - Two + ACEs - **31 %**
- (Natl. average: **22 %**)



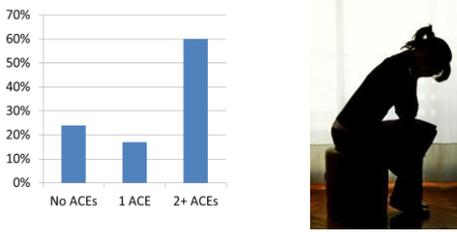
Arizona Children ages 12 – 17

(2011/2012 National Survey of Children's Health)

- **44%** have experienced **two or more** ACEs
- (Natl. average **30%**)

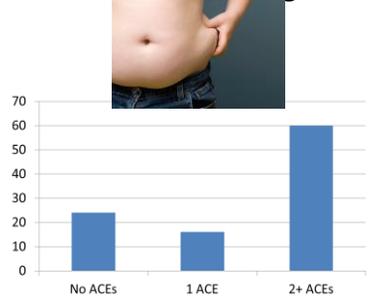


Presence of Emotional, Behavioral or Developmental Needs



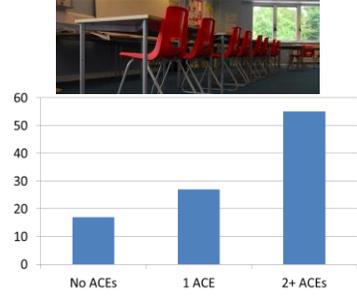
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AZ Children Overweight or Obese



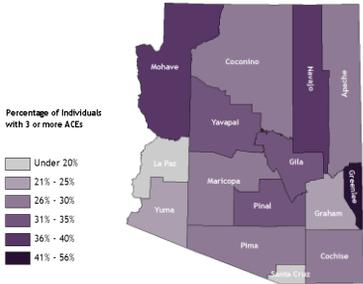
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Missed 11 or More Days of School



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AZ ACEs by County



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Stress Activates the "Hot" System



- Sympathetic Nervous System = "Hot" System
- When Hot System Perceives Threat it Responds with Survival Strategies
- "Hot" System Behaviors are Unconscious, Automatic, Involuntary



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How Does Trauma Get Created?

- High Intensity Episodic Events, (domestic violence, abuse and neglect, etc.)
- Low Intensity with High Frequency (chaotic, aggressive, punitive environments, inconsistent child rearing practices, family instability – financially, emotionally, residentially) creates cumulative harm
- Low Intensity with Continual Environmental Activation (bullying, constant bickering in the home)



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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



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Trauma

- Ex: hand on hot stove – is behavior reactive adaptation or a planned intentional response?



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Trauma is Like a Sunburn

- Attempt to Make it Hurt Less
- Don't Let Things Come into Contact
- React to Personal Touch; Create Distance
- If Intentionally Touched Likely to React Negatively
- Adapt to Avoid Real or Perceived Pain



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Arousal/Alarm System

- Reduces Non-essential Processes
- Excites Survival Oriented Physiology
- Negatively Impacts Working Memory, Verbal Fluency, Attention, and Long-term Memory



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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



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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



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Trauma in the Classroom

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



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Assumptions

- Kids are Acting Exactly as Their History Wired Them
- 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.)*



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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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Federal Class Action Lawsuit



- Peter. P. vs. Compton Unified School District
- Alleges District failed to recognize and address trauma-induced disabilities, and therefore denied legal right to an equal education



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Trauma Informed Care

- Not “What’s **wrong** with you?”
- Instead “What happened to you?”
- Symptoms are adaptations to trauma
- Shift from “The denial stops here.” to “**The recovery starts here.**”





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Trauma Informed Care in Action

- Jim Sporleder, Lincoln High School - trauma sensitive approach changed entire culture

- Paper Tigers - <http://kpjrfilms.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)



Graduation

Resilience

Hope

Healing



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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Positive Factors That Counterbalance Adversity



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At Least 1 Stable, Caring and Supportive Relationship



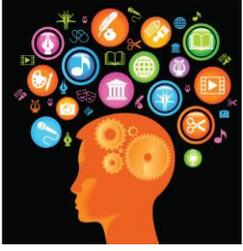
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Building Sense of Mastery over Their Life Circumstances



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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

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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