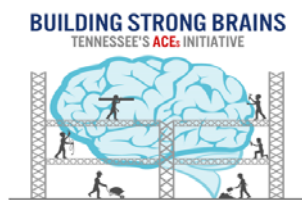


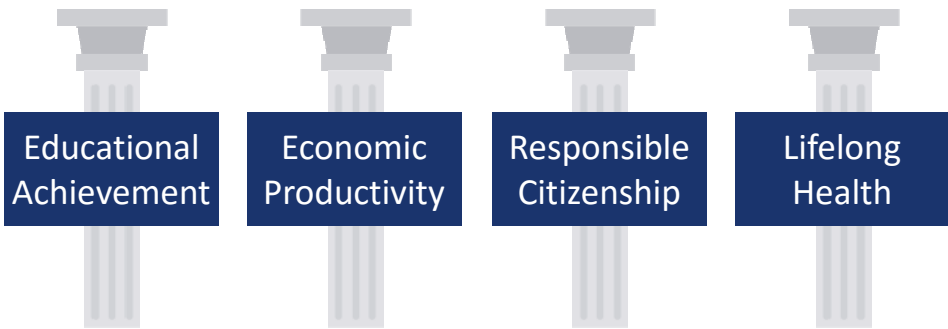
# The Role of Life Experiences in Shaping Brain Development



Jessica Mullins, LMSW  
Assistant Director of C&Y Mental Health  
TN Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services



*Strong Communities*      *Healthy Economy*  
**Successful Parenting of Next Generation**



**Healthy Child Development**



## Brain Architecture



The early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the maturing brain. As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows --- and getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix them later.



### Serve & Return Interactions Build Brains and Skills

- Young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling, facial expressions, and gestures, and adults respond in kind.
- These “serve and return” interactions are essential for the development of healthy brain circuits.
- Therefore, systems that support the quality of relationships in early care settings, communities, and homes also support the development of sturdy brain architecture.



## Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Brain Development

### Positive Stress



Short, stressful events like meeting new people or starting the first day of school are healthy for brain development. They prepare the brain and body for stressful situations later in life.

### Tolerable Stress



Tragic, unavoidable events like a natural disaster or losing a loved one aren't good for us. But if supportive caregivers are around to buffer the stress response, these events won't do lasting damage to the brain and body.

### Toxic Stress



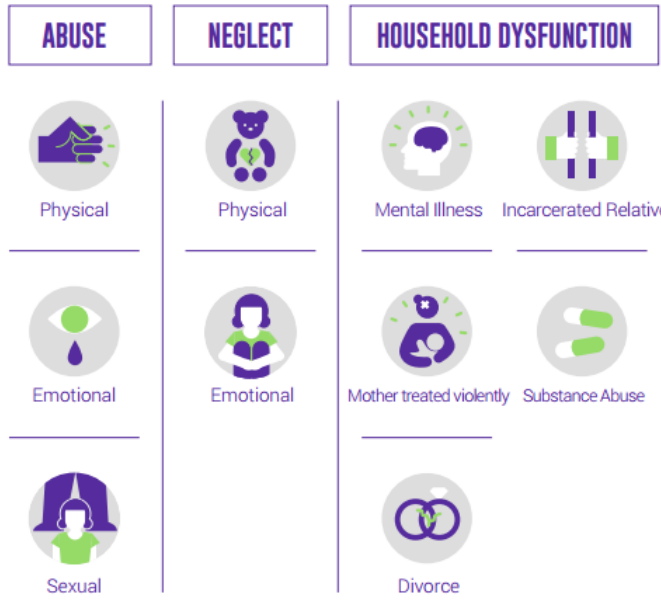
Ongoing, repeated exposure to abuse or neglect is bad for brain development. If no supportive adults are present to help buffer the stress response, stress hormones will damage developing structures in the child's brain. The result is an increased vulnerability to lifelong physical and mental health problems, including addiction.



## How Brains are Built

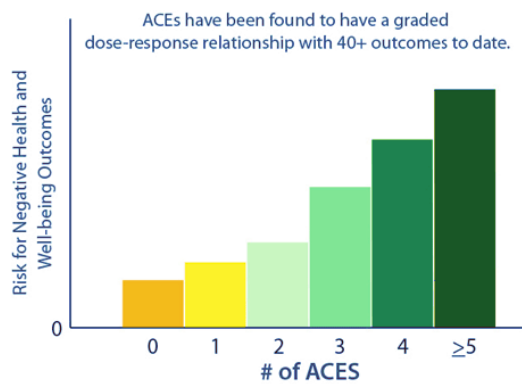


## Adverse Childhood Experiences



## ACES can have lasting effects on....

-  Health (obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones)
-  Behaviors (smoking, alcoholism, drug use)
-  Life Potential (graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time from work)

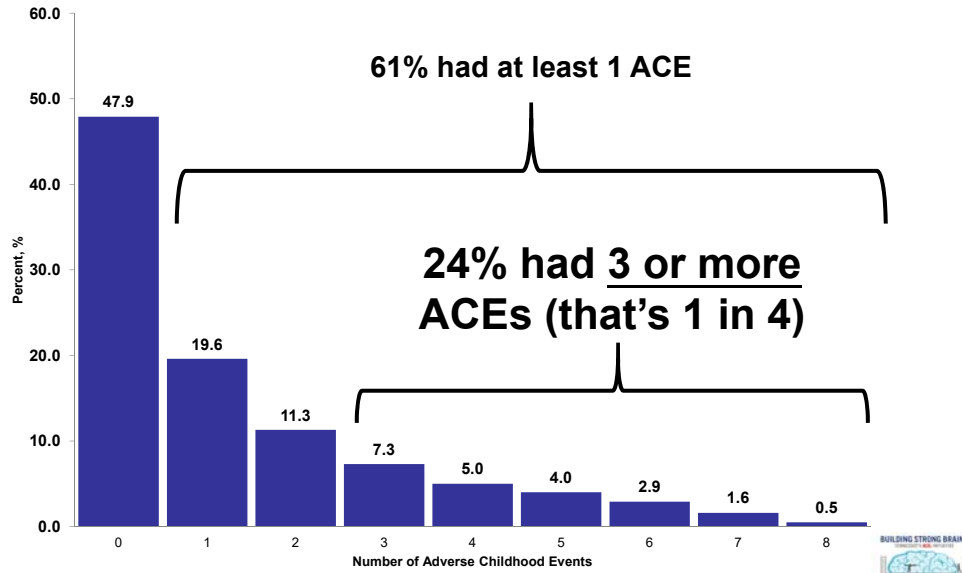


\*This pattern holds for the 40+ outcomes, but the exact risk values vary depending on the outcome.

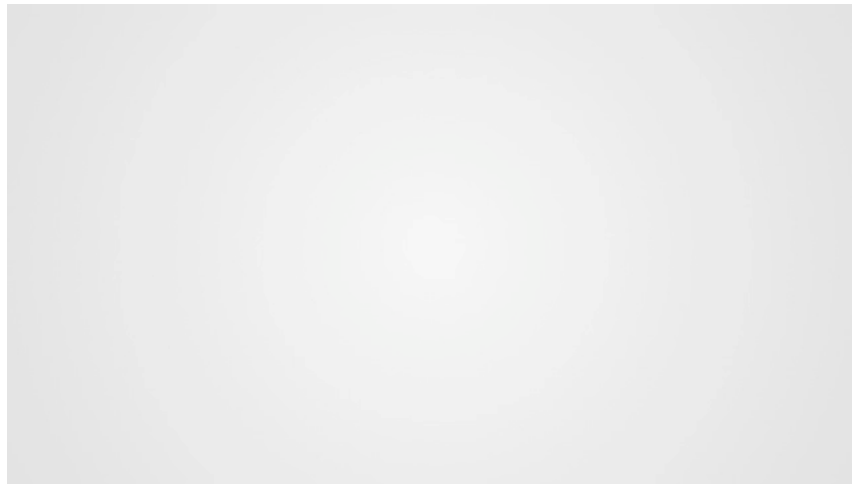


# ACEs in Tennessee

Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Tennessee,  
2014



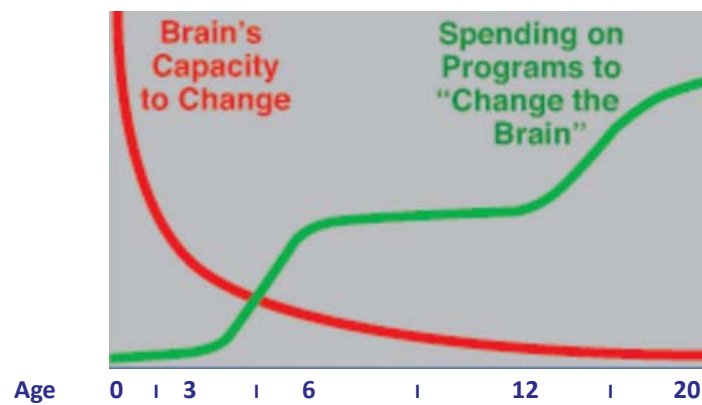
## Fostering Resilience





## Moving the Needle

Focus has to shift from remediation to prevention and not just “prevention,” but **primary prevention**



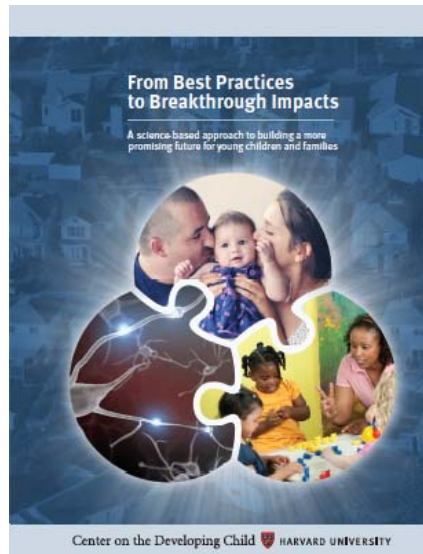
## The New Norm: Shifting the Conversation...

What is wrong with you?

**TO**

What has happened to you?

### Further Information:



Center on the Developing Child  
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/>

## Adverse Childhood Experiences Community Survey

---



<http://bit.ly/2dZOeWg>

## Why Trauma-Informed Care?

Chelsea Watkins, LPC-MHSP  
Crisis Team Lead  
Mental Health Cooperative





# Trauma-Informed Care



## What is Trauma?

According to SAMHSA, individual trauma results from an:

- **Event**, series of events, or set of circumstances that is
- **Experienced** by an individual as physically &/or emotionally harmful or threatening & that has lasting adverse
- **Effects** of the individual's functioning &/or physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being



## A Trauma-Informed Approach Incorporates:

- **Realizing** the prevalence of trauma
- **Recognizing** how it affects all individuals involved with the program, organization or system, including its own workforce
- **Resisting** re-traumatization
- **Responding** by putting this knowledge into practice

## Core Principles of a Trauma-Informed System of Care:

- **Safety** - ensuring physical and emotional safety
- **Trustworthiness** - maintaining appropriate boundaries and making tasks clear
- **Choice** - prioritizing (staff) consumer choice and control (people want choices and options; for people who have had control taken away, having small choices makes a big difference)
- **Collaboration** - maximizing collaboration
- **Empowerment** - prioritizing (staff) consumer empowerment and skill-building