

Chelsea McRath Part 1

- 00:00

Welcome to this episode of our PaTTAN Behavior Bytes summer

- 00:04

series. Dedicated to families, educators, community members

- 00:06

and students preparing for the return of school in the fall of

- 00:10

2020. Please note That no one at the time of this recording knows

- 00:14

what the fall opening will look like, but we have invited folks

- 00:18

with various backgrounds and experiences to share best

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practices and resources.

- 00:24

Welcome to Patton's behavior by it series, my name is Sandy

- 00:28

Shakelady-White and I'm an educational consultant for

- 00:31

PaTTAN at the East office in Malvern. Joining me today is

- 00:35

Chelsea McRath from Chester County government services where

- 00:38

she is a coalition coordinator and trauma specialist.

Chelsea McRath Part 1

- 00:41

To be sharing information with us today about the impact of the

- 00:45

pandemic on our youth, and as we prepare for returning to school

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in the fall, Chelsea, thanks for being here today I'll turn it

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over to you. Thank you so much for having me Sandy. I'm excited

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to be here and to be able to talk a little bit about how we can

- 01:02

really provide that hope for our

- 01:04

children and youth who are specifically now

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impacted by the trauma inflicted by COVID-19, so

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again I am the coordinator of the Chester County ACEs

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Coalition, and I am also a trauma specialist with the

- 01:18

Chester County Health Department.

- 01:21

So I said the term aces as far as Chester County ACEs

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- 01:26

Coalition. Well, what exactly is that?

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It actually is derived from a study that was conducted in 1997

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over 20 years ago that was called the adverse childhood

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experiences study by researchers who were in the Southern

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California area decided to survey over 17,000 HMO members

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at their annual exams. So what they did was they gave the

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patient a survey that consisted of 10 questions in three

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different areas. Abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction so

- 01:59

they used to ask questions of

- 02:01

Whether or not you have been physically, emotionally, or

- 02:05

sexually abused. If you've been neglected or as far as household

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dysfunction, they ask questions such as did you witness domestic

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- 02:14
violence in the home?
- 02:17
Were there any parental separation or divorce?
- 02:21
Did you have a parent or Guardian who went to prison? Or
- 02:26
if a parent or Guardian had any kind of mental illness or
- 02:31
substance use disorder in your
- 02:33
childhood? So they gave the patients 10
- 02:38
questions, it was yes or no questions and for every yes
- 02:42
that the patient had responded, you receive the
- 02:45
points and then at the end of that survey you added up your
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points. And so what that means is that would be your
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ace score, so you're ace score could be 0 to 10.
- 03:00
After they received these results, they then compared

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- 03:03
to ace score that they received to the later healthcare
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outcomes and well being.
- 03:10
So they looked at all of really the significant public health
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concerns such as cancer, diabetes, strokes, mental
- 03:18
illness, suicidality, addictions, and went on and on.
- 03:22
An really looked at the number of a scores compared to these
- 03:27
health outcomes and what they found was truly staggering.
- 03:34
The study was really important because of some of the major key
- 03:38
findings that they found. They found out that aces are
- 03:42
extremely common, so 64% of people in the study reported at
- 03:46
least one ace score. So 64% of these people had experienced
- 03:50
some kind of potentially traumatic experience in their

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- 03:53
childhood, and nearly one in six people reported four or more
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aces. So there's a lot of us that have really experienced some
- 04:02
potentially traumatic things in our childhood, and I think that
- 04:05
it was way more common than what they had originally thought.
- 04:10
They also found that there is a dose response relationship
- 04:14
between the number of aces and negative health outcomes. So as
- 04:19
the number of cases increased for a person, so did the
- 04:23
likelihood that they would experience some negative health
- 04:26
outcomes later in life.
- 04:29
So for instance, and ace score of four or more in a person would
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mean that there are two times as likely to become a smoker where
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there are seven times more likely to become alcoholics.

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- 04:42

They also found that with a person who had and a score of

- 04:47

four or more that increase the risk of emphysema or chronic

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bronchitis by nearly 400%.

- 04:53

And attempted suicide by 1200% compared to a person who had a

- 05:00

score of 0.

- 05:03

So again, it just found that these aces are a serious and

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costly public health issue. And Lastly, they found through this

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study that aces are associated with early mortality. So if you

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have an ace score of six or more, your life expectancy decreases

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by 20 years. So these findings are extremely important, and I

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think when the researchers found out about this and they looked

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at the information, I think that they thought there was going to

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- 05:30
be this huge explosion.
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So the research of people reaching out and saying, Oh my
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gosh, if we need to do something about this, and unfortunately
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there wasn't too much of that at that time, but throughout this
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20 years, 20 plus years that this research has come out,
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there has been some really significant research that has
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come out. So, for instance, there has been a Philadelphia
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Urban Aces study.
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That that really looked at additional factors they looked
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at not only the original 10 aces but also additional aces.
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They looked at bullying, neighborhood violence, racism,
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and again, compared those experiences to later health

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- 06:16
outcomes. And they actually found very similar results.
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So what we can say is that trauma is not just limited to
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aces. Yes, we focus on aces. I think that this is a term that
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were commonly using just because it really was the first landmark
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study within the trauma movement. But there are other
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types of trauma we continue on. If you could clarify or just
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make sure I understand just because you have so many
- 06:47
traumatic events in your childhood does not mean that
- 06:51
you're gonna die at a young age right now. No it definitely
- 06:54
doesn't mean that, and I know.
- 06:57
Looking at some of these statistics didn't kind of say
- 06:59
Oh my gosh, this is going to happen to me or you know,

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- 07:02

it's a little scary, but what it just means is that.

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Yes, they are at risk. They are at risk. So to get assistance to

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be more resilient and bounce back and and cope with those

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traumas that we've experienced absolutely and we will review a

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little bit of those further on in the slides. But yes, that

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doesn't mean that you're going to, It doesn't mean that that's

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going to happen to you, it just means that this is what they

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found in the original study. And now that this information is out

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there, we could focus on that and we can say, OK, you know I

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may have had these experiences in my childhood, but what can I

- 07:39

do? What can I put in place?

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What are some of those protective factors that I

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- 07:44

can surround myself with so that that doesn't happen?

- 07:47

And the great thing is, is that we can bounce back

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and there is that resilience and hope

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for all of us.

- 07:56

Yes.

- 07:58

Thank you, Sandy.

- 07:59

So then we're talking about trauma throughout, you know this

- 08:03

this presentation, or, you know, I think trauma is this huge

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buzzword right now. Everybody is kind of talking about it. So

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what exactly do we mean when we're talking about trauma were

- 08:16

referring to intense and overwhelming experiences that

- 08:19

involve serious loss?

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- 08:20
Threat or harm to a person's physical and or
- 08:24
emotional well being.
- 08:27
That can you can experience trauma at anytime in your life
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and it may be just one single traumatic event. Or it could be
- 08:35
a series of events that are repeated over many years.
- 08:40
So you know examples of trauma could be natural
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disasters, car accidents.
- 08:49
Um, even COVID-19, and this pandemic that we're experiencing
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right now. You know that it's truly a collective traumatic
- 08:55
experience that we're all going through, and I think that it's
- 08:59
really important to recognize that this is causing some some
- 09:03
stress to a lot of us. It's threatening us, potentially

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- 09:06

harming a lot of us, and so that can cause a lot of uncertainty.

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And stress around it, which is referred to as a trauma.

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So how exactly does trauma affect our bodies? You know, we

- 09:26

can now link these experiences to affecting our physical well

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being, but how does that happen?

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So imagine yourself in a forest. And a bear is coming at you,

- 09:41

running towards you. All of the sudden your pupil dilate,

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and your hearts pounding your breathing really fast, or

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tensing your muscles. Your palms are really sweaty because you

- 09:56

are prepared to either fight.

- 09:59

Flee or freeze so our body is automatically producing

- 10:05

This response. The amygdala reacts to the threat.

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- 10:10

So your brain saying OK, there's a bear. It's coming at me. The

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hypothalamus activates the sympathetic nervous system and

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releases all of these.

- 10:22

This adrenaline going through your body. It releases cortisol

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so you your alert, you're ready to either fight.

- 10:31

Fight or freeze.

- 10:34

And that's great because our bodies need we need to be able

- 10:38

to prepare to do those things in order to protect ourselves. This

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is this is a threat that is potentially going to harm me. So

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our bodies need to know how to do this and need to know how to

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reactivate in that way. And that's great if we're in a

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forest and there's a bear coming at us. But what if that bear is

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- 10:59
really a parent or Guardian that comes home in a fit of rage
- 11:04
every night? Um, where their drunk or high when they come
- 11:08
home and you're scared?
- 11:14
We all have stress and in some stress is really good stress,
- 11:18
so we you know we have positive stress in our lives
- 11:21
and that could be, you know, just being anxious for your
- 11:25
first day of school or work. You know some of the our
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kiddos are really going to experience this with going
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back to school this year and just, you know, depending on
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really how that looks and that's our bodies normal and
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healthy stress response to a situation or something that's
- 11:40
going on that.

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- 11:42

That kind of gives us a little bit of that anxiety or stress,

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you know, and that's positive stress we all need that stress

- 11:51

in our lives. And then there's tolerable stress. So that's when

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your body stress response system is activated. It's a little bit

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more long lasting, or it's no more severe event.

- 12:02

But we have supportive buffers in place, so for example.

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If we lost a member of our family and we're grieving, and

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obviously that's a stressful event, and it could be a little

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bit more long lasting. However, we have the support of people in

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our lives that are going to make sure that we're getting through

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it, and so kind of Comus down. And to be there for us.

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When we're talking about trauma and we're talking about these

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- 12:32
adverse childhood experiences and the fight flight, or freeze
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response system. And really, how that's affecting our body, we're
- 12:39
really talking about toxic
- 12:40
stress. That prolong activation of the body stress response to
- 12:46
frequent intense situations or
- 12:48
events. So again, that's that constant activation of the fight
- 12:52
flight or freeze response.
- 12:55
And really, the wear and tear that that's doing on our bodies
- 13:00
over and over and over again. So witnessing domestic violence in
- 13:03
the home that chronic neglect, not knowing where you're going
- 13:07
to get your next meal or the bear or your parent or guardian
- 13:12
coming home in a fit of rage.

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- 13:15

So it's that constant activation your body saying

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always that I I have a threat, somethings going to

- 13:22

harm me and our bodies constantly being activated.

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It really does a job on our bodies and it can really

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break. Break us down.

- 13:33

So and just to clarify, there are some some people may be able

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to rebound from a certain stress, so the definition of

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stress for each person could be totally different. Absolutely

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absolutely, I think, and their awareness of their bodies

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reactions. That whole mind, body connection and response to the

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stressors. Absolutely. And it also is just really having those

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supportive buffers in place. Do we have someone that we can go

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- 14:03

to that we can release some of this tension that we can we can

- 14:09

express what's going on in our lives that we feel safe with,

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and if we have those buffers in our lives, it's more likely that

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we're really going to be able to get through these events or

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situations in a more healthy,

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tolerable way. But it's when we're really talking about

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trauma and its effects on our bodies were talking a lot

- 14:34

about that toxic stress and the activation of the stress

- 14:39

response system.

- 14:45

So then what are the signs and symptoms of a student

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experiencing trauma or really any person experiencing trauma?

- 14:54

So these are just a few reactions. Emotional reactions

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- 14:58
could be depression, hopelessness, shame, worry.
- 15:01
Physical reactions could be stomach aches or headaches,
- 15:05
fatigue, some behavioral reactions to trauma. Could be a
- 15:09
student, being maybe uncooperative or argumentative,
- 15:12
engaging in high risk behaviors.
- 15:15
And then some cognitive reactions could be
- 15:18
forgetfulness, inability to focus, or having some
- 15:20
flashbacks. So I think when I look at this list, I see a lot
- 15:25
of things that, like, really, anybody could be experiencing
- 15:29
and going through for a multitude of different reasons.
- 15:32
But when we're talking about how trauma affects us, I think what
- 15:37
we really need to remember and what we need to focus on is we

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- 15:42

need to think about that student or that person's baseline.

- 15:46

So we have a student that's coming into a classroom that is

- 15:50

usually happy and getting great grades and is sociable

- 15:54

and just seems like they're doing well, and that's kind of

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their baseline. That's usually how they come into school.

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When all the sudden they start coming into school, and maybe if

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they're not as happy or they're not really engaging with their

- 16:11

friends or they're getting these.

- 16:14

their grades are slipping. That's what really are the red

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flags are going up and we really need to pay attention to them.

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So it's all about just remembering what a person or a

- 16:26

students baseline is and how they normally function. And if

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- 16:30
they, if you see them all of the
- 16:32
sudden. Responding or reacting in a in a very different way
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then really just being mindful of that and maybe digging a
- 16:42
little bit deeper to see if they are potentially
- 16:46
experiencing some of these trauma reactions and just to
- 16:50
kind of clarify, it's not just a one day, even a couple of
- 16:55
days of showing these unusual atypical behaviors for that
- 16:59
individual, but more of us more intense, more frequent
- 17:03
long term.
- 17:05
You know the duration of it and clearly it means you've got to
- 17:09
know your child or the youth. If you're a parent, obviously you
- 17:14
would know your child, right? You're a caregiver, a day

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- 17:17
caregiver, a teacher who may be watching this video. That's
- 17:20
where report was really going to make a difference in helping
- 17:24
children who are struggling with dealing with a toxic stress and
- 17:27
trauma. Yes, you have to know that that child and you have to
- 17:32
know how they usually function and an really what their
- 17:35
demeanor is. On a on a typical basis, so you're right, you have
- 17:40
to have that rapport with them and if you just see some of these
- 17:44
these signs, or these symptoms
- 17:46
that they're just not the same.
- 17:50
That's just like I said, those are your red flags. Those red
- 17:53
flags should be going up and you should be saying what's
- 17:56
going on here. You know there may be something a little bit

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- 18:00

deeper and then trying to find help for them. Absolutely yes.

- 18:05

So prevention, how can we prevent aces in trauma from

- 18:09

happening to our youth?

- 18:12

This. This image is from the CDC. They list some protective

- 18:18

strategies in order to prevent aces or trauma as well as

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mitigate the harms associated with aces or trauma, and the

- 18:27

reality is, is that we have a ton of resources that are

- 18:33

available within our communities who are doing exactly this. So,

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for instance, strengthening economic supports for families

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we know that poverty,

- 18:43

homelessness. Um, prudent security. These are all things

- 18:47

that affect kids and they could be a potential trauma.

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- 18:52

For children and for families, so we can help families by

- 18:57

strengthening those household financial securities. Or you

- 18:59

know, such as referring families to rental assistance programs or

- 19:03

food banks, or really just putting those services and

- 19:07

resources in place for families so that a child is concerned

- 19:11

about whether or not the heat is going to be on when they come

- 19:17

home or their electric's going to be on, or where their next

- 19:21

meal is coming from.

- 19:24

Another one is providing quality care and education early in

- 19:28

life. There's really great programs such as head start

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that's out there. A lot of the programs with the IU's are

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really focusing on that education early in life and

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- 19:41
having that family engagement. There's also childcare subsidies
- 19:44
that are really focused on providing families with the best
- 19:48
quality of child care possible. And like I said, just really
- 19:53
getting that education.
- 19:54
Early on in their lives, and then additionally intervening
- 19:59
to lessen harms and prevent future risk. There's a
- 20:04
lot of this is why the Chester County ACEs coalitions mission
- 20:09
is so important. We really try to educate and
- 20:16
get information out there and just have people be aware of
- 20:20
what trauma can do to someone and that just provide that hope
- 20:24
and resiliency piece in order to offset this offset the cycle of
- 20:29
trauma we're going out there and we are educating primary care

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- 20:33
facilities or behavioral health facilities, mental health
- 20:36
facilities on trauma, and so really making sure that everyone
- 20:40
is educated in this so that they are able to intervene and to
- 20:45
prevent future risk is just extremely important for everyone
- 20:49
to know this information, so these are just a few examples of
- 20:55
and some strategies of what we can do in order to prevent aces
- 21:02
and trauma. Additionally, on our website ccacescoalition.com we
- 21:06
do have a list of this. Actually this list of protective
- 21:11
strategies, and then we also have links to
- 21:15
services and providers specifically within Chester
- 21:18
County who are doing these already. So if you're interested
- 21:22
in maybe connecting anyone to any of these strategies, please

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- 21:27
anyone can go on our website and check that out. If they're not
- 21:32
from the Chester County, Delaware County, Montgomery
- 21:35
County area, since this is across the state, or there are
- 21:40
likely other similar organizations in counties across
- 21:43
Pennsylvania. Yes, there are. We have the our surrounding
- 21:47
counties. Listed on our website as far as trauma or aces
- 21:52
initiatives within their communities, we actually have
- 21:55
their contact information on our website, but I think a lot of
- 22:00
counties or areas and communities throughout
- 22:02
Pennsylvania throughout the country right now are really
- 22:06
focusing on this and there should be information out there
- 22:10
where you can go. Also, acesconnection.com lists

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- 22:13

initiatives that are going on for the country, and so I know

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they would be a great resource.

- 22:21

To be able to go on there to seek the initiatives just

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specifically, within

- 22:28

Pennsylvania, right? This concludes another

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PaTTAN Behavior Byte.

- 22:33

Remember, this is just a byte of behavior. We will

- 22:35

see you next time.