Disclosures
The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress

... evidence of the disruptive impacts of toxic stress, ... insights into causal mechanisms linking early adversity to later impairments in learning, behavior, physical and mental well-being ... adult diseases should be viewed as developmental disorders that begin early in life and that persistent health disparities associated with poverty, discrimination, or maltreatment could be reduced by the alleviation of toxic stress in childhood...
The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE)

Collaboration between Kaiser Permanente’s Department of Preventive Medicine in San Diego and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
What is the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study?

- Decade long. 17,000 people involved.
- Looked at effects of adverse childhood experiences over the lifespan.
- Largest study ever done on this subject.
ACE Study Findings

Childhood experiences are **powerful** determinants of who we become as adults
Adverse Childhood Experiences are Common

Of the 17,000 HMO Members:

- 1 in 4 exposed to 2 categories of ACEs
- 1 in 16 was exposed to 4 categories.
- 22% were sexually abused as children.
- 66% of the women experienced abuse, violence or family strife in childhood.
What Are ACEs?
Adverse Childhood Experiences

• ACEs are experiences in childhood that are unhappy, unpleasant, hurtful.

• Sometimes referred to as toxic stress or childhood trauma.
ACEs Often Last a Lifetime . . . But They Don’t Have To

- Healing can occur
- The cycle can be broken
- Safe, stable, nurturing relationships heal parent and child.
Life in a Tough World

If trauma/toxic stress occurs early in life, the brain becomes wired to survive it.
What do you see?
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.

Front

Temporal Lobes

Back

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.
Child's Brain Unexposed to Alcohol

Child's Brain after Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol

- Fewer folds in brain
- Smaller head size
- Flattened face
- Smoother surface of brain
- Underdeveloped inner structure of brain

Source: Children’s Research Triangle, Chicago, IL
In Summary

- Childhood abuse and trauma:
  - Impacts brain and nervous system, perception of self and others
  - Causes serious and chronic health, behavioral health and social problems
  - Epidemic proportions. Major public health issue
  - Often unrecognized, ignored or denied.
Types of Trauma (Lenore Terr)

- **Type 1** traumatic conditions of childhood follow from unanticipated single events.
- **Type 2** disorders follow from long-standing or repeated exposure to extreme external events.
  - “**Type 1.5**” when a single event leads subsequent ongoing childhood adversities.
- **Childhood physical & sexual abuse** represents one of the most extreme forms of trauma.
Approach to Trauma Informed Care

- Realize
- Recognize
- Respond
- Resist

https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions
What Can We Do as Physicians?

- Break societal silence and end the isolation of the child.

- Ask “what happened” vs. what’s wrong with you.

One Tool....

“The Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK) model …address prevalent psychosocial problems:

- parental depression
- substance abuse
- major stress
- intimate partner violence
- food insecurity
- discipline challenges”

http://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/seek/

http://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/seek/

The Parent Screening Questionnaire

Dear Parent or Caregiver: Being a parent is not always easy.

We want to help families have a safe environment for kids. So, we’re asking everyone these questions. They are about problems that affect many families. If there’s a problem, we’ll try to help.

Please answer the questions about your child being seen today for a checkup. If there’s more than one child, please answer “yes” if it applies to any one of them. This is voluntary. You don’t have to answer any question you prefer not to.

Child’s Name: ___________________________ Today’s Date: ___/___/___
Child’s Date of Birth: ___/___/___

PLEASE CHECK
- Yes  □ No Do you need the phone number for Poison Control?
- Yes  □ No Do you need a smoke detector for your home?
- Yes  □ No Does anyone smoke tobacco at home?
- Yes  □ No In the last year, did you worry that your food would run out before you got money or Food Stamps to buy more?
- Yes  □ No In the last year, did the food you bought just not last and you didn’t have money to get more?
- Yes  □ No Do you often feel your child is difficult to take care of?
- Yes  □ No Do you sometimes find you need to hit/spank your child?
- Yes  □ No Do you wish you had more help with your child?
- Yes  □ No Do you often feel under extreme stress?
- Yes  □ No In the past month, have you often felt down, depressed, or hopeless?
- Yes  □ No In the past month, have you felt very little interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy?
- Yes  □ No In the past year, have you been afraid of your partner?
- Yes  □ No In the past year, have you had a problem with drugs or alcohol?
- Yes  □ No In the past year, have you felt the need to cut back on drinking or drug use?
- Yes  □ No Are there any other problems you’d like help with today?

Please give this form to the doctor or nurse you’re seeing today. Thank you!
So What Can We Do About IT?

1. Educate ourselves

2. Identify the patients and problems through screening

3. Encourage patients to get help through community resources

4. Direct the patient to the correct services

Many people see a physician, but few see mental health professionals on a regular basis. WE AS DOCTORS are the best front-line defense against ACEs.

https://www.texmed.org/WhatToKnowAboutACEs/
IT IS EASIER TO BUILD STRONG CHILDREN THAN TO REPAIR BROKEN ADULTS.

-F. DOUGLASS-
References


