



Understanding & Overcoming ACEs

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

4 Parts to This Webinar:

Part 1:
What are
ACEs?

Part 2:
Effects of ACEs

Part 3:
The Role of PCEs
Prevention &
Intervention

Part 4:
Coping
Strategies





What are ACEs?

What are ACEs?

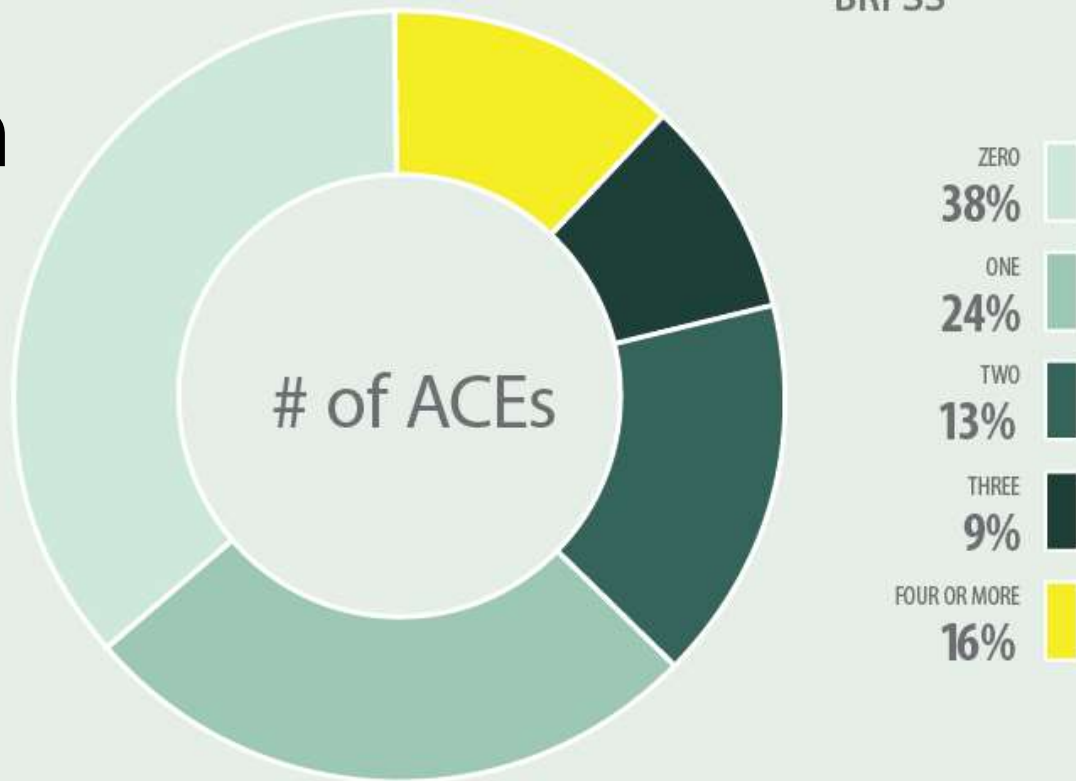
- Potentially traumatic events that take place in childhood before 17
- **Can include:**
 - Physical, sexual, or emotional **abuse**
 - Physical or emotional **neglect**
 - **Family dysfunction** such as addiction, incarceration, mental illness, domestic violence, or divorce



How common are ACEs?

ACE Score Prevalence for Participants
Completing the ACE Module from the 2011-2014 BRFSS

BRFSS



Kaiser Study

1980s

- **Dr. Vincent Felitti** – Kaiser Permanente
- Obesity clinic through the Department of Preventive Medicine
- More than half of the participants drop out despite success.
- Many of these participants had suffered **childhood trauma**, and their struggles with obesity were directly related to this early trauma.



Kaiser Study

1980s

- Partnership between Kaiser and the CDC
- One of the largest investigations of **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** and health and well-being later in life
- Finds a strong graded relationship between the breadth of ACEs (childhood abuse, neglect, and household challenges) a person experiences and **multiple risk factors for most of the leading causes of death in adults**



ACEs Score

QUESTION 1: *

- Yes
- No

Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often...

- a) Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or
- b) Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

QUESTION 2: *

- Yes
- No

Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often...

- a) Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or
- b) Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?



ACEs Score

QUESTION 3: *

•Yes

•No

Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever...

- a) Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or
- b) Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?

QUESTION 4: *

•Yes

•No

Did you often or very often feel that ...

- a) No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or
- b) Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

SOURCE: <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>



ACEs Score

QUESTION 5: *

- Yes
- No

Did you often or very often feel that ...

- a) You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?
or
b) Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

QUESTION 6: *

- Yes
- No

Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

SOURCE: <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>



ACEs Score

QUESTION 7: *

•Yes

•No

Was your mother or stepmother:

- a) Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped or had something thrown at her? or
- b) Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or
- c) Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?

QUESTION 8: *

•Yes

•No

Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?

SOURCE: <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>



ACEs Score

QUESTION 9: *

- Yes
- No

Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?

QUESTION 10: *

Did a household member go to prison?


- Yes
- No





POLL

Have you:

- 1 Worked with people who've experienced ACEs?
 - 2 Experienced ACEs?
 - 3 Both?
 - 4 Neither?
- 

The background features a dark blue field filled with numerous out-of-focus, glowing yellow and orange circular lights, creating a bokeh effect. Overlaid on this are several geometric shapes: a large white circle in the center, a smaller semi-transparent grey circle on the left, and a series of concentric white circles on the right.

Definition of Trauma

Deeply distressing or disturbing
experience that overwhelms the
mind and central nervous system

Big T and little t trauma

Big T Trauma

- Serious loss, abuse, or life-threatening event

Little t trauma

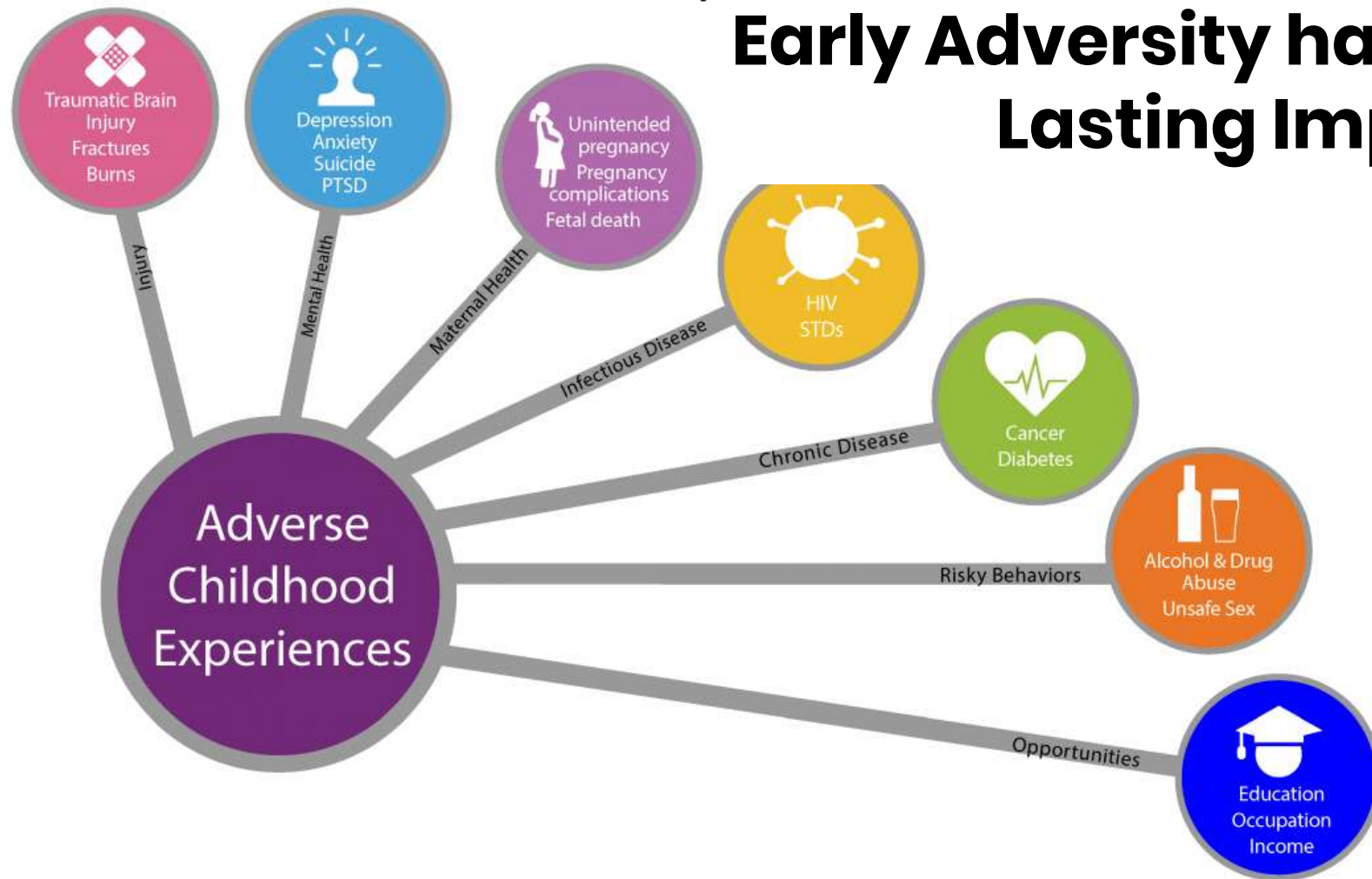
- Causes distress, fear, or pain and, therefore, changes the way you see yourself, others, or the world



The image features a woman with dark skin and curly hair, wearing glasses and a white top with a colorful floral pattern. She is covering her eyes with both hands, suggesting distress or emotional pain. The background is dark with several concentric white circles. A semi-transparent grey horizontal bar is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the title text. In the bottom right corner, there is a small, solid black circle.

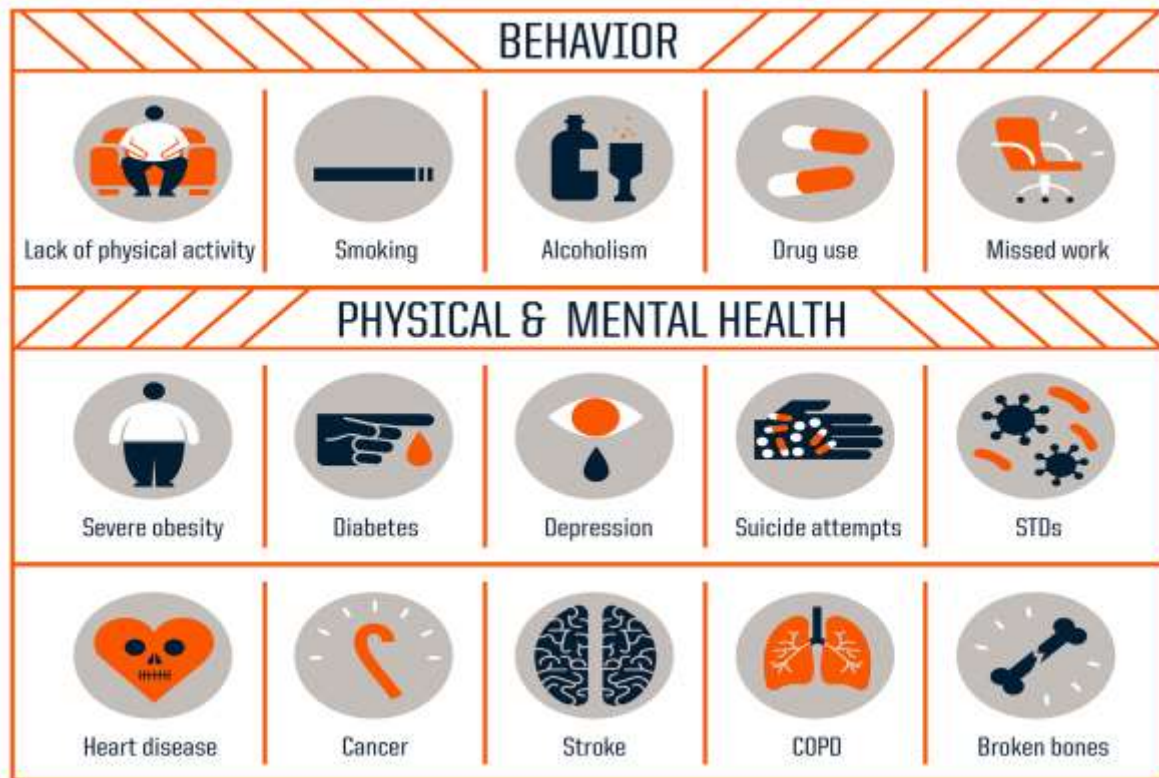
Effects of ACEs

Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts

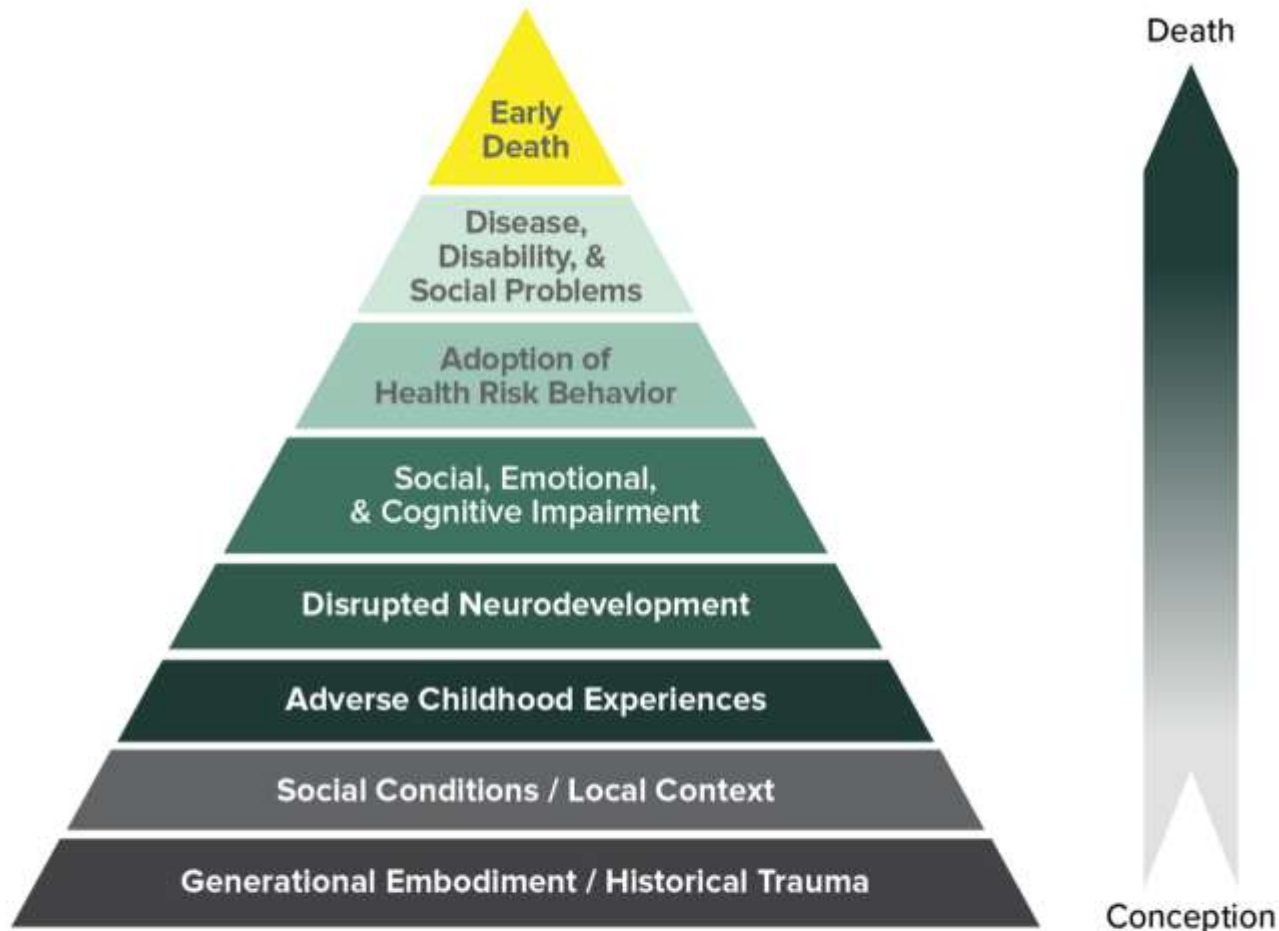


Adverse Childhood Experiences

Results of ACEs



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences
Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan



A photograph of a woman with long dark hair hugging a young child from behind. The child has dark hair in a bun and is wearing a blue shirt with pink stripes. The woman's hand, with a ring, is visible on the child's back. The background is a soft-focus green. The entire image is framed within a large white circle. A semi-transparent grey horizontal band across the middle contains the title text in bold yellow font. A small black circle is in the bottom right corner.

The Role of Positive Childhood Events

PCEs Questionnaire

Answer Yes or No

"Before the age of 18, I was..."

1. Able to talk with my family about my feelings.
2. Felt that my family stood by me during difficult times.
3. Enjoyed participating in community traditions.
4. Felt a sense of belonging in high school.
5. Felt supported by friends.
6. Had at least two non-parent adults who took a genuine interest in me.
7. Felt safe and protected by an adult in my home.



Positive Childhood Experiences

**Christina Bethell – Johns Hopkins
Bloomberg School of Public Health**

Higher counts of positive childhood experiences (PCEs) were associated with 72 percent lower odds of having depression or poor mental health overall as an adult. Those with higher levels of positive experiences were also more than 3.5 times more likely to have all the social and emotional support they needed as an adult.



Source: *Trauma-informed care in behavioral health services.* (2014). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

Positive Childhood Experiences

**Christina Bethell – Johns Hopkins
Bloomberg School of Public Health**

“Every moment matters. Every interaction with a child has a reaction in that child. Even as we keep working to address the many social and cultural factors we need to address to prevent negative experiences, we should be focused on proactive promotion of the positive.”



Source: *Trauma-informed care in behavioral health services.* (2014). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

Positive Childhood Experiences

- Less stress than other people with ACEs
- People who also have PCEs have lower odds of depression or poor mental health
- Counter-ACEs protect against poor adult health and lead to better adult wellness.
- When ACEs scores are moderate, counter-ACEs largely neutralize the negative effects of ACEs on adult health.
- Although early life experiences are significantly impactful, relationally enriched environments may buffer these effects.



Sources: <https://www.du.edu/ahss/psychology/protect-lab/media/documents/narayan-bces-2017.pdf>
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2749336>
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213419302662>
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0883941718302851>



The image is a circular collage composed of three distinct photographs. The top half features a close-up of a hand being held or supported by another hand, with a blurred background of a child in blue clothing. The bottom-left quadrant shows a close-up of a baby's face, focusing on the eyes. The bottom-right quadrant shows a hand holding a spoon, with a blurred background. A semi-transparent grey horizontal band across the middle contains the title text. The entire composition is framed by a large circle with thin white concentric lines.

Prevention and Intervention

Three Ways to Deal with ACEs

Phase	Goal
Primary Prevention	Prevent the occurrence of adverse childhood events so that fewer children experience ACEs
Secondary Prevention	Reduce the severity and acute consequences of the child adverse experience, thereby reducing the incidence of adverse outcomes associated with ACEs
Tertiary Prevention	Treat and reduce the long-term consequences of ACEs

Source: <https://www.nature.com/articles/pr2015197/>



A woman with blonde hair is holding a baby wrapped in a white blanket. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. In the background, there is a wooden crib. The entire image is framed within a large circle, with two thin white concentric circles overlaid. A semi-transparent horizontal bar is positioned behind the text.

Primary Prevention



ACEs can be prevented



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

Intensive Intervention

- Study on intensive intervention with vulnerable families during the earliest stages of parenthood in preventing the intergenerational transmission of disrupted relationships and insecure attachment
- Minding the Baby (MTB), an interdisciplinary reflective parenting intervention for infants and their families
- Young first-time mothers received intensive home visiting services from a nurse and social worker team from pregnancy to the child's second birthday
- MTB mothers' levels of reflective functioning was more likely to increase over the course of the intervention
- Infants in the MTB group: significantly more likely to be securely attached and significantly less likely to be disorganized



A photograph of a young boy with dark, curly hair being held by an adult. The boy is looking off to the side with a thoughtful or slightly distressed expression, his hand near his mouth. The adult's hands are visible, gently holding the boy. The image is framed by a large, light gray circle with several concentric white circles inside. A semi-transparent gray horizontal band across the middle contains the text 'Secondary Intervention' in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, outside the main circular frame, is a small, solid black circle.

Secondary Intervention

Protective Factors

- Bolstering children's protective factors prior to, and during child abuse treatment, may reduce trauma-related distress following exposure to adversity.



Parent-Child Interaction Therapy

- PCIT led to reductions in externalizing behavior in children of parents with four or more ACEs.
- PCIT showed promise as an evidence-based treatment for trauma-exposed children in the child welfare system.



Sources: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740917305078>
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07317107.2019.1599255?journalCode=wcfb20>



Individual and Group Child-centered Play Therapy

Findings indicated that a combination of individual and group child-centered play therapy significantly decreased problematic behaviors affecting academic performance and the classroom overall. The combination of individual and group interventions also demonstrated a significant decrease in general worry and negative intrusive thought patterns.



Source: <https://insights.ovid.com/international-play-therapy/ijpt/2018/10/000/play-therapy-african-american-children-exposed/4/00063904>



A circular frame containing a photograph of a woman with long brown hair sitting on a light grey couch. She is looking towards the camera with a distressed expression, her hand resting on her forehead. Next to her, a person in a light blue shirt is seen from the back, appearing to be a therapist or counselor. The background is a bright, out-of-focus interior. The text "Tertiary Prevention" is overlaid in the center in a bold, yellow font with a slight shadow.

Tertiary Prevention



Trauma-Informed Care

- Comprehensive multilevel approach that shifts the way organizations view and approach trauma
- Involves validation and recognition of the effects of traumatic events, common coping strategies, and effective treatments



Trauma-Informed Care

The SAMHSA promotes the use of six broad principles for TIC

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice, and choice
6. Cultural, historical and gender issues



Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

EMDR therapy provides physicians and other clinicians with an efficient approach to address psychological and physiologic symptoms stemming from adverse life experiences.

Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3951033/>



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

CBT has the most evidence for management of health problems in adult survivors of adverse childhood experiences.



SOURCE: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735815300295>



Voice Therapy

The image features a large, dark gray circular background. Inside the circle, there's a horizontal band of lighter gray with the text "Voice Therapy" in bold, yellow, sans-serif font. The background of the circle shows a cloudy sky on the left and a man in a black suit on the right, looking down with his hand near his face. Two thin white concentric circles are centered on the page. A solid black circle is located in the bottom right corner.

Voice Therapy

Cognitive/ Affective/ Behavioral Approach



Voice Therapy

A Psychotherapeutic
Approach to Self-Destructive Behavior

Robert W. Firestone Ph.D.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step I

The person articulates his or her self-attacks in the second person and expresses any feelings that arise.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step II

- The person discusses reactions to saying their voices.
- The person tries to understand the relationship between these attacks and early life experiences.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step III

- The person answers back to the voice attacks.
- The person makes a rational statement about how he or she really is.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step IV

The person develops insight about how the voice attacks are influencing his or her present-day behaviors.



The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step V

- The person collaborates with the therapist to plan changes in these behaviors.
- The person is encouraged to not engage in self-destructive behaviors and to increase the positive behaviors these negative thoughts discourage.

If you're interested in attending a voice therapy training please contact jina@glendon.org or visit www.glendon.org.



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Anti-Self



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Self-Compassion

“Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering”

From Kristin Neff:

Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.

Three Elements:

1. **Self-kindness** Vs. Self-judgment
2. **Mindfulness** Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. **Common humanity** Vs. Isolation

SOURCE: Self-Compassion. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.self-compassion.org/>





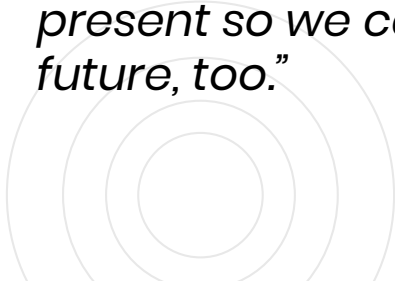
Coherent Narrative as a Method to Resolve Trauma

Why is it important to make sense of your trauma?



- ✓ Research shows that with self-reflection and understanding, we can free ourselves from the effects of our trauma.
- ✓ Making sense of our story by writing a coherent narrative allows us to have a sense of who we've been, who we are now, and who we'd like to become.
- ✓ *"When we create a narrative of who we are, we link past and present so we can become the active author of a possible future, too."*

~ Dr. Dan Siegel



Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative

James Pennebaker & Janel Seagal, Journal of Clinical Psychology, 1999

- “Writing about personal experiences in an emotional way for as little as 15 minutes over the course of three days brings about improvements in mental and physical health.”
- “...writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences.”
- “...the formation of a narrative is critical and is an indicator of good mental and physical health.”
- “Forming a story about one’s experiences in life is associated with improved physical and mental health across a variety of populations.”
- Ongoing studies suggest that writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences.

Source: Pennebaker, J. W., & Seagal, J. D. (1999). Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 55(10), 1243-1254. doi:10.1002/(sici)1097-4679(199910)55:103.0.co;2-n



Expressive writing and
mindfulness-based therapies
show promise in improving
health outcomes in adult
survivors of adverse childhood
experiences



Source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735815300295>



Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic. They are experienced by the survivor as inflicted, not chosen – as flashbacks to the events themselves.

In contrast, narrating memories to others (who are strong enough and empathic enough to be able to listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma.

Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self.



Tips for Writing a Coherent Narrative

- ▷ Write as an adult.
- ▷ Write rationally.
- ▷ Write autobiographically.
- ▷ Write intuitively.
- ▷ Write with feeling.
- ▷ Write about how the past influences your present.
- ▷ Write with balance.
- ▷ Write with self-compassion.





Identifying Traumas

List some emotional or physical traumas or traumatic events that have happened in your life. These do not have to be “Big T” traumas. A trauma can be any significant, distressing event or incident that shaped you as a child – things that made you feel bad, scared, ashamed, etc.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

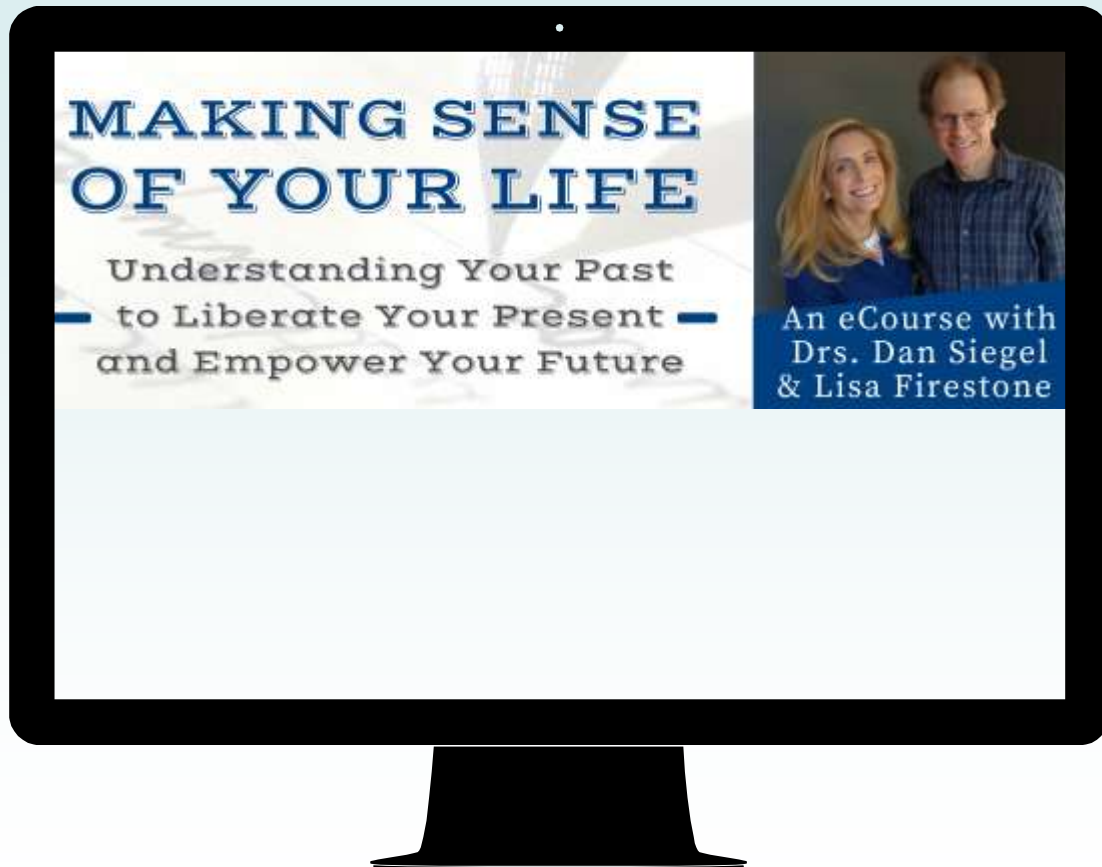
9. _____

10. _____



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The background features a solid blue color with a large, semi-transparent circular area in the upper left containing a black circle. Yellow and orange autumn leaves are scattered across the top. On the right side, there are several concentric white circles of varying sizes.

Coping Strategies

to help with feelings that
arise from trauma



Toolkit

- Name It to Tame It
 - Wheel of Awareness
 - RAIN Approach
 - Balancing the Mind
 - 4-7-8 Breathing
- 

Enhanced-Emotional Regulation

Key Findings:

- Emotion regulation significantly mediated the relationship between ACEs and three common outcomes: PTSD symptoms, depression and poor physical health
- Interventions that focus on improving emotion regulation skills might provide an efficient “transdiagnostic” treatment strategy for both psychological and physical health problems.



Mindfulness

Key Findings:

- Populations and trauma-exposed adults, mindfulness interventions have demonstrated reduced depression and anxiety, reduced trauma-related symptoms, enhanced coping and mood, and improved quality of life.
- Studies in children and youth also demonstrate that mindfulness interventions improve mental, behavioral, and physical outcomes.
- Taken together, this research suggests that high-quality, structured mindfulness instruction may mitigate the negative effects of stress and trauma related to adverse childhood exposures, improving short- and long-term outcomes, and potentially reducing poor health outcomes in adulthood.



Mindfulness

Key Findings:

Mindfulness-based body approaches help with social and emotional trauma potentially interrupting intergenerational cycle of ACEs.

Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4863233/>

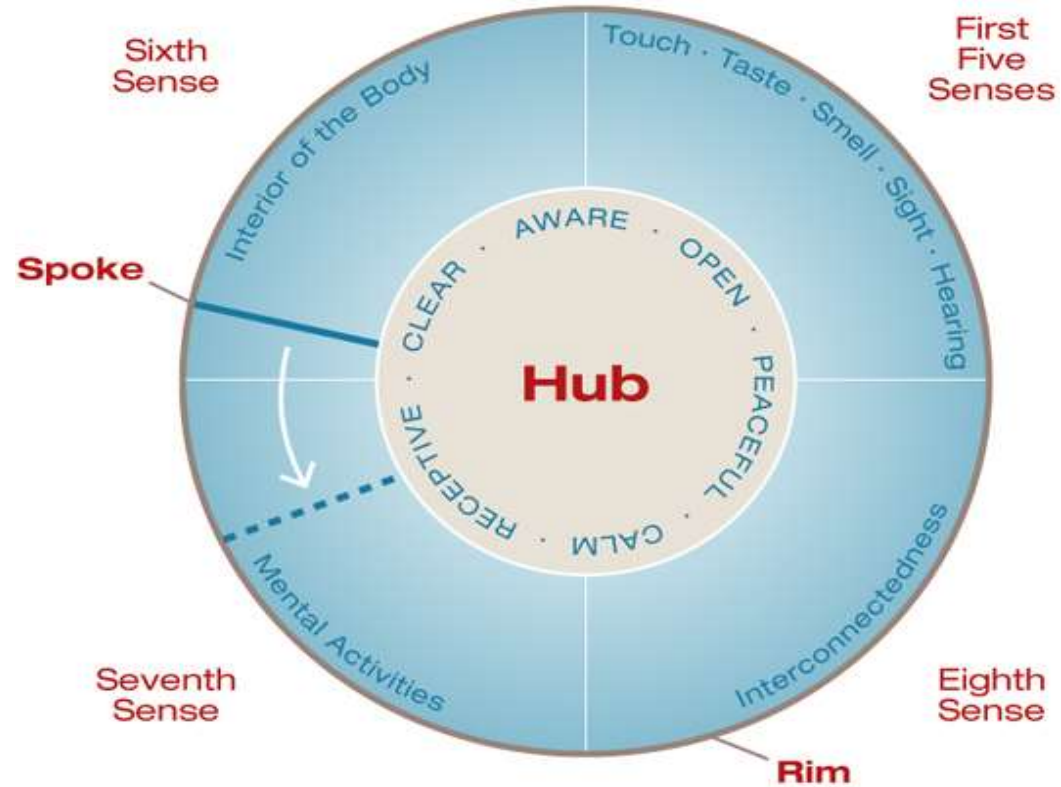


Name It to Tame It

Helps strengthen the left hemisphere of our brain's language capabilities and link them to the more raw and spontaneous emotions on the right side of our brain (integration)



Wheel of Awareness





The RAIN Approach

Recognize

Accept/Acknowledge/Allow

Investigate

Non-Identification





Balancing the Mind

Can help you achieve more calm and balance during times of chaos or stress


Step 1: Place one hand on your chest over your heart and one hand on your abdomen.

Step 2: Apply a gentle amount of pressure with each hand and see how you feel.

Step 3: Try switching the position of your hands, so that the hand on your chest moves to your belly and vice versa.

Step 4: Again, place a gentle amount of pressure with both hands and notice how this feels.

Step 5: Place your hands in whichever position feels best and simply breathe in and out slowly until your body starts to relax, and your mind becomes calmer





4-7-8 Breathing

Been shown to help relieve stress, lower blood pressure, and induce sleep

Step 1: Put the tip of your tongue to the top of your mouth just behind your two front teeth.

Step 2: Breathe in through your nose for four seconds.

Step 3: Hold your breath for a count of seven seconds.

Step 4: Breathe out through your mouth for eight seconds.

Step 5: Repeat at least five times.



Mindset Interventions

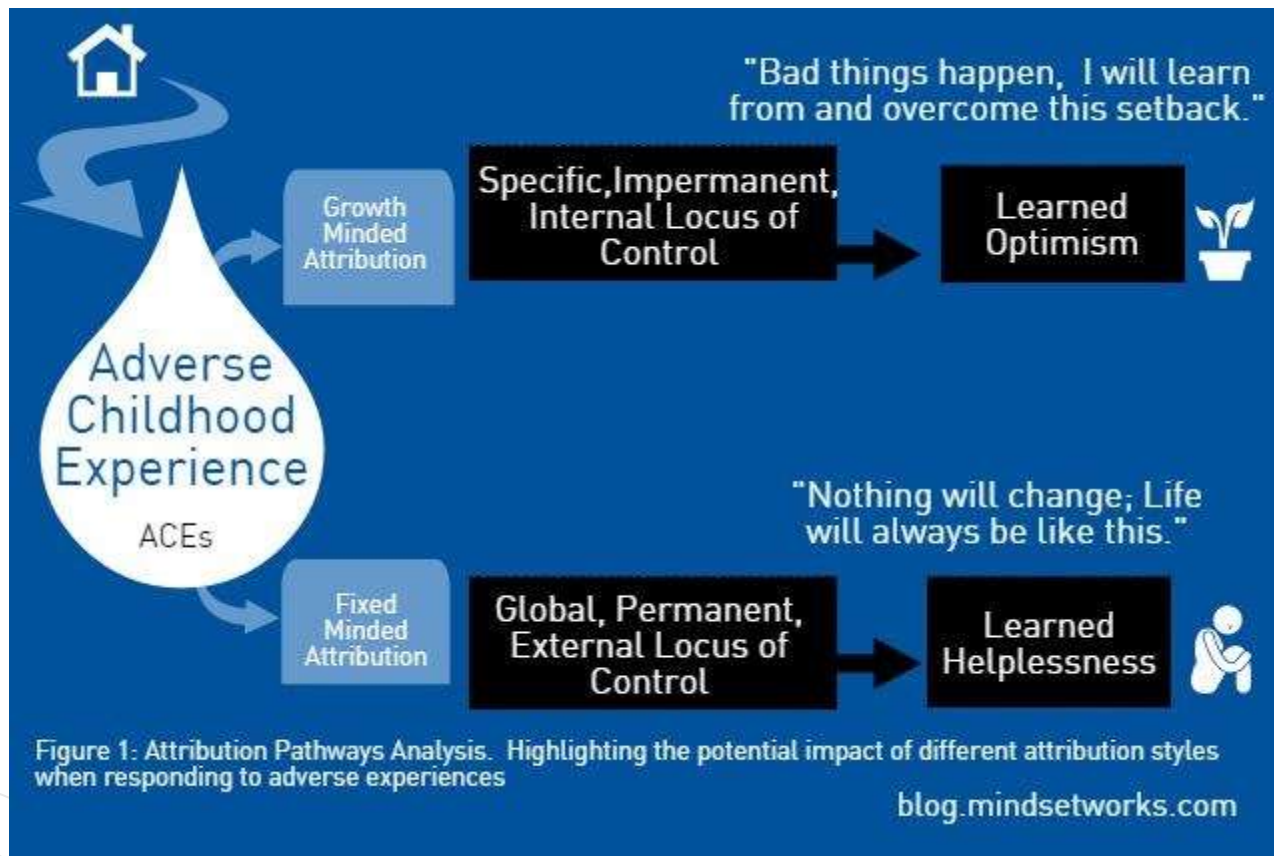
Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck

“the understanding that abilities and intelligence can be developed”



Source: Decades of Scientific Research that Started a Growth Mindset Revolution. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mindsetworks.com/science/>

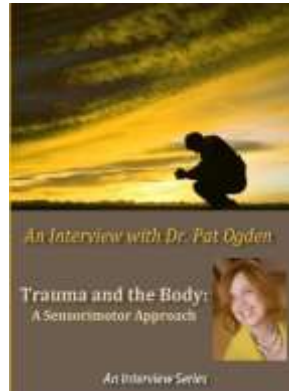


Reprinted with permission from Mindsetnetworks.com

Source: Trauma, Adverse Experiences and Mindset. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://blog.mindsetnetworks.com/entry/trauma-ace-s-and-mindset>

Body-focused Therapies

- **Pat Ogden**
 - Sensorimotor Psychotherapy
- **Peter Levine**
 - Somatic Experiencing
- **Bessel van der Kolk**
 - Wide variety of methods to deal with complex trauma





Support Groups

www.acesconnection.com/blog/support-groups

Thanks!



Any questions?

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