HELPING KIDS WITH ACES: EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Yuma Early Childhood Professional Development Day
March 15, 2014
What are ACEs?

• ACEs
  • What’s my ACE score?
ACEs

• Common and an epidemic that’s growing
• Start in Early Childhood
• Can have life long effects
  • chronic disease
  • most mental illness
  • and violence
ACE Pyramid

ACE Pyramid: Conceptual Framework

ACE Pyramid: Real Life Scenario
No ACEs

• 1/3 of adults have an 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 the US.
What is a **High** ACE Score?

Tipping Points Seem to Occur at 4 and 7
ACEs Have Cumulative Stressor Effect

- It is the number of different categories, not the intensity or frequency that determine health outcomes.
Adverse Childhood Experiences vs. Smoking as an Adult
Adverse Childhood Experiences vs. Adult Alcoholism
ACE Score vs. Intravenous Drug Use

![Graph showing the relationship between ACE Score and Intravenous Drug Use. The x-axis represents ACE Score (0, 1, 2, 3, 4 or more) and the y-axis represents the percentage of individuals who have injected drugs. The graph shows a clear increase in the percentage of drug use as the ACE Score increases.]
Adverse Childhood Experiences vs. Likelihood of >50 Sexual Partners

The graph shows the relationship between ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) score and the likelihood of having more than 50 sexual partners. As the ACE score increases, the adjusted odds ratio of having more than 50 sexual partners also increases. The data suggests a clear trend where participants with higher ACE scores have a higher likelihood of engaging in more sexual partners.
Childhood Experiences Underlie Chronic Depression

![Bar chart showing the percentage of individuals with a lifetime history of depression by ACE score and gender.](chart.png)
Childhood Experiences Underlie Later Suicide
ACE Score vs. Serious Job Problems

ACE Score vs. Serious Job Problems

ACE Score

% with Job Problems

0 1 2 3 4 or more

ACE Score
Why do we care?

• Day to day interactions are tough
  • For child
  • For teacher
  • For parent

• ACEs show up at child care
  • interfere with children’s ability to learn
  • educational system can help reverse the trend
Toxic Stress affects Brain Development

• Abuse and neglect influence the amygdala
  • the part of the brain that regulates emotions, particularly fear and anxiety (red)

• Abuse changes how the prefrontal cortex functions
  • the part of the brain responsible for thinking, planning, reasoning and decision making, which can lead to behavioral and academic problems (black)
Healthy Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.

An Abused Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a Romanian Orphan, who was institutionalized shortly after birth, shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top), which regulate emotions and receive input from the senses, are nearly quiescent. Such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems.
Washington State

- Recent research on over 5,500 students K-8
  - 50% had 2 or more ACEs
  - 25% had 3 or more

- Chris Blodgett, Director, Washington State University Area Health Education Center (AHEC)
Spokane Research

- Kids with 3 or more adverse childhood experiences had
  - 3 times the rate of academic failure,
  - 5 times the rate of severe attendance problems,
  - 6 times the rate of school behavior problems,
  - and 4 times the rate of poor health compared with children with no known trauma

http://aces too high.com/2013/08/20/spokaneschools
Arizona Facts: under age 3

• Arizona ranks 46th among all states for child well-being

• 69% of infants and toddlers have at least one risk factor for poor health, school, and developmental outcomes

• 53% of children live in low-income families

• 35% of children who are maltreated are under 3

• Yet only 9% of Arizona families participate in a home visiting program
  • ZeroToThree Baby Facts 7/2013
Children exposed to 5+ significant adversities in first 3 years face a 76% likelihood of having one or more delays in development.
Arizona Children, 0 – 17

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

- No ACEs - 42.5 %
- One ACE - 26.4 %
- Two + ACEs - 31.1 %
- National average 2+ ACEs - 22.6 %
Arizona Children ages 12 - 17

- 44.4% have experienced two or more ACEs
- National average = 30.5%
AZ: Health Status Rated Fair/Poor

- No ACEs
- 1 ACE
- 2+ ACEs
AZ Children Overweight or Obese
AZ: Emotional, Behavioral or Developmental Needs

![Bar chart showing the percentage of children with emotional, behavioral, or developmental needs based on the number of ACEs they have.](image)

- No ACEs: 20%
- 1 ACE: 10%
- 2+ ACEs: 70%
AZ: Missed 11 or More Days of School

No ACEs

1 ACE

2+ ACEs
AZ: Repeated 1 or More Grades

RESULT:
Pass  □
Fail  X

% of students repeating grades:

- No ACEs: 10%
- 1 ACE: 30%
- 2+ ACEs: 60%
Programs Addressing Childhood Trauma

- Cambridge, Mass
- Kansas City
- San Diego
- Tarpon Spring, Florida
- Philadelphia
Massachusetts TLPI

• Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative’s (TLPI)
• Partnership between Mass. Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School
• Mission: to ensure that children traumatized by exposure to family violence and other adverse childhood experiences succeed in school.
Kansas City

- Crittenton Hospital Head Start-Trauma Start
- [http://www.saintlukeshealthsystem.org/head-start-trauma-smart](http://www.saintlukeshealthsystem.org/head-start-trauma-smart)

- Children who experience trauma often become **physically and emotionally on “red alert”**—their hearts race, they cannot sleep, and they live in fear. Head Start-Trauma Smart provides the appropriate mental health treatment to help children concentrate in school and develop social and emotional strengths to carry them into adulthood.
Philadelphia

- [http://www.instituteforsafefamilies.org/programs](http://www.instituteforsafefamilies.org/programs)
- Children And Moms Program (CAMP)
- Pediatric Champions
- Family Safe Zone
- Partnering with Parents
San Diego

- School climate — Create a school that promotes a culture of care, a sense of belonging and positive relationships.
- In-school and in-home health — services for parents, including education, domestic violence counseling and restorative practices.
- Youth leadership
- Restorative practices and restorative justice in the community.
Tarpon Springs, Florida


- Children are getting hearing and vision exams, new eyeglasses, a weekend snacks and meals program, and a uniform bank (with the support of a local church), and transportation to extracurricular activities.
Shared Ideas about Healing

• Bessel van der Kolk (2005): Child can heal when feel safe and joy
• Bruce Perry (2006): Child can heal when sense of safety is enhanced and repetition can occur to develop new neuronal models
• Jean Ayres (2005): With the “optimum for growth” situation, child “turns on” with an obvious zest
New Mindset

• Let go that kids behave badly because
  • they’re out to “get” teachers or parents
  • “intentional” or “willfully defiant”
• Parents are all “bad” and “should know better”
• Overwhelming research from several different scientific fields
  • epidemiology
  • neurobiology
  • biomedicine
  • epigenetics
We can

- Believe that all kids are good, but that many of them have troubles over which they have little control
- Be the first line of defense for kids who are living really tough lives
- Create an environment where kids feel safe enough to blossom into the natural learning machines that they are
- Provide new tools for self-regulation
Self Regulation

- Develops from birth with:
  - Attunement from caregivers
  - Non-verbal interactions (holding, rocking, pressure, temperature, tone of voice)
  - Language

- Understand that behaviors are adaptations to environment
Attachment

• Understand early child development
• Secure Attachment
  • How develops
  • Why critical for learning

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/three_core_concepts/serve_and_return/
Toxic Stress

• What is it
• How it affects
  • Brain development
  • Emotional regulation
  • Learning
• What it looks like in children
• Triggers adult reaction

Stress in little kids looks like

- Poor sleep/nightmares
- Poor appetite, low weight or other digestive problems
- Difficulties with relationships
- Regressions in developmental abilities
More Stress Cues

- Excessive temper
- Scream or cry excessively
- Startle
- Anxious, fearful or avoidant
- Fear of separation
- Irritability
We can help

- Kids one on one
- Classroom

- Center-wide
- Parents
Kids one on one

- Be aware of upset child
  - Aggression
  - Withdrawn
  - Frozen
- Offer interaction/talk
- Offer quiet time/reflection
- Art
- Hugs, tickles, laughter
Touch Interventions

- Use pillows/cushions to do "squishies," "car wash," or "burrito"
- Squishing into a bean bag chair, couch, or crash pad
- Weighted blankets, water pads, pillows
- Soft tactile blanket to touch or wrap up in
- Fidget toys
- Ball bag or "sensory shaker"
- Stuffed animals
- Roll a therapy ball over the child
- Spandex body socks
- Cat or dog to pet/sit in lap
Movement Principles

• Linear input is generally calming
  • gliding back and forth in a glider rocker
  • jumping up and down on a trampoline
• Using both sides of the body together is regulating and supports development of coordination
• Rocking, rocking, rocking
Movement Principles

• Slow arcs can also be calming
  • rocking in a rocking chair, on an air pillow
  • or on a rotating disc going slowly back and forth

• Vestibular (head movement) input is long-acting and very powerful

• Use weight bearing movements (crawling) to support regulation
Movement Interventions

• Yoga
• Animal movements (bear walking)
• Butterfly hugs
• Practicing words in movement
  • Yes, No, Slower/Faster
• Acting out “Engine levels” from the Alert Program
• Swinging/Rocking
• Balance games (obstacle courses)
Dyadic Movement Interventions

- **Infants:** Lap games like Peek a Boo, PattyCake
- **Toddlers:**
  - Pushing on the adult who is “tired”
  - Helping to carry an object together
- **Older Toddlers/Preschoolers:**
  - Balancing a dowel between child and parent
  - Balancing a long peacock feather on finger
- **Movement interventions are best integrated in the child’s routines**
  - helping with chores, helping push younger sibling in stroller or pull in wagon
Music - Rhythm

- Rhythm is innately containing
- Rhythm is organizing
- Expression through rhythm (describe experience with sound)
- Relationships through listening and expressing - sound conversation
- Rocking
Imagery

• Imagining safe place
  • Drawing
  • Creating safe space
• Tents
  • way of reducing sensory input
• I spy with my little eye
  • up-regulating
  • bringing into present moment
Self expression

- Art
- Music
- Outdoors

- Your ideas?
Quiet time

- Weighted blanket (5 min)
- Sand tray
- Paper and markers
  - Look into your brain
- Swaddle/cradleboard for infants
- Other ideas?
Listen

• Now I want to talk
• Respond with empathy
• Call mom, sister, who worried about

• Your examples?
Teacher Role

- Help children regulate themselves
- Create environment of safety
- Involve family
- Establish learning environment
  - blossom into natural learning machines
- High expectations
- Care/Control not Chaos
- Not cookie cutter
Classroom Strategies

• Introduce interaction time for all
  • Time to talk about what’s in your head/heart
  • Express gratitude
  • Put words to feelings
• First 10 min of day
• Music transitions to daily routines
• Post daily schedule
  • Extra attention for trauma child
• Pet Therapy dog/animal
Mindful Yoga

• Research says exercise and mindfulness training helps the stressed out brain

• Neuroscience says mindfulness

• Trauma research says movement

• Yoga combines both
Benefits

• Redirect attention
• Improve concentration
• Increase self-control
• Provide reliable, healthy coping mechanisms
• Reduce negative thinking, negative affect, revenge motivation, depression
• Reduce emotional / physical arousal, attitudes toward violence
• Increase self-control, tolerance for distress, school engagement
Center-wide Strategies

• All teachers learn about effects of complex trauma
• Set up classrooms to allow interaction time
• Identify who children can approach when need special interaction time, or which teachers are good at spotting needy kids
• Establish behavior rules, with flexibility to be learning experience
• Teacher to teacher communications
• Supportive teacher environment – Reflective Supervision
Center Leadership

- Recognizing power and importance of relationships
- Awareness of complex trauma
  - Child
  - Parent
  - Teachers
- Training in Reflective Practice
- Time/Space for Reflective Supervision
- Parallel Process: Organizational culture same for teachers; same for parents, same for children
ARC Model: Attachment, Regulation and Competency

- Developed by Dr. Margaret Blaustein and Kristine Kinniburgh, staff clinicians at the Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute in Brookline, MA.

- Practical tools to
  - manage emotional response
  - create consistency in classrooms through routines and rituals
  - give skills to kids to control their own behavior and emotions
Who can kids turn to?

- Teacher
- Director
- Specials teachers (art, yoga)
- Special time (Friday lunch with ___)
Which Teachers?

- Are skilled at spotting needy kids
- Have comforting laps
- Have time
Special place?

- Corner of room
- Office
- Bench under tree
Flexible rules

• Make a deal
• Appropriate consequences
• Not negative consequences
• Zero tolerance doesn’t work

• Time out to teach self regulation:
  • Quiet Mouth
  • Quiet Hands
  • Quiet Feet
Teacher to teacher

• Time for case study
• Share knowledge about complex trauma
• Share strategies that worked
• Don’t assume same conditions
• Focus on all students
  • Aggressive and withdrawn
Communicate with Home

• Private
• Compassionate
• Verify
• Non-judgmental
• See child with new eyes
• Each is unique
Parent Trauma History?

- Have difficulty making decisions that keep them and their children safe
- “Shut down” and fail to respond to their children when under stress
- Find it hard to trust others resulting in poor relationships, particularly with people in positions of power
- Unhealthy coping mechanisms
- Difficulty controlling emotions, behaviors, and words
Use ACE Questionnaire?

- Parents may benefit from knowing about the ACE Study
- Give them the ACE Survey
- Be available to talk if they want
Partner with Community

- Public Health Nurses, Home Visitors make great partners to connect to community resources for family
- Help traumatized parents function better vs relying on coping alone with own ACEs
Results

• Track blow-ups, expulsions
• Parent-teacher conferences
• Children ready to move up
• Staff satisfaction, turnover
• General tone
• QualityFirst rating
What can YOU do?

• Small group discussions
• In My Classroom, I ____________
• In My Center, we ________________
It’s All our Responsibility

• Effects of Neglect
  http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/inbrief_series/inbrief_neglect/

• Helping adults
Resources

- [www.acestoohigh.com](http://www.acestoohigh.com)
- [www.azpbs.org/strongkids](http://www.azpbs.org/strongkids)
- Resiliency Trumps ACEs – [http://www.resiliencetrumpsaces.org](http://www.resiliencetrumpsaces.org)
- Center for Study of Social Policy - strengthening families and protective factors – [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org)
Articles

- http://acestoohigh.com/2013/03/20/secret-to-fixing-school-discipline/
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Articles

Community Programs

• Cambridge, Mass.
  • http://traumasensitiveschools.org/trauma-and-learning/the-flexible-framework/

• San Diego, Calif.
  • http://acestoohigh.com/2013/07/22/at-cherokee-point-elementary-kids-dont-conform-to-school-school-conforms-to-kids/

• Tarpon Springs, Florida
  • http://acestoohigh.com/2012/02/13/tarpon-springs-may-be-first-trauma-informed-city-in-u-s/
More Community Programs

• Kansas City
  • http://www.saintlukeshealthsystem.org/head-start-trauma-smart

• Philadelphia
  • http://www.instituteforsafefamilies.org/philadelphia-ace-task-force

• Spokane
  • http://spokane.wsu.edu/researchoutreach/cafru/documents/cafru_pub.pdf
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