Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
Alternative Markers of ACES

- Bullying
- Poverty
- Peer rejection and having no friends
- Experience of racism
- Death, multiple and traumatic loss
- Community violence
- Food scarcity
- Experience of the care system
- Poor academic performance
- Living in an unsafe environment
• ACES = Trauma/Stress
• Lots of ACES over time =

• Complex Trauma
• Chronic Stress
• Toxic Stress
• PTSD
• Complex PTSD
**HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS THE BRAIN**

**Prefrontal Cortex**
Rational thinking - regulates emotions such as fear responses from the amygdala - with PTSD this has a reduced volume.

**Hippocampus**
Responsible for memory and differentiating between past and present – works to remember and make sense of the trauma. With consistent exposure to trauma, it shrinks.

**Amygdala**
Wired for survival, when active it is hard to think rationally. The more hyperactive the amygdala is, the more signs of PTSD are present.
HOW TOXIC STRESS IN CHILDHOOD ALTERS THE BRAIN

Exposure to major adversity in early childhood can weaken brain development. This can permanently set the body’s stress response system on high alert. A stable, nurturing environment can prevent these responses and outcomes for learning, behavior and health.

A typical neuron with many connections looks like this.

SOURCES: J.J. Radley Neuroscience 2004

A neuron damaged by toxic stress has fewer connections.

MARTHA THIERRY/DETROIT FREE PRESS
Flood, fawn or fatigue?
US psychologist Curtis Reisinger reckons we have three more responses

- FLOODING: Being flooded with sudden emotion
- FAWNING: Submitting to a large threat or a captor
- FATIGUE: Sleeping so as to manage the crisis situation
When Trauma = “Normal”

• We are MORE COMFORTABLE when we are in a state of arousal AKA “triggered.”

• We begin to expect, look for, and even SEEK OUT trauma/drama
DISTRIBUTION OF ACES
AMONG THOSE WITH AT LEAST 1 ACE

45% ZERO ACEs
15% FIVE
9% FOUR
15% THREE
40% ONE
22% TWO
60%
Executive Functioning Skills

Planning is the ability to figure out how to accomplish our goals.

Organization is the ability to develop and maintain a system that keeps materials and plans orderly.

Time Management is having an accurate understanding of how long tasks will take and using time wisely and effectively to accomplish tasks.

Task Initiation is the ability to independently start tasks when needed. It is the process that allows you to just begin something even when you don’t really want to.

Working Memory is the mental processes that allow us to hold information in our minds while working with it.

Metacognition is being aware of what you know and using that information to help you learn.

Self-Control is the ability to regulate yourself, including your thoughts, actions, and emotions.

Attention is being able to focus on a person or task for a period of time and shifting that attention when needed.

Perseverance is the ability to stick with a task and not give up, even when it becomes challenging.

Flexibility is the ability to adapt to new situations and deal with change.

www.thepathway2success.com
A Trauma-Informed Approach (Four R’s)

A trauma-informed program, organization, or system:

- **Realizes**
  - Realizes widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery

- **Recognizes**
  - Recognizes signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system

- **Responds**
  - Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices

- **Resists**
  - Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

*From SAMHSA’s Concept Paper*
SAMHSA'S 6 PRINCIPLES of a TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

SAFETY
Prevents violence across the lifespan and creates safe physical environments.

TRUSTWORTHINESS
Fosters positive relationships among residents, City Hall, police, schools and others.

EMPOWERMENT
Ensures opportunities for growth are available for all.

COLLABORATION
Promotes involvement of residents and partnership among agencies.

PEER SUPPORT
Engages residents to work together on issues of common concern.

HISTORY, GENDER, CULTURE
Values and supports history, culture and diversity.
Rationale: For most people, COVID-19 will be associated with increased uncertainty and stress. When we are under acute stress we are more likely to be operating from the survival areas of our brain, which means that our thinking becomes much more black and white, our attention is more narrowly focused on the immediate here and now, we start to have difficulty planning or thinking ahead, we have difficulty regulating our emotions, and we become less able to make decisions. Stressful times are associated with threats to our safety and a loss of power and control. A trauma informed approach can help reduce or prevent a trauma response.
Take the ACES Quiz

- https://americanspcc.org/take-the-aces-quiz/

- You may want to wait until you are in a safe space – the questions could be triggering.
Questions?

Anice.S.Chenault@hud.gov