

# Adverse Childhood Experiences

How the impact of “ACEs” Trauma impacts health and impedes access to education.

# What are ACEs?

If you have experienced any of the following  
before age 18

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Neglect
- Emotional Neglect
- Family Member diagnosed with mental illness
- Mother (or Father) treated violently
- Substance misuse within the household
- Parental separation, divorce or death
- Incarcerated household member

# What is happening with ACEs?

- ACEs are an epidemic that's growing!
- They contribute to a huge amount of the burden of chronic disease in this country, as well as most mental illness and violence
- They interfere with the child's ability to learn in school
- The educational system can help reverse the trend

# Who is affected?

- Common as salt
- Crosses all social/economic groups
  - Study of 17,000 middle-class, college-educated, mostly white, employed people with great health care
    - 87% had experienced 2 or more types

# THE TRUTH ABOUT ACEs

## WHAT ARE THEY?

ACEs *are*  
ADVERSE  
CHILDHOOD  
EXPERIENCES

The three types of ACEs include

### ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

### NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

### HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Mother treated violently



Divorce



Incarcerated Relative

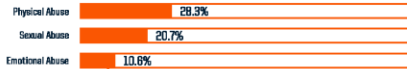


Substance Abuse

## HOW PREVALENT ARE ACEs?

The ACE study\* revealed the following estimates:

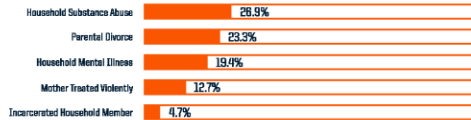
### ABUSE



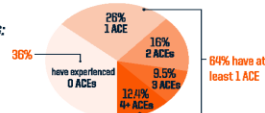
### NEGLECT



### HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Of 17,000 ACE study participants:



## WHAT IMPACT DO ACEs HAVE?

As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative health outcomes



Possible Risk Outcomes:

### BEHAVIOR



### PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH



# Hand Model of the Brain

- Make a fist with your thumb tucked inside your fingers
  - Your fist is the brain and wrist and forearm are the spinal cord.
    - Your thumb is the midbrain – emotions and memories are created and processed and fight-or-flight reflex triggered
    - Back of your hand and fingers is the cerebral cortex –thinking logically, act with kindness, reasoning and problem-solving
    - Fingernails logic and reasoning part kicks into gear

# When the emotional brain and the rational brain don't communicate so well.

- Emotions of the midbrain are simply too overwhelming
  - Fight-or flight reflex triggers
  - We “flip our lids”
    - Rational brain has very poor connection with our emotional brain.
    - Feelings intense
    - Not able to access the logical, problem-solving part
    - We need to calm our anger and ease our fears

# What does it look like?

- The more ACEs a child has, the more likely that child was to have:
  - Failing grades,
  - Poor attendance
  - Severe behavior problems
  - Poor health



# Developmental Domains Effected by Complex Trauma

- Attachment/Relationships
  - Problems with family, adults & peers
  - Problems with boundaries
  - Social isolation
- Emotional Responses
  - Emotional self-regulation
  - Labeling & expressing feelings
  - Communicating wishes & needs
- Self-Concept
  - Low self-esteem
  - Shame and guilt
- Thinking & Learning
  - Executive function & attention
  - Information processing
  - Focusing on & completing tasks
  - Learning difficulties
  - Language development
- Behavior
  - Impulse control
  - Risk-taking behaviors
  - Substance abuse
  - Oppositional behavior – complying with rules or respect authority

# What can be the role in the school?

- Give school staff real practical tools they can use to:
  - Manage their emotional response
  - Create consistency in their classrooms
  - Give skills to kids to control their own behavior and emotions.

# Change of approach

ACE-informed programs that promote resilience and recovery are likely to save high in human, social and health costs.

- Trauma-informed education
  - School discipline, no
  - School expectations, yes

# Integrating trauma-informed practices

- How to approach students
- Shift in staff
- Supports PBIS and/or CBITS approaches
  - Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support
  - Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools

# Community Connections

- Public health nurses in some schools
- Needs supported
  - Medical care
  - Food stamps
  - Transport to and from doctor appointments
  - Mental health assessment
  - Housing
  - Domestic violence intervention
  - Respite care for elderly parents

# Some outcomes

- Happier, calmer kids
  - Fewer blowouts
  - More learning
  - More awards

## Equals

Drop in suspensions

Drop in teachers' referrals to the principal's office

Very little staff turnover

Improvement of overall reading and math test scores