

The Scientific Connection Between ACEs and Resilience

Have you ever noticed that children can learn new things easily? That is because their brains are in constant, rapid development. The human brain continues developing late into adult life, but **most brain development takes place during the first five years of life.**

Childhood brain development isn't a fixed process. How a child's brain develops depends on their experiences. Providing a wide variety of experiences for a child at an early age, including appropriate challenges, will help their brains develop better. **It is possible to "rewire" the brain at any age, but it is easiest in childhood.**

Deeper, long-lasting connections are made when a particular experience happens over and over whether the experience is positive or negative. The younger a child is when they have an experience, the larger the area of the brain designated to process those experiences. For example, a child who learns musical instruments at an early age will have a larger area of their brain devoted to playing that instrument than someone who starts playing

as a teenager, even if the teen spends more time practicing.

Studies about brain development in kids show that enriching experiences can support positive brain development, but adverse experiences can negatively affect it, and lead to long term health problems. Fortunately, there is a way that children and even adults can heal from tough times, and that is where resilience comes in.

How the body handles stress is similar to how the body handles sickness. When you get a cold, the immune system gets stronger so that the next time it encounters similar germs it can attack them faster, and you're less likely to get sick. Continual exposure to sickness can make it harder for the body to recover.

Similarly, **some amount of stress can build resilience**, but if the stress becomes unmanageable it can be toxic and lead to poor health. Greater resilience allows individuals to handle more stress, which builds even more resilience and supports better health. Anyone can learn simple skills and tools to deal with stress as part of becoming more resilient.

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE VITAL TO BREAKING THE CYCLE

80% of brain growth happens in the first three years of life, and a child's brain develops best through social interaction.

Research shows that supportive relationships increase a person's ability to thrive and allow for normal, healthy brain development.

Healthy brain development establishes a good foundation for future health, intellect, and resilience, allowing a child to reach their full potential.

Healthy brains are better able to form caring relationships.

Caring relationships connect a community. Better connected communities have lower levels of crime, violence and trauma, and community members have a better sense of well-being.

Communities can promote healthy brain development through building relationships.

A community built on caring relationships protects children from the effects of tough times.

CONNECTION

Between ACEs and Resilience

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is how well an individual or group can withstand and recover from significant changes that threaten their stability, capability, or development.

WHAT ARE ACEs?

ACEs are defined as ongoing traumatic events that occur during childhood—everything from abuse or neglect, to growing up with a family member who is incarcerated in the household. ACEs cause toxic stress, which can affect a child's brain development.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Resilience is a major factor in the growth and development of children and adolescents. Building strong resilience counters the harmful health effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).



Learn more at:
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TYPES OF ACEs

NEGLECT

- Emotional
- Physical

ABUSE

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional

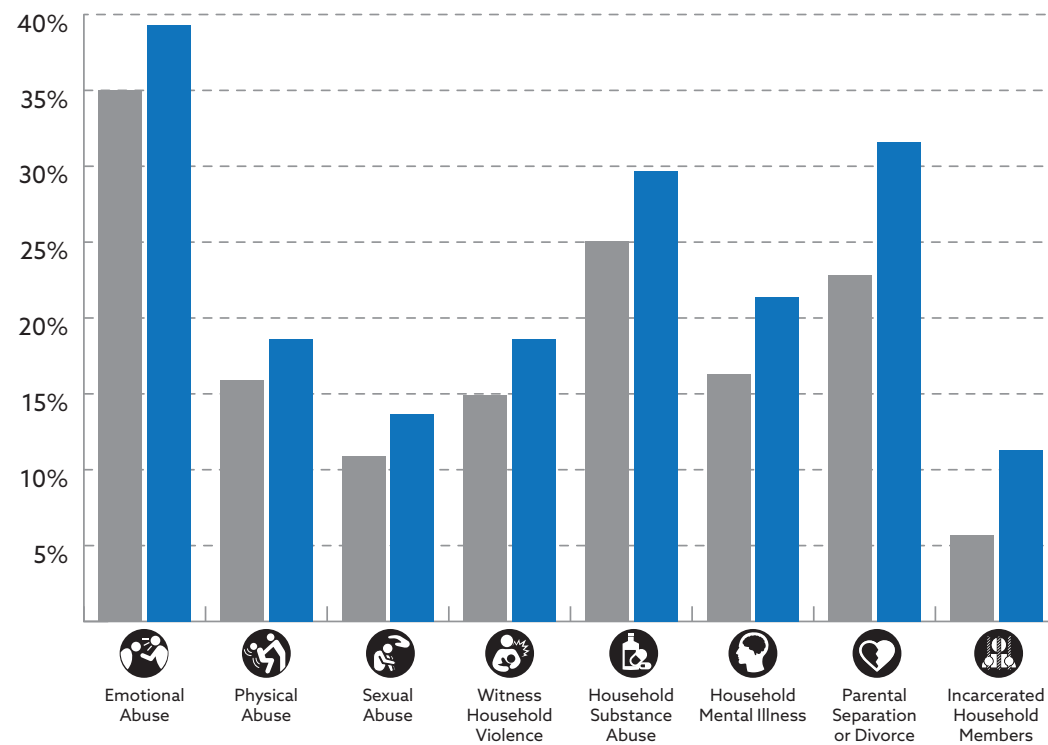
HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

- Household Substance Abuse
- Parental Divorce
- Household Mental Illness
- Incarcerated Household Member
- Witness Household Violence

Childcare providers can always create a warm, safe environment for the children that they serve, independent of their living situations at home. No matter what a child's situation outside of childcare, when they are with you they should be able to grow and develop in healthy ways.

PERCENTAGE OF ALASKA ADULTS' ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES COMPARED TO A TEN STATE SAMPLE

Alaska
Ten-State Sample



SOURCES: 2013-2015 Alaska BRFSS, Section of Chronic Disease and Prevention, Alaska Division of Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey ACE Module Data, 2010.

Facts and Figures

OVER 64% OF ALASKAN ADULTS have had one or more adverse childhood experiences.

When comparing Alaska to average results from ten states, a greater percentage of adult Alaskans have had every type of adverse childhood experience (ACE) that was surveyed.

ACEs are typically passed down from generation to generation. A child of a parent who has experienced tough times is more likely to face tough times themselves.

People all deal with tough times differently depending on their experiences, relationships, and community. Experiencing too much trauma without relief can change the brain and body, leading to poor health and social outcomes.

Children ages 0-5 are especially affected by tough times as their brain is going through rapid development. The good news is they can also rapidly learn how to handle tough times when they have the example of a caring, supportive adult. Brains continue to develop throughout life, so everyone can learn new skills to handle tough times.

Jamie has been attending childcare for seven months. Up until now, they have been an upbeat and happy 3-year-old, who loved playing with other kids, and was always smiling and laughing. Recently Jamie has started hogging all the toys and refusing to share with the other children. Yesterday Jamie hit another child when they tried to play with the same toy Jamie was using, and started crying instantly. Jamie has been crying much more frequently and it takes very little to set them off.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The reason for Jamie's behavior change is unclear. In some instances, it might be appropriate to talk to Jamie's parents or caregivers to see if they have also noticed this behavior change and see if there is any obvious reason for it (e.g. the family recently moved, another baby was born in the family.) Sometimes this kind of communication with the parent is not an option, or is inappropriate.

HELP THE CHILD IDENTIFY THEIR FEELINGS: It's very difficult for young children to connect their emotions to the way they are acting. Try to help Jamie verbalize what emotion they are feeling at the time (happy, mad, sad, scared). Really listen to Jamie with interest so that they know what they have to say is important. Let Jamie know that whatever they are feeling is normal, and that other people have these feelings too. This will help them feel understood and give them confidence to talk to you about their feelings in the future.

GIVE ATTENTION, AFFECTION, AND COMFORT: This will help Jamie feel safe and loved. Many children don't yet have the ability to explain their fears and anxieties in words, but when they are comforted they will not feel alone with their big, scary feelings.

Jamie will feel closer to you, and will learn healthy ways to find comfort. This will create a safe, loving environment for Jamie to always return to.

BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL: Jamie is more likely to imitate your actions and words than to follow spoken advice. When you are with a child, handle difficult situations the same way you want children to handle them – show understanding and compassion, take deep breaths when you're stressed, keep your emotions under control, and stay positive.

TEACH THE CHILD HOW TO COOL DOWN: Teach Jamie cool down strategies before they get upset—like counting to ten, taking deep breaths, or using fingerholds (see capacitar.org). Have Jamie practice the skills once they are having big feelings. Create a

cool down corner, or some other comfortable space, with pillows, calming music with headphones, or books. When Jamie gets upset have them go to the cool down corner and use their strategies or listen to calming music.

CREATE CONNECTIONS: Create an individual connection with Jamie, and with each child you work with. Quality relationships with caring adults are key to building resilience. Make sure Jamie has the opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions. Additionally, create connections between the children. The best way for Jamie to learn how to deal with minor stresses is to see it modeled by peers.

