

Intro to ACEs and Trauma-Informed Practices in Healthcare Settings

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Learning Objectives

- **Learn about the causes & impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**
- **Identify the signs and effects of stress & trauma and their connection to ACEs**
- **Learn about Trauma Informed Care values and principles**
- **Learn how healthcare can unintentionally re-traumatize individuals and how TIC is an antidote.**





The Original ACEs Study

(Felitti & Anda, 1997)

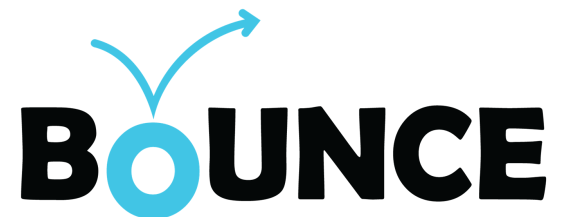
Prior to your 18th birthday:

- Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
- Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
- Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
- Did you often or very often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
- Did you often or very often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

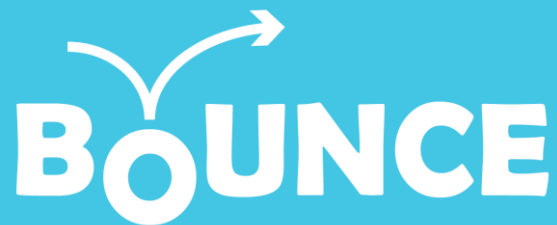


Prior to your 18th birthday:

- Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
- Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
- Did a household member go to prison?



*Examples of
Traumatic Events?*



Examples of Events That Can Be Traumatic

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Homelessness
- Abandonment
- Death
- Life-threatening illnesses
- Race-based trauma
- Domestic violence
- Exposure to untreated substance abuse
- Exposure to untreated mental illness
- Automobile accidents
- Natural disasters
- Bullying
- Separation/divorce
- Community violence
- Incarceration
- Terrorism
- Chronically chaotic environments

Source: *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA)*

Trauma Can Create Toxic Stress

Trauma is an experience that threatens an individual's life and/or sense of safety.

*All trauma creates stress...
but not all stress is the same.*

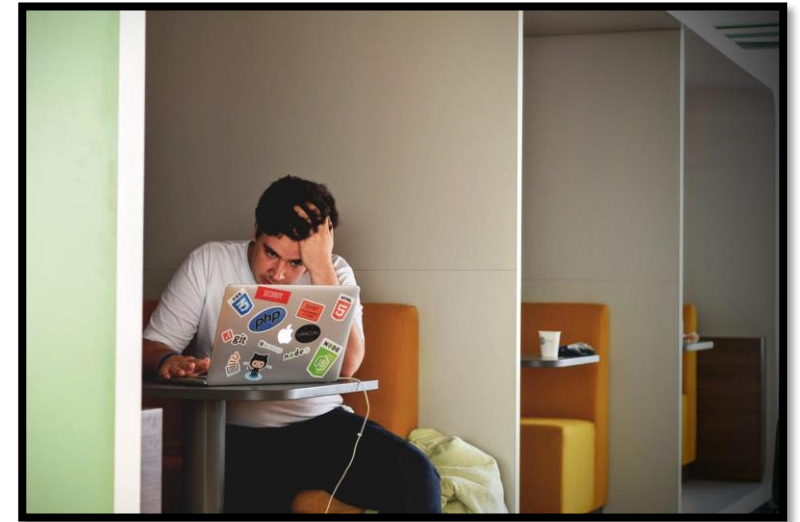


Levels of Stress

Positive. Mild, temporary, significant support (often improves performance)

Tolerable. Moderate, temporary, ample support (significant but manageable)

Toxic. Intense, prolonged, limited or no support (traumatic with serious adverse outcomes)



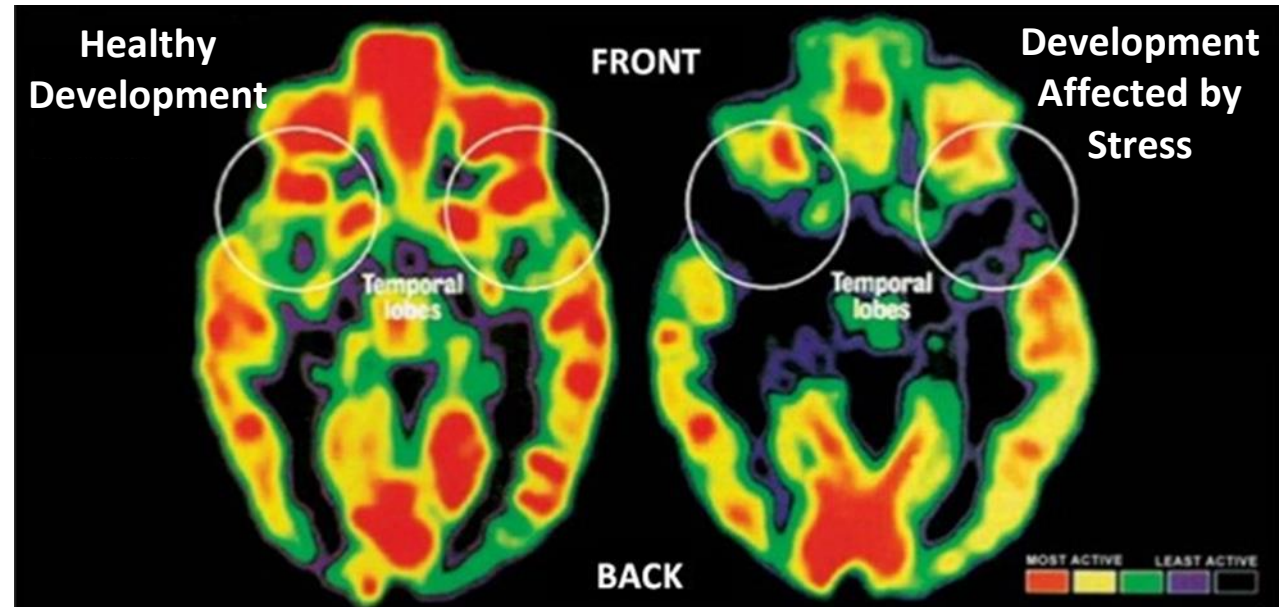
Source: *Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University*

Toxic Stress Hurts Us Physically

Hormonal Changes: Risk for diabetes, depression, immune response, and cardiac health

Neurological changes: Weakens connections to thinking parts of the brain, strengthens connections to survival parts reducing ability to cope with adversity

Genetic changes: Turns genes on and off increases expression of mental illness, metabolic illness, cardiac illness, and addiction



Dr. H. T. Chunagi, 1997

Impact of Trauma on Child Development that Informs Adult Behavior

The ability to form healthy relationships is highly dependent on learned social skills

- Children's social skill learning is directly related to the characteristics of their environments
- Disordered environments=dysfunctional skills
- Violence teaches withdrawal, anxiety, distrust, over-reaction and/or aggression as coping behaviors
- Extreme behaviors are rooted in dysregulated emotional states

(NF Commission, 2003; SG Report, 1999; Hodas, 2004; Saxe et al, 2003)

ACEs are Traumatic Experiences

As ACEs
accumulate,
the impact of
trauma
increases...



A significant adverse event



Impact over a long period



Without help managing it



Often amplified by multiple, concurrent
ACEs



What's Missing From the ACEs Assessment?

- Original ACEs study done on a mostly white, college educated, middle class group
- Missed items that may be serious sources of trauma
- There are “expanded” ACEs surveys that include new items like racial discrimination

Racial Injustice is a Significant Source of Trauma... And a Major Concern Today

- Overt discrimination
- Micro-aggressions
- Economic inequality
- Criminal justice
- Child welfare



Photo by Brett Sayles from Pexels

Problems that are often linked to ACEs

- ✓ Change in activity level
- ✓ Sleeping difficulties
- ✓ Substance use
- ✓ Disconnection
- ✓ Irritability, anger, and frustration
- ✓ Difficulty making decisions
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Behavioral changes (attendance, decreased attention, aggression)
- ✓ Difficulty coping
- ✓ Changes in performance
- ✓ Hyper-arousal
- ✓ Tired and sleepy
- ✓ Difficulty with criticism or authority

The Impact of Childhood Stress Across a Lifetime

Nadine Burke Harris, MD
California Surgeon General



https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en

Why is understanding trauma important in healthcare settings?

Imagine a place that...

- Asks “What happened to you?” instead of “What is wrong with you?”
- Understands past trauma can be triggered by experiences in the present
- Is committed to supporting people as they heal
- Leaves a person feeling empowered

Universal Precautions as a Trauma Informed Concept

Presume that every person in a treatment setting has been exposed to abuse, violence, neglect or other traumatic experiences.

Trauma-Informed Care

- Trauma-Informed Care is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma.
- Trauma-Informed Care also emphasizes physical, psychological and emotional safety for both consumers and providers, and helps survivors rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

Core Principals of TIC: Antidotes to Re-traumatization

Awareness

Safety

Trustworthiness

Choice

Collaboration

Empowerment

Biggest Barrier: Transforming Organizational Culture

Organizational Culture

- **Physical Environments**
- **Treatment & Support Environments Infused with Recovery & Resiliency Focus**
- **Individualized Approaches**
- **Program Practices (e.g., Variety of Activities, Choice, Holistic Offerings)**

Shifting Our Approach

- **Focus on the present**
- **Collaborate on options and decisions**
- **Minimize retraumatization by *going slow***
- **Adaptive behaviors = RESILIENCE**
- **Screening and universal precautions**

What is your most important take-away from our time together?

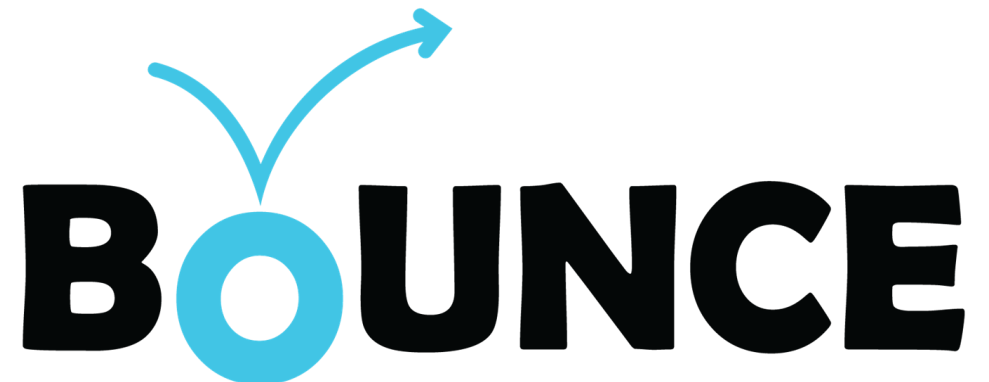


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Trauma Informed Care/ ACES Resources

- The National Center for Trauma- Informed Care
<http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/>
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
<http://www.nctsn.org/>
- Trauma Informed Care Implementation Resource Center
<https://www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/>
- ACES Aware
<https://www.acesaware.org/ace-fundamentals/principles-of-trauma-informed-care/>