#HeadStartHeals Campaign

Examining the Effects of Toxic Stress and Trauma on the Mental Health of Young Children

April 30, 2020
1:00-2:30 pm ET

Promoting empathy through trauma-informed and healing focused practices
Welcome

Please use the left side bar to ask questions, submit comments, or download handouts

Ask your questions and submit your comments here

Download handouts from Event Resources
Welcome

Please type in the CHAT Box:

What is your role in Head Start?
Examining the Effects of Toxic Stress and Trauma on the Mental Health of Young Children

Presented by:
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Psychologist & Clinical Associate Professor
Examining the Effects of Toxic Stress & Trauma on the Mental Health of Young Children

**Learning Objectives**

- Define toxic stress
- Identify ACEs that have a particular impact on stress levels
- Understand the developmental and health effects of toxic stress
- Recognize the effects of toxic stress and trauma on young children from agricultural and migrant families
- Learn simple strategies to help early childhood education systems become more trauma-informed
Infant Mental Health & Early Childhood Mental Health

- Both terms are used to refer to the developing capacity of the child to:
  - experience, manage and express emotions
  - form close and secure interpersonal relationships
  - explore, master and learn from the environment

‘Infant Mental Health’ (Birth to Three)

‘Early Childhood Mental Health’

refer to how well a child develops socially and emotionally
## Stress Severity

### Stress: Levels of Severity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td>• Brief increase in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tolerable</strong></td>
<td>• Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Toxic</strong></td>
<td>• Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activation of Stress Response System
### Adverse Childhood Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABUSE</th>
<th>NEGLECT</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION</th>
<th>OTHER ADVERSE EVENTS IMPACTING AGRICULTURAL FAMILIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>Deportation Fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Mother treated violently</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td></td>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Historical Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incarcerated Relative</td>
<td>Transient Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>Inadequate Housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Source:** Florida State University College of Medicine, Center for Child Stress and Health (www.fsustress.org)
Resources
E-Books

http://www.fsustress.org/ebook.html
ACEs Increase Health Risks

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

- Severe obesity
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Suicide attempts
- STDs
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stroke
- COPD
- Broken bones
ACEs Impact Child Development

**Significant Adversity Impairs Development in the First Three Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors for Adversity</th>
<th>Children with Developmental Delays, percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children with 6-7 risk factors have a 90-100% chance of a developmental delay by age three that is serious enough to require special services when they reach school.

### ACEs & Challenging Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical State</th>
<th>Emotional State</th>
<th>Thinking State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fight:</strong> hitting, kicking, yelling, lying</td>
<td><strong>Fear</strong></td>
<td><strong>Problem-solving</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flight:</strong> running away, giving up</td>
<td><strong>Anxiety/worry</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision-making</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freeze:</strong> becoming numb, zoning out, disassociation</td>
<td><strong>Stress</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Emotional regulation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Brain functions under alarm response

React (fight, flight, freeze)
Understanding Terms

- **ACEs**: term used to represent a group of negative experiences children may face or witness while growing up.
- **Toxic Stress**: excessive or prolonged activation of stress response systems in the body and brain.
- **Trauma**: occurs when children are exposed to events or situations that overwhelm their ability to cope with what they have experienced.
Exposure to traumatic experiences can impact young children, resulting in emotional & behavioral changes.

The experiences a child goes through will trigger either positive or negative emotions in the child.

Positive emotions typically lead to positive behaviors
Negative emotions typically lead to negative behaviors
Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions

Source: Jaak Panksepp Affective Neuroscience
Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions
Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions

AMOUNT OF PLAY

- A lot
- Some
- A little
- None

DAY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions

A lot
Some
A little
None

AMOUNT OF PLAY

DAY

Cat hair introduced
AMOUNT OF PLAY
A lot
Some
A little
None

DAY
Cat hair introduced

Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions
Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions

AMOUNT OF PLAY

A lot
Some
A little
None

DAY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Cat hair introduced
Cat hair removed
Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions

- AMOUNT OF PLAY
- DAY
- A lot
- Some
- A little
- None

Cat hair introduced
Cat hair removed
Trauma, Emotions & Behavior: An Experiment on Emotions

AMOUNT OF PLAY

A lot
Some
A little
None

DAY

Cat hair introduced
Cat hair removed

www.fsustress.org
Fear = Emotion that was experienced in response to the trauma

Cat Hair = Traumatic event

Behavior Change = Rats stopped playing
Key Lessons From Experiment

- When a young child is exposed to an adverse event, he/she is likely to experience fear.
- When a young child experiences fear, his/her behavior is likely to change.
- Once the fear system is triggered, it is hard to turn it off.
- Even events that appear to be minimally stressful can have a lasting impact on a young child.

It takes time to re-ignite positive emotions and behaviors.
Trauma-Informed Strategies
What Does it Mean to be “Trauma-Informed?”

A system in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system ... Programs infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies...

-NCTSN
What Does a Trauma-Informed System Look Like?

Trauma-informed approaches aim to adhere to the “4 Rs”:

- **Realizing** the widespread impact of trauma and pathways to recovery
- **Recognizing** traumas signs and symptoms
- **Responding** by integrating knowledge about trauma into all facets of the system
- **Resisting** re-traumatization of trauma-impacted individuals
Resilience

Resilience is the ability to "bounce back" or recover from adversity.
Competence

- The ability to handle situations effectively
- Acquiring a new skill

Islands of Competence Concept/Source: Robert Brooks, PhD
Competence Example

Dr. Sarah Parcak
Fostering Competence

Everyday Strategies for Building Young Children's Resilience in Early Childhood Education Settings

Competence

Provide children with opportunities to learn new skills every day. Here are some skills that can be taught to early childhood educators, organized into categories from the C.A. Model.

1. Instructions: Teach Skills by Telling

This is an easy way to teach children the instructions you are giving. The child can eventually look at the picture and/or read the instructions in the present tense. Use visual stimuli to teach children to follow your instructions.

- Direct: Make sure the child can follow your instructions.
- Use words that the child understands.
- Use multiple times to teach the child.
- Use visual stimuli to teach children to follow your instructions.

2. Modeling: Teaching Kids by Showing

Modeling is one of the best ways to teach a child a new skill. This involves showing a child how to do something and then guiding them through the process. Consider the following:

- Direct: Make sure the child can follow your instructions.
- Use models to teach a child skills that involve social communication. This is a difficult process.

Character Strengths:

- Helpful
- Thoughtful
- Kind
- Independent
- Cooperative
- Creative
- Tactful
- Hardworking
- Enthusiastic

Social Strengths:

- Group activities
- Social skills
- Good listener
- Takes initiative
- Makes friends
- Can express emotions
- Good sense of humor
- Is helpful
- Is good at planning
- Is good at helping

Creativity & Artistic Strengths:

- Creativity
- Likes dancing and singing
- Can dance
- Likes singing
- Active imagination
- Likes stories

Literate Strengths:

- Good reader
- Enjoys reading
- Good writer
- Enjoys writing

Logical-Math Strengths:

- Solves puzzles
- Can count
- Can follow directions
- Can add or subtract numbers

Language/Communication Strengths:

- Uses lots of words
- Can retell a story
- Likes having meals
- Likes having dinner
- Good listener

Motor Skills Strengths:

- Good balance
- Good coordination
- Good fine motor
- Good gross motor
- Good coordination
Confidence

• The solid belief in one’s own abilities

• Children gain confidence by demonstrating their competence

Our job is to help children gain appropriate confidence by helping them recognize that they possess various abilities
CONFIDENCE-BUILDING STRATEGY

HELP CHILDREN OVERCOME THE FEAR OF FAILURE:

Consider deliberately making mistakes in front of your group of students and follow those mistakes with statements like

“Oh well, I’ll have to try that again, that didn’t work”.

Use positive language and punctuate your interactions by using phrases like

“Oh gee, we might have to try that again ... Let’s build the tower again, it fell over ... You can do it ... keep trying”.

Character

• Having a clear sense of what is right and what is wrong

Caregivers cannot leave character development to chance; they have to be active and intentional in helping children build strong character.
Character-Building Strategy

**NOTICE CHILDREN'S ACTS OF KINDNESS:**

Praise children for accomplishing a new task. Catch them being kind, generous and thoughtful and tell them how pleased you are.

**NOTICE ACTS OF KINDNESS IN OTHERS**

Notice and point out the positive things other people do. For instance, if a parent brings treats for all of the children in a group, say something like:

“That was very kind of David’s mother to bring in a treat for us all!”
Contribution

• Has to do with a child contributing to others in a specific way

• We want children to realize that the world is a better place because they are in it and that they have competencies that they can use to help (contribute) to others
Contribution

**ACKNOWLEDGE CHILDREN’S CONTRIBUTIONS:**

- Point out spontaneous acts of kindness such as holding the door open for someone, helping a peer finish a task or when children are taking turns
- Give children age-appropriate “special tasks” to help with – like setting the table at lunch time or helping a younger child. Acknowledge the child for their contribution.

**CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTRIBUTE:**

- Organize opportunities for children to contribute to a particular need. For example, arrange to draw pictures and mail them to children impacted by a natural disaster.
- Ask children to bring in a canned food item and donate the goods to a local food bank. Teach children how food banks help families when they need food and acknowledge that their contribution will help someone in need.

**ALLOW CHILDREN TO CONTRIBUTE IDEAS:**

- Contribution isn’t only about good deeds or actions, children also need to know that they can contribute ideas that will be taken seriously and respected. When a child gives an idea (like suggests a particular song during music time), consider it and even solicit ideas.
Coping

• The skills a child has to deal (cope) with challenges

Like a coach on a sports team, adults need to teach children skills they can use to handle stress effectively.
Teaching Coping Skills

**FOCUS ON MANAGING EMOTIONS**

- Use sensory experiences to help children become calm. For example, the use of water trays, slime trays or finger paints may help foster feelings of reassurance and coping.
- When a child is distressed, acknowledge their feelings in the moment. Consider saying to the child, “I can see you’re sad”, and “It’s okay to cry.”
- Help young children put words to they feel. For instance, you may say to a child who is developing language “You’re smiling – you seem to feel happy!”
- Teach strategies to manage uncomfortable emotions – like deep breathing. Use strategies like elephant breathing to help children remember deep breathing.

**ELEPHANT BREATHING**

Stand with your feet wide apart and your arms dangling in front of your body like an elephant’s trunk. As you breathe in deeply through your nose, raise your arms up high above your head. Then slowly swing your arms down again as you breathe out through your mouth.
Control

• Has to do with a child having *inner control*, which means *they are* controlling their actions

• A child understanding the relationship between his/her behavior and consequences

A (Antecedent) → B (Behavior) → C (Consequence)
**CONTROL**

**FOSTER INDEPENDENCE & RESPONSIBILITY**

- Allow children to complete tasks on their own at developmentally appropriate times. For instance, hand washing or unpacking their bag.
- Have children retrieve their own hidden objects or replace toys in their proper location when they are finished.

**PROVIDE STRUCTURE, ROUTINE & CHOICES**

- Always keep a well-established routine so children know what is expected of them and what to expect; this helps children feel safe.
- Give children opportunities to make decisions. Children need structure, but when they are offered choices within that structure this can foster their sense of belonging and autonomy. You can give children choices like selecting a song from a selection of music or the option to choose if they’d like to use a red glue stick vs. a white one.
- Foster Belonging by having a designated space for each child. This can be a small container, basket or cubby where they can keep their belongings. Have a space to display any artwork or projects children complete.
Connection

• A child needs to have meaningful relationships with other people

• Connection to other people sends the message that “we can get through this together”

Connection is NOT just about getting through hard times. Connection also does the following:
- let’s children experience a higher level of security
- gives children joy
- provides children with a comfortable base that allows them to take chances (i.e., try new things)
- helps children come closer to their potential
Connection

BUILD SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS:

• Look for opportunities to help children practice empathy. For instance, if you are reading a book about a character who is having a difficult time, ask the children how they would feel if they were experiencing the same things as the character.

• If you have several children of the same age, include ‘Circle Time’ in your daily schedule. You can pass a ball around the circle and the person with the ball takes a turn to speak or to share a special object or toy they brought from home.

• If child is out sick have peers prepare a ‘get well soon’ note or drawing and make arrangements for the peer to receive it

TEACH CHILDREN TO RESPECT DIFFERENCES:

• Consider using children’s books for guidance.

• Read books that show how people treat others.
Resources

FSU Center for Child Stress & Health Publications

Avoiding Toxic Stress Brochure
Provides an introduction to toxic stress, including information about its health consequences and suggestions for how to help.
• Avoiding Toxic Stress Brochure (English)
• Avoiding Toxic Stress Brochure (Spanish)
• Avoiding Toxic Stress Brochure (Creole)

Toxic Stress
• Toxic Stress Brochure (English)
• Toxic Stress Brochure (Spanish)
• Toxic Stress Brochure (Creole)

Depression
• Depression Brochure (English)
• Depression Brochure (Spanish)
• Depression Brochure (Creole)

Grief
• Grief Brochure (English)

Resources for Children/Youth

KidsHealth Relax & Unwind Center

Resources for Parents/Caregivers
• A Parent is the #1 Shield (English)
• A Parent is the #1 Shield (Spanish)
• A Parent is the #1 Shield (Creole)
• Center on the Social & Emotional Foundations for Early Learning
• American Academy of Pediatrics – Healthy Children
• KidsHealth from Nemours
• Child Mind Institute

Divorce
• Divorce Brochure (English)
• Divorce Brochure (Spanish)
• Divorce Brochure (Creole)

Deportation
• Deportation Brochure (English)
• Deportation Brochure (Spanish)
• Deportation Brochure (Creole)

Immigration and Traumatic Separation
Module 1: The Effects of Toxic Stress & Trauma

Module 2: Strategies for Building Resilience in Early Childhood Education Settings

Module 3: The Impact of Trauma & Adversity on Early Childhood Mental Health

Module 4: Managing Childcare Provider Stress & Compassion Fatigue

Training Opportunities:
fsustress@med.fsu.edu
(239) 658-3123
Questions/Comments?
MyPeers Communities

MyPeers.org offers:

- Open communities including: **Mental Health, Opioid Misuse and Substance Use Disorders; Staff Wellness**
- Knowledge base - Q&A, Forums, Polling, File sharing, Calendars, Events, Tasks, Wikis
- Communication tools – Group Chat, Instant Message, and internal email
- Robust search engine
- Social Network style feeds
Office Hours coming up:
5/4, 1–2 p.m. ET – Building Resilience in the Face of Trauma and Adversity
5/14, 1–2 p.m. ET – Partnering with Families to Address Domestic Violence
5/21, 1–2 p.m. ET – Supporting Families Impacted by Substance Use
5/28, 3–4 p.m. ET – Family Engagement and Child Welfare

Webinars coming up:
5/5, 3–4:45 p.m. ET – Promoting Healing and Resilience with Staff and Families
5/12, 1-2:30 p.m. ET – Addressing Trauma in Classroom Settings
6/11, 3–4 p.m. ET – Preparing for Challenging Conversations with Families
Office of Head Start
#HeadStartHeals campaign

Email: trauma@eclkc.info

Website: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/