

# Providing Hope for Our Children & Youth Impacted by the Trauma Inflicted by COVID-19

**Presented by:**

**Chelsea Melrath**

Chester County ACEs  
Coalition Coordinator &  
Trauma Specialist

**Sandy Shacklady-White**

Educational Consultant for  
PaTTAN

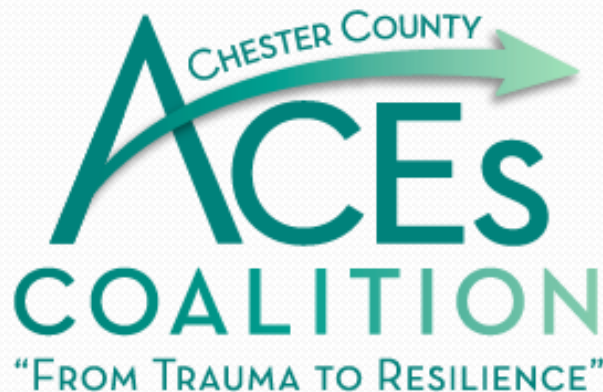
**Summer 2020**

# I hear the term ACEs. What is this?

- Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (1997)
- Surveyed over 17,000 HMO members in California at their annual exams
- Survey consisted of 10 questions in 3 different areas: abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction
- Did any of these 10 happen to you in your childhood?
- Add points at the end = your ACE score
- Compared childhood abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction to later health outcomes and well being

# Why is this study so important?

- ACEs are common.
  - 64% of people in the study reported at least 1 ACE
  - Nearly 1 in 6 people reported 4 or more ACEs
- There is a dose-response relationship between number of ACEs and negative health outcomes.
  - ACEs are a serious and costly public health issue.
- ACEs are associated with early mortality.
  - If you have an ACE score of 6 or more, your life expectancy decreases by 20 years.



# Trauma is not limited to ACEs. What other types of trauma are there?

Trauma refers to intense and overwhelming experiences that involve serious loss, threat or harm to a person's physical and/or emotional well being.

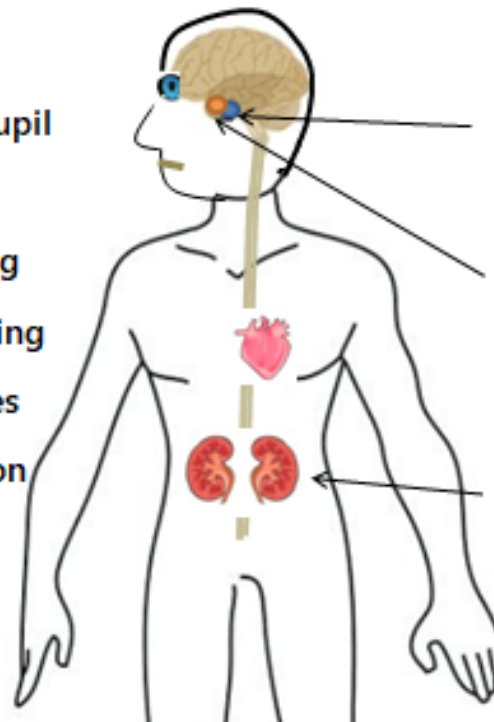
These experiences may occur at any time in a person's life. They may involve a single traumatic event or may be repeated over many years.

# How do our bodies respond to trauma?



## The fight or flight response

Dilation of pupil  
Dry mouth  
Fast breathing  
Heart pounding  
Tense muscles  
Slow digestion  
Sweating of palms



1. The amygdala reacts to threat
2. The hypothalamus activates the sympathetic nervous system, release of adrenaline
3. The adrenal cortex releases cortisol for continued alertness

# How does stress impact us?

## Positive Stress

The body's normal and healthy stress response to a tense situation/event.

### *Example:*

First day of school or work.

## Tolerable Stress

Activation of the body's stress response to a long-lasting or severe situation/event.

### *Example:*

Loss of family member, but with supportive buffers in place.

## Toxic Stress

Prolonged activation of the body's stress response to frequent, intense situations/events.

### *Example:*

Witnessing domestic violence in the home, chronic neglect.<sup>2</sup>

# What are the signs and symptoms of a student experiencing trauma?

- **Emotional Reactions:** depression, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, shame, anger, irritability, and worry
- **Physical Reactions:** nausea, increased blood pressure, headaches, stomach aches, increased heart rate, and fatigue
- **Behavioral Reactions:** crying, uncooperative, argumentative, decreased activity level, engagement in high-risk behaviors, increased drug & alcohol use
- **Cognitive Reactions:** forgetfulness, preoccupation with traumatic event, inability to focus, difficulty making decisions, intrusive memories or flashbacks



# How can we help prevent ACEs and trauma from happening to our youth?

These Protective Strategies are provided by the CDC in order to prevent ACEs/Trauma as well as mitigate the harms associated with ACEs/Trauma.



## **Strengthen economic supports to families**

- Strengthening household financial security
- Family-friendly work policies



## **Change social norms to support parents and positive parenting**

- Public engagement and enhancement campaigns
- Legislative approaches to reduce corporal punishment



## **Provide quality care and education early in life**

- Preschool enrichment with family engagement
- Improved quality of child care through licensing and accreditation



## **Enhance parenting skills to promote healthy child development**

- Early childhood home visitation
- Parenting skill and family relationship approaches



## **Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk**

- Enhanced primary care
- Behavioral parent training programs
- Treatment to lessen harms of abuse and neglect exposure
- Treatment to prevent problem behavior and later involvement in violence



# What is Trauma-Informed Care?

*Trauma-Informed Care* shifts the focus from:

What is  
**WRONG**  
with you?

to

What  
**HAPPENED**  
to you?

Think in terms of a **Continuum** of Implementation where Organizations move through Stages

Trauma-Aware	Trauma-Sensitive	Trauma-Responsive	Trauma-Informed
<p><b>Key Task:</b> Awareness and attitudes</p> <p>Trauma-aware organizations have become aware of how prevalent trauma is and have begun to consider that it might impact their clientele and staff.</p>	<p><b>Key Task:</b> Knowledge, application, and skill development</p> <p>Trauma sensitive organizations have begun to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) explore the principles of trauma-informed care (safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment) within their environment and daily work;</li><li>2) build consensus around the principles</li><li>3) consider the implications of adopting the principles within the organization; and</li><li>4) prepare for change.</li></ol>	<p><b>Key Task:</b> Change and integration</p> <p>Trauma responsive organizations have begun to change their organizational culture to highlight the role of trauma. At all levels of the organization, staff begins re-thinking the routines and infrastructure of the organization.</p>	<p><b>Key Task:</b> Leadership</p> <p>Trauma informed organizations have made trauma- responsive practices the organizational norm.</p> <p>The trauma model has become so accepted and so thoroughly embedded that it no longer depends on a few leaders.</p> <p>The organization works with other partners to strengthen collaboration around being trauma informed.</p>

Source: Missouri Model: A Developmental Framework for Trauma-informed, MO Dept. of Mental Health and Partners (2014).

# **ACEs/Trauma are not destiny; our brains can be hurt but they can also be healed.**

- Children are very resilient and can bounce back from adversity as long as they have the family and community support they need.
- Strategies to help youth at home:
  - Caregiver reactions are key.
  - Keeping regular routines and schedules are important.
  - Help children recognize the greater good in isolation and social distancing.
  - Be honest and be willing to listen nonjudgmentally.
  - Loosen rules on social media and encourage connecting with friends virtually.

# Strategies continued...

- Encourage healthy habits.
- Help them practice mindfulness (Ex. Taking deep breaths).
- Limit media exposure.
- Now, more than ever, is a great time to focus on self-care strategies and helping our youth and children understand the importance of taking care of themselves mentally, physically, and emotionally.
- Seek mental health services such as school counselor, social worker, pediatrician, etc. if needed.

# What can I do this summer to help my youth re-enter school regardless of how that will look?

- Acknowledge their feelings and concerns by listening nonjudgmentally and validating their feelings
- Encourage them to ask questions if they have any
- Reassure them that no matter the outcome, they will be okay and you will help them through it
- Speak to them in familiar terms depending on age and development



# What resources are out there if I would like additional information?

- Chester County ACEs Coalition:  
[www.CCACEsCoalition.com](http://www.CCACEsCoalition.com)
- Nadine Burke-Harris Ted Talk (Approx. 15 minutes):  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network:  
<https://www.nctsn.org/>



# Resources continued..

- ACEs Too High: [www.acestoohigh.com](http://www.acestoohigh.com)
- Center for Disease Control (CDC):  
[https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fchildabuseandneglect%2Facestudy%2Findex.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fchildabuseandneglect%2Facestudy%2Findex.html)
- Center for Youth Wellness:  
<https://centerforyouthwellness.org/>



**Any questions? Feel free to contact us!**

Chelsea Melrath: [cmelrath@chesco.org](mailto:cmelrath@chesco.org)

Sandy Shacklady-White: [sshackladywhite@pattankop.net](mailto:sshackladywhite@pattankop.net)