

Understanding Early Childhood Trauma

Sarah Roden, LGPC and Emily Ruff, LGPC

Training Objectives:

- **Defining Trauma**
- **Types of Trauma**
- **Learn how trauma impacts children's development**
- **Recognize trauma symptoms in early childhood**
- **Learn strategies on how to support children who have experienced trauma**
- **Provide additional trauma resources in Carroll County & trauma informed resources to use at home with children**



Defining Trauma



- An event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as **physically or emotionally harmful** or life threatening that has **lasting adverse effects** on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (SAMHSA)
- **Acute Trauma**- single event that is limited in time
- **Chronic Trauma**- repeated & prolonged traumatic events
- **Complex Trauma**- exposure to chronic ongoing traumatic events
- **Intergenerational Trauma**- effects of collective trauma passed onto next generation through psychological and biological means

ACEs Study

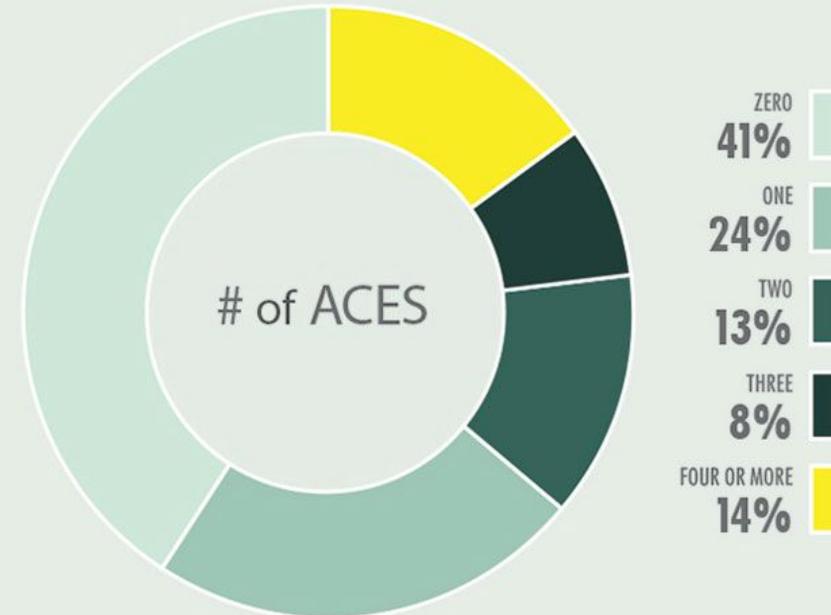
Adverse Childhood Experiences

- *Potentially* traumatic events that occur within childhood (0-17)
- **Examples:** abuse, neglect, witnessing violence, having a family member die, etc.
- **Environmental ACEs:** growing up within a household with: substance use, mental health concerns, incarcerated parents, parental separation, etc.

How Common are ACEs?

ACE Score Prevalence for Participants
Completing the ACE Module on the 2010 BRFSS

BRFSS



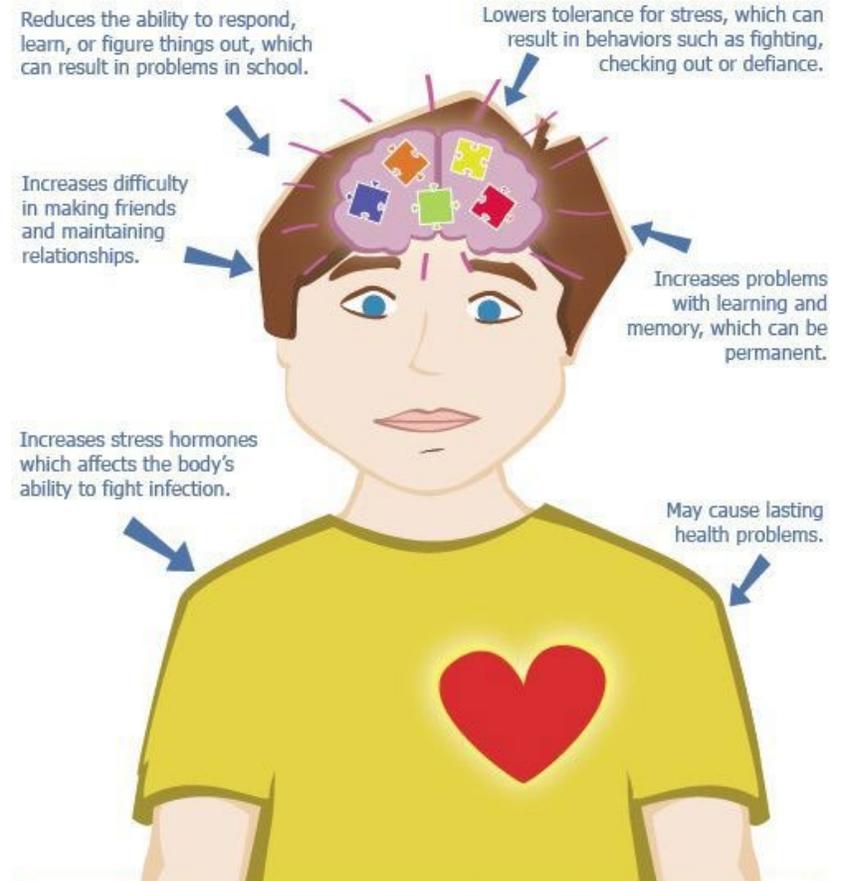
Experiencing Trauma:

Effects on early childhood development and the brain

- Constant bombarding of stress on brain results in: fight or flight mode
- Although these changes can be lifelong, with support and early intervention, development can get back on track!
- Can result in heightened state of awareness (quick to react, difficulty regulating emotions, frequent tantrums, etc.)

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.



A Survival Mode Response to toxic stress increases a child's heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension. Their thinking brain is knocked off-line. Self-protection is their priority. In other words:

"I can't hear you! I can't respond to you! I am just trying to be safe!"

Recognizing Early Childhood Trauma

Symptoms

- Inconsolable crying
- Re-enacting events through play
- Heightened startle response to sights/sounds
- Avoidance of physical touch
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Nightmares
- Negative thinking
- Bedwetting
- Blank stare behavior
- Unusual clinginess to caregivers
- Long lasting temper tantrums
- Regression in milestones once acquired (speech, toilet training, eating, etc.)
- New fears
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Emotional reaction does not match the situation (smiling when something is sad)
- Sexualized behaviors outside of developmental norms
- Lying or stealing





Trauma-Informed Strategies

1. Increase *safety*

- Maintain routines as much as possible
- Be consistent with expectations
- Provide warmth with hugs, pats on the back, and praise

2. Label their feelings and your feelings- use language they can understand

- "You look angry when you squeeze your fists"
- "I can tell you're embarrassed when you look at the ground"
- "You sound frustrated"
- "I'm sad that mom passed away"

3. Provide Validation- acknowledges how the child feels & makes them feel heard

- You do not need to agree with the feeling in order to validate
- "I understand you feel angry"
- "I can see why you're frustrated at me"

Strategies cont.

4. Reassure the child that what happened was not their fault

- Children are very egocentric and internalize feelings when things go wrong
- For example, a child may think, "Mom and dad are fighting because I am bad."

5. Teach breathing exercises when feeling anxious/frustrated/angry/sad

- Practice smelling the flowers & blowing out the candles on a cake
- Place stuffed animal on their belly and watch the animal rise/fall
- Get creative (if the child likes superheroes or Sesame street use those characters)

6. Regulate your own emotions

- Remain calm and take a break when you feel overwhelmed
- Model calm down strategies
- Seek your own professional help when feeling triggered

7. Talk about the trauma & acknowledge their feelings when they bring it up

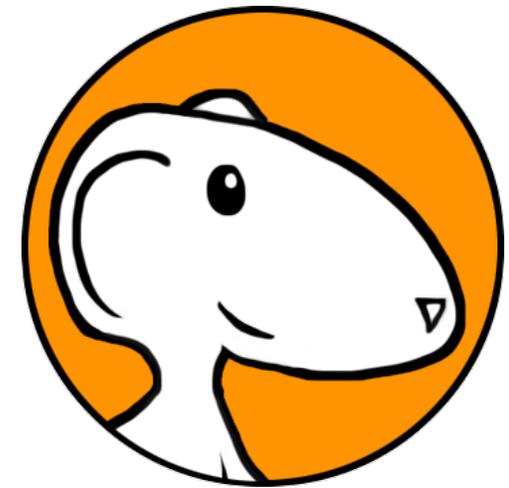
- Remember it's okay if you don't know how to answer their questions
- Always remain curious about what they know without giving too many details, keep it simple
- Keep adult conversations away from children, we want them to stay kids
- Encourage them to draw a picture of what happened, use puppets to talk about the trauma, or ask them to tell you a story through play



Trauma-Informed Books

Overall Traumatic or Stressful Events:	Caregiver Addiction:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Once I was Very, Very Scared- Chandra Ghosh Ippen• A Terrible Thing Happened- Margaret M. Holmes• Healed Hearts Heal Hearts: A Restoration "Kid-Versation"- written by Damsel In Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My Dad Loves Me, My Dad Has a Disease: A Child's View of Living with Addiction- Claudia Black, PhD• An Elephant in the Living Room- Jill M. Hastings M.S. and Marion H. Typpo, PhD.
Grief, Loss, and Separation Anxiety	Caregiver Incarceration
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rosie Remembers Mommy: Forever in Her Heart-Robin F. Goodman et al.• Where are you? A Child's Book about Loss- Laura Olivieri• The Invisible String- Patrice Karst	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Far Apart, Close in Heart: Being a Family When a Loved One Is Incarcerated- Becky Birtha• Kofi's Mom-Richard Dyches• Missing Daddy- Mariame Kaba and Bria Royal

Additional Resources



- [Trauma and Violence | SAMHSA](#)
- [ACEs and Intergenerational Trauma - Center for Child Counseling](#)
- [Trauma Types | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(nctsn.org\)](#)
- [Signs of Trauma in Children | Child Mind Institute](#)
- **Piplo Productions:** [Piplo Productions – Stories for Social Good](#)
- **Sesame Street:** [Traumatic Experiences | Sesame Street in Communities - Sesame Street in Communities](#)





Resources and activities related to:

- Art
- Asthma
- Autism
- Caring for kids
- Caring & Sharing
- Daily Routines
- Divorce
- Eating Well
- Emergencies
- Exploring Emotions
- Family Bonding
- Family Caregiving
- Financial Education
- Foster Care
- Grief
- Handling Tantrums
- Health Emergencies
- Health & Hygiene
- Homelessness
- Incarceration
- Language
- Learning Through Play
- Literacy
- Math
- Milestones
- Moving Our Bodies
- Offering Comfort
- Parental Addiction
- Racial Justice
- Resilience
- School Readiness
- Science
- Self-Care
- Traumatic Experiences
- Veterans & Changes
- Violence



Sesame Street cont.

Offering Comfort

During tough times—both everyday challenges and more serious experiences—support from caring adults can offer children comfort and reassurance. But sometimes we need help showing we care in ways that help kids really feel it. It can help to reflect on how love was expressed to us growing up, so we can make choices about how to express it to our children now.

★ ↗ 📄

Watch on YouTube

Copy link



Find an Activity

Discover games, videos and more on topics important to you and your child.

Age Time Type Find

- Type
- Storybook
- Video
- Printable
- Article
- Interactive





Questions & Answers





Sarah Roden, LGPC
Child-Parent Psychotherapy Supervisor and Clinician
Parent-Child Interaction Therapist and
Outpatient Mental Health Therapist
443-244-8127 sroden@ccysb.org

Emily Ruff, LGPC
ESMART Mental Health Consultant and Child-Parent Psychotherapy
Clinician
Parent-Child Interaction Therapist and
Judy Center Clinician at Carroll County Youth Service Bureau
443-244-8125 eruff@ccysb.org