



Undoing the damage of childhood trauma

Risks, Results and Resiliency

Joseph Yeretsian, MD, FAPA

President, OptiMindHealth

Board Certified Psychiatrist



Boulder Community Health



Who is your speaker today?

- Board Certified Psychiatrist
- Graduate of New York University School of Medicine, 2002
- Graduate of Harvard Medical School, psychiatry training, 2008
- Founder & President of OptiMindHealth

Risks - Childhood is a critical period of development

The first 18 years

These years are full of significant milestones as we learn how to live / participate in the world.

Biological and psychological growth

Brain development, coping mechanisms, social skills, stress tolerance skills, and attachment styles are developed

Dependencies and vulnerabilities

This is also a critical age because attaining these milestones are facilitated by healthy relationships with caring, responsive adults.

Failures

When this period of development is disrupted by severe trauma or ACEs, we can develop strategies to live in the world that may be temporarily useful, but are less helpful in adulthood.

Mental health can deteriorate as a result of this disrupted development, predisposing us to social challenges, addiction, and failure to reach our full potential.

Risks – What are ACEs?

ACEs are traumatic experiences before age 18

Original research

Much of the research in ACEs stemmed from the original CDC-Kaiser Permanente Study

- Conducted between 1995 and 1997¹

Subsequent work

Later work broadened the scope of the original studies to include a wider sampling of people and experiences

Definitions were broadened to include additional associated experiences of chronic stress and adversity

1 CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION 2020, ACCESSED 06/07/20, CDC.GOV.

Risks – What causes and raises our risk for ACEs?

Childhood adversity can be of various kinds:

Abuse

Physical, emotional or sexual

Neglect

Physical or emotional

Dysfunction in the home

Untreated mental illness, violence toward a parent, substance misuse, divorce, familial incarceration

Other toxic stressors

Poverty, chronic stress related to racial or gender discrimination, recurrent threats, intimidation, or personal victimization



Risks – Common factors related to ACEs

Childhood adversity can be of various kinds and share common features

They are outside the control of the child

Guilt or shame

- Result from believing there was a choice
- Are secondary to normal childhood vulnerability and dependency on adults

We progress through several critical stages of psychosocial development in our earliest years

- We need healthy relationships with caring and responsive adults
- Without those relationships, critical development in those earliest years is disrupted
- Development can be delayed
- Maladaptive ways to cope with stress and adversity in adult life can result

Risks – How common are ACEs?

Frequency

ACEs are common

According to the CDC:

- *60% of adults surveyed across 25 states reported that they had experienced at least one type of ACE¹*
- *Nearly 20% surveyed reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs.*

1. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION 2020, ACCESSED 06/07/20, CDC.GOV.
2. ACES TOO HIGH NEWS 2017. ACCESSED 06/10/20. ACESOOHIGH.COM

Risks – What about different kinds of ACEs?

Total number is more significant than type of ACEs, if comparing similar

Take 4 ACEs like:

1. Parental divorce
2. Physical abuse
3. An incarcerated family member
4. A depressed family member

Experiencing these resulted the same statistical health consequences as experiencing:

1. Living with an alcoholic
2. Experiencing verbal abuse
3. Experiencing emotional neglect
4. Experiencing physical neglect¹

1. VINCENT J FELITTI MD, FACP, ET. AL. RELATIONSHIP OF CHILDHOOD ABUSE AND HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION TO MANY OF THE LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH IN ADULTS THE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE) STUDY AJPM VOLUME 14, ISSUE 4, P245-258, MAY 01, 1998

Results – What do ACEs result in?

Effects of ACEs

An ACE score of 4:

- Nearly doubles the risk of heart disease and cancer²
- Increases the likelihood of becoming an alcoholic by 700 %
- Increases the risk of attempted suicide by 1200 %²

Significant health burden

- Up to 1.9 million cases of heart disease and 21 million cases of depression could have been avoided by preventing ACEs¹

Subgroups at higher risk

- Some children are at greater risk than others²
- Women and several racial/ethnic minority groups were at greater risk for having experienced 4 or more types of ACEs³

1. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION 2020, ACCESSED 06/07/20, CDC.GOV.
2. ACES TOO HIGH NEWS 2017. ACCESSED 06/10/20. ACESTOOHIGH.COM
3. VINCENT J FELITTI MD, FACP, ET. AL. RELATIONSHIP OF CHILDHOOD ABUSE AND HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION TO MANY OF THE LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH IN ADULTS THE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE) STUDY AJPM VOLUME 14, ISSUE 4, P245-258, MAY 01, 1998

Results – How do ACEs effect us in childhood?

ACEs create immediate problems in childhood

Broad health effects

Biological

Alterations in nervous, endocrine, and immune systems, and can even change DNA structure¹

Psychological

Difficulty with forming stable relationships, changes in attention, decision making and learning, disordered eating, depression

Social

Smoking, drug experimentation, high risk behaviors (early initiation of sexual activity, unprotected sex, and suicide attempts or other forms of self harm)

1. CHILD ADOLESC PSYCHIATR CLIN N AM. 2014 APRIL ; 23(2): 185–222.

Results – How do ACEs effect us in adulthood?

What happens to adults who have had ACEs?

There is a strong correlation between the more ACEs and the greater the chance of poor outcomes later in life¹

Physical Health Effects

Severe obesity, diabetes, hypertension

Cancer, stroke, heart disease

Mental Health Effects

Depression, suicidality, excessive risk taking

Smoking, alcoholism, substance misuse

Unstable relationships, relationship violence

Trauma cycles may repeat across the generations

1. CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD, HARVARD UNIVERSITY. ACCESSED 06/06/20. DEVELOPINGCHILD.HARVARD.EDU/ACES



Results – How do ACEs effect us in adulthood?

Mental Health Effects

Addiction and unprocessed feelings

- *ACES and trauma in childhood can cause challenges in adulthood if experiences remain unprocessed*
- *Emotional scars due to ACEs can be severe enough to cause significant psychological or even physical pain in adulthood*

Biology attempts to return to a balanced state

- *Our bodies / minds attempt to heal and stop experiencing pain*
- *Sometimes we look for the most rapid way to achieve relief*
- *Seeking comfort and distance from memories of disturbing experiences is attempted with repetitive substance use*
- *Traditionally this is referred to by some addictions specialists as “ritualized compulsive comfort seeking” and refers to a way to understand behaviors associated with substance misuse¹*

1. ACES TOO HIGH 2017. ACCESSED 06/10/20. ACESOOHIGH.COM

Results – How do ACEs effect us in adulthood?

How do ACEs cause these problems in adulthood?

Reactive Survival Mode

- The human body has evolved to survive hardship
- In a traumatic adverse experience, energy from all non essential physical and mental processes is shifted to dealing with the trauma.
- The nervous system increases stress hormones and prepares you to fight, run, or freeze.
- The reactions that an otherwise normal child has to trauma are to try to keep the child safe and reduce further harm
- Traumatic emotional experiences in childhood can remain unprocessed for years into adulthood
- Adaptations to cope with early trauma sometimes do not translate well for coping in adult life

Results – How do ACEs effect us in adulthood?

How do ACEs cause these problems in adulthood?

Healing restorative mode

- *Usually, when an immediate threat ceases, the body starts reducing stress hormones and allows the brain to go back to the usual top down decision making control process*

Failed restoration

- *The body and mind want to return to balance, to homeostasis*
- *A severe trauma history can adversely affect the ability to return to normal after sometimes even a slight provocation*
- *Continual activation of the stress response results in long lasting wear and tear on the body and brain – “hyperarousal”*
- *These chronic stressors can result in physical and mental health problems later in life*

Resiliency – How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

The brain is plastic, and wants to heal

Is lasting recovery and healing possible?

Yes! We can recover from ACEs and trauma, and improve our lives and our relationships.

Healing is accomplished in many ways

- Ideally, governmental, societal, and personal efforts are focused on preventing and reducing the impact of ACEs
- Individual counseling, trauma focused counseling, specific approaches like EMDR can be used
- Group therapy
- Social and behavioral changes - getting more support
- Medication options help lessen symptoms

1. BASILE, K.C., DEGUE, S., JONES, K., FREIRE, K., DILLS, J., SMITH, S.G., & RAIFORD, J.L. (2016). STOP SV: A TECHNICAL PACKAGE TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE. ATLANTA, GA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND CONTROL, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION.

2. DADAVID-FERDON, C., VIVOLO-KANTOR, A. M., DAHLBERG, L. L., MARSHALL, K. J., RAINFORD, N. & HALL, J. E. (2016). A COMPREHENSIVE TECHNICAL PACKAGE FOR THE PREVENTION OF YOUTH VIOLENCE AND ASSOCIATED RISK BEHAVIORS. ATLANTA, GA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND CONTROL, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION.

Resiliency – How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

The brain is plastic, and wants to heal

Prevention/healing – organizational and government efforts

Fostering creation of safe, stable, nurturing relationships for children

- Relationship education
- Child rearing and family life education / coaching

Support community / social strategies that focus on addressing challenges of ACEs^{1,2}

- Making trauma informed trainings available
- Dissemination of ACE resources

Working to address higher risk populations and the vulnerabilities they face due to recurrent toxic stress

- Increasing options for housing stability
- Improving the social safety net for our most vulnerable

1. DADAVID-FERDON, C., VIVOLO-KANTOR, A. M., DAHLBERG, L. L., MARSHALL, K. J., RAINFORD, N. & HALL, J. E. (2016). A COMPREHENSIVE TECHNICAL PACKAGE FOR THE PREVENTION OF YOUTH VIOLENCE AND ASSOCIATED RISK BEHAVIORS. ATLANTA, GA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND CONTROL, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION.

2. SICKMUND, M., & PUZZANCHERA, C. (EDS.). (2014). JUVENILE OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS: 2014 NATIONAL REPORT. PITTSBURGH, PA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE. RETRIEVED FROM [HTTP://WWW.OJJDP.GOV/OJSTATBB/NR2014/](http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/NR2014/)

Resiliency – How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

The brain is plastic, and wants to heal

Prevention/healing – community/family efforts

Fostering relationships with caring adults

- Positive role models for children can prevent some ACEs, and improve outcomes for youth who experience ACEs¹

Mentoring and after school programs

- Strengthen behavioral, academic, leadership skills of youth
- Improve resiliency and enhances recovery from ACEs

Providing adult supervision during critical hours

- Hours 3 pm and 6 pm are when youth crime and violence peaks – supervision at these times reduces ACEs²

Other family members

- Responsive, caring relationships from other family members can protect against ACEs and to reduce their burden.

Resiliency – How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

No one who has had ACEs is irreparably damaged

Individuals can heal from ACEs at any age

Children and Adolescents

- With the help of caring, responsive adults kids can strengthen life skills
- Can enhance abilities to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity
- Engaging with consistent, supportive adults help children develop trust in others and belief in their own abilities

Resiliency – How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

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Mid Life

- In middle adulthood working with a counselor with experience in trauma, addiction, depression, or anxiety can help build insight into the effects of ACEs and how to heal from them
- Being in nurturing relationships as adults helps to foster growth and recovery from ACEs
- Learning how to better communicate feelings, engage with others, and develop meaningful relationships reduces the helplessness, guilt, and shame that often accompanies ACEs.

Resiliency– How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

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Individuals can heal from ACEs at any age

Late age

In older age we have the opportunity, sometimes that we didn't have previously, to reflect and ask questions that we were unable to earlier in life

- More time
- More psychological curiosity
- More desire to find answers and heal from our challenges

Getting involved in community or other social efforts to reduce the risk and resulting effects of ACEs

- Volunteerism
- Community advocacy

Helping other younger adults navigate the difficulties of accessing mental health care, addressing substance misuse, or the challenges of parenting can enhance a sense of integrity, and generativity in later life

Resiliency– How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

Healing is possible at any age

Getting help from a professional

- Working with a professional who has experience in trauma, addiction, depression, or anxiety can help

Engaging in treatments that work

- Current holistically informed approaches to addiction or mental health challenges associated with trauma demand:
 - Treating people with respect, avoiding shame, blame, or guilt
 - Listening closely for how ACEs were experienced
 - Discovering the heart of that disturbance for that person
 - Holistically review biological, psychological, and social strategies for healing

Resiliency– How can we heal from the effects of ACEs?

No one who has had ACEs is irreparably damaged

Some things are helpful for healing at all ages

- *Meditation*
- *Physical exercise*
- *Spending time in nature*
- *Pursuing other endeavors of interest and meaningful work*
- *Volunteering time to help others*

The goal and measure of healing

If we are able to consistently work, love and help others, to be productive and see the value in striving to solve problems that affect us all, we can be satisfied that we have significantly overcome our personal adversities, and are living our lives well.

Resources

- Boulder Community Health Opioid & Chronic Pain Response Program
 - www.bch.org/opioid
 - 303.415.8659
- OptiMindHealth
 - <https://www.optimindhealth.com>
 - 720.893.0842
- CDC
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html>
- Web Resources
 - <https://acestoohigh.com/>
- Colorado Crisis Services
 - Crisis Phone Services
 - 1-844-493-TALK (8255)
 - Text 'TALK' to 38255
 - coloradocrisiservices.org
 - Trans Lifeline
 - 1-877-565-8860
 - translifeline.org





Questions?

Thank You!

Please fill out post-lecture survey
(sent to the email address you
registered with) to let us know how
we did!



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