



The unexpected and unseen consequences of early adversity and toxic stress  
Jeanne Elberfeld, MD, LSW- Schuylkill County's VISION

# WHAT IF???

- What if you knew that something in our homes was causing disease...
  - Cardiovascular disease
    - Pulmonary disease
      - Liver disease
      - Cancers
      - Mental illness
    - Substance abuse
  - Violence & Self harm
    - And more...

**•What would you do about it?**

## ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

## NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

## HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



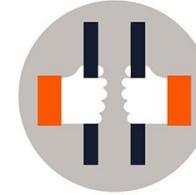
Mental Illness



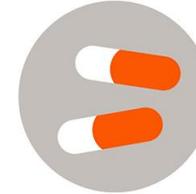
Mother treated violently



Divorce



Incarcerated Relative



Substance Abuse

# STRESS & EARLY BRAIN GROWTH

## Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

### What are ACEs?

ACEs are serious childhood traumas -- a list is shown below -- that result in toxic stress that can harm a child's brain. This toxic stress may prevent child from learning, from playing in a healthy way with other children, and can result in long-term health problems.

#### Adverse Childhood Experiences can include:

1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Emotional neglect
5. Physical neglect
6. Mother treated violently
7. Household substance abuse
8. Household mental illness
9. Parental separation or divorce
10. Incarcerated household member
11. Bullying (by another child or adult)
12. Witnessing violence outside the home
13. Witness a brother or sister being abused
14. Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
15. Being homeless
16. Natural disasters and war

#### Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Depression

### How do ACEs affect health?

**Through stress.** Frequent or prolonged exposure to ACEs can create toxic stress which can damage the developing brain of a child and affect overall health.

Reduces the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.

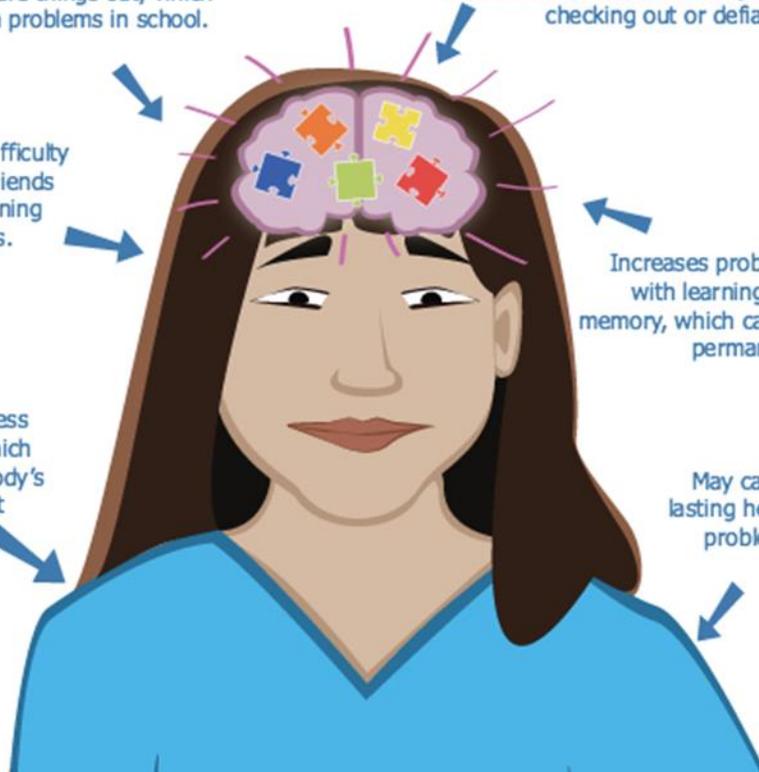
Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.

Increases problems with learning and memory, which can be permanent.

Increases stress hormones which affects the body's ability to fight infection.

May cause lasting health problems.



PAST TRAUMAS- OVERWHELMING TOXIC STRESS



**HABITUATED RESPONSE- FIGHT/FLIGHT/FREEZE**



**CHANGES IN THE NEUROENDOCRINE SYSTEMS IN THE YOUNG, DEVELOPING BRAIN**



**EXPERIENCE CURRENT STRESS**



Retreat

- Isolation
- Secrecy
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Shame

Self-destructive behaviors

- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Self-harm
- Suicidal actions
- Shame

Destructive behaviors

- High risk of injury behaviors
- Aggression
- Violence
- Rage
- Shame

# Adverse Childhood Experiences

Traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and wellbeing



People with 6+ ACEs can die

**20 yrs**

earlier than those who have none



1/8 of the population have more than 4 ACEs



www.70-30.org.uk  
@7030Campaign

## 4 or more ACEs

3x the levels of lung disease and adult smoking 

11x the level of intravenous drug abuse 

14x the number of suicide attempts 

4x as likely to have begun intercourse by age 15 

4.5x more likely to develop depression 

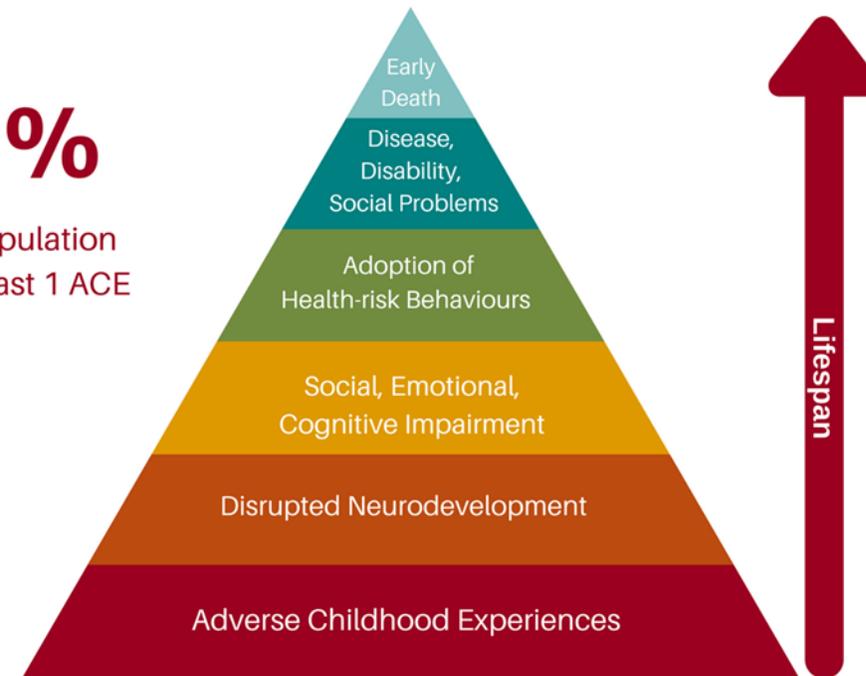
2x the level of liver disease 

“ Adverse childhood experiences are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today ”

Dr. Robert Block, the former President of the American Academy of Pediatrics

**67%**

of the population have at least 1 ACE



**As the  
number of  
ACEs  
increases so  
does the risk  
for :**

- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Smoking/Early initiation of smoking
  - Illicit drug use
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
  - Ischemic heart disease
  - Liver disease
- Immune system dysfunction
- Risk for intimate partner violence
  - Multiple sexual partners
  - Sexually transmitted diseases
  - Unintended pregnancies
- Early initiation of sexual activity
  - Adolescent pregnancy
  - Fetal death
  - Risk for sexual violence
- Risk for Intimate partner violence
  - Depression
  - Suicide attempts
- Poor academic achievement
  - Poor work performance
  - Financial stress

# THE ROOTS OF DISEASE:

- The air we breathe
- The water we drink
- The food we eat
- Where we live
- The care we receive as children
- Our access to care
- Stress in our lives





"IT IS EASIER TO BUILD  
STRONG CHILDREN THAN  
TO REPAIR BROKEN MEN."

Frederick Douglass

## THE EIGHT CATEGORIES OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS MEASURED IN THE DAP

External Assets	Internal Assets
 <p><b>SUPPORT</b> Measures whether children have caring adults in their lives, which may include parents, neighbors, and/or teachers.</p>	 <p><b>COMMITMENT TO LEARNING</b> Asks questions related to whether children care about school and completing their homework, as well as appreciate learning new things.</p>
 <p><b>EMPOWERMENT</b> Asks questions about how safe children feel at school and at home, as well as their perception of being valued and appreciated.</p>	 <p><b>POSITIVE VALUES</b> Seeks to understand if children value taking responsibility for their actions and helping others, are honest and have respect for others and their community.</p>
 <p><b>BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS</b> Hones in on whether a child feels he or she must abide by boundaries and expectations set at home, in school and in their neighborhood.</p>	 <p><b>SOCIAL COMPETENCIES</b> Measures a child's willingness to express his or her feelings, establish relationships with others, say no to activities or suggestions that are dangerous, and can find positive ways to deal with hardships.</p>
 <p><b>CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME</b> Evaluates whether children are involved in outside activities like clubs, music or art programs or religious groups.</p>	 <p><b>POSITIVE IDENTITY</b> Measures a child's self-worth.</p>

RESILIENCE =  
CONNECTION

# THE SCHUYLKILL RESILIENCY PROJECT

- Funded July 2019 – June 2021 by Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency
- A rural, juvenile, anti-violence, pilot program
- 3 prong approach
  - Support local mental health professionals who work in our schools
  - Free trauma informed trainings for any school or agency in the county
  - Schuylkill Resiliency Center – **Growing Strong Families**
    - **Goal – to enhance personal resilience through improved family attachment and positive interactions.**
    - Educational component for parents and child(ren) separately on weeknight
      - Healthy Relationships curriculum (youth), Caring for Kids curriculum (parents)
    - Body based, rhythmic, mirroring activities to support attachment and neurodevelopment- Combined parent and child(ren)
      - Yoga, drumming circle, art exploration

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Early family support
  - Parenting education- home visitation and support of early attachments –
    - Nurse family Partnership model
  - Safe, Stable, Predictable, Nurturing environments
  - Accessible, affordable child care
  - Social supports for all family members
- Intimate partner violence prevention
- Strong community programs to encourage connection and support
  - Anchor institutions
- Strong Schools with safe, structured, predictable classrooms
- Teen parenting programs that facilitate completion of education and support positive parenting skills
- Accessible mental health and substance abuse treatment options
- Adversity/Resilience screening

**Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better. It's not."**

**– DR. SEUSS**

# READING LIST

- The body keeps the score by Bessel van der Kolk
- Why zebras don't get ulcers by Robert Sapolski
- Stress without distress by Hans Selye
- The neuroscience of human relationships by Louis Cozolino
- In an unspoken voice: How the body releases trauma and restores goodness by Peter Levin
- The boy who was raised as a dog by Bruce Perry
- It didn't start with you: How inherited family trauma shapes who we are and how to end the cycle by Mark Wolynn
- Trauma and recovery by Judith Herman
- The deepest well: Healing the long term effects of childhood adversity by Nicole Burke Harris
- Creating sanctuary by Sandra Bloom

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