

Community Conversation

Jan. 10, 2019

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

Discussion leader: Dr. Robert Shapiro

Dr. Shapiro: brief overview of ACES

Have seen kid after kid victimized by abuse. It goes far beyond abuse and neglect.

The science has caught up on this. When bad things happen to young people, it causes biological changes in their brains.

The brain's wiring is changed.

This has profound effects on how they grow up.

ACEs can be the result of bullying, of parents with mental illness....there are many possible causes.

We don't have great tools to measure adversity. They're coming soon. But there are signals of it.

ACEs score – people are asked how many adverse experiences they remember as a child. 0-10 score.

When ACEs greater than or equal to four, people have two times the rate of cancer, heart disease, liver disease. More suicidal, more likely to fail in school. More asthma and allergy.

Not related to other choices they make.

Children with high ACEs have harder time learning, sitting still, following instructions. More likely to be expelled.

Key point – It's not just the adverse event, it's the stress caused by the event.

It overloads bodies with stress. You have a certain capacity absorb stress, and kids are overloaded.

When it's too much for bodies to handle, it's toxic stress.

Key point: It's not the experience. It's how you experience the experience.

Group discussion: How does knowing about ACEs change how you see things?

The sheer number of kids impacted. There are no socio-economic boundaries, but for kids in poverty it's even more.

Poverty can be a cause of ACEs, or it may not be.

Some behaviors look like other things. They're getting medications for it. Misdiagnosis.

It's true many children with high ACEs scores will have behaviors that look like ADHD, but the treatment is different.

Are they hyperactive or are we just hypervigilant? Might we have misdiagnosed? Be curious. Look deeper.

They cannot process "sit down."

You have to be careful. Don't make your own assumptions.

Know how to protect that child and family story.

I might not have any background at all on the child. I understand privacy, but the team needs to work together.

Many schools do not attempt ACEs scoring. Some activities may be illegal. Not sure what scores for adults mean in a 13-year-old. Stressors were identified 20 years ago.

What are we talking about with stress? Heart rate, blood pressure, pupils dilate, blood flow redirects. Those are stress responses. Think about feeling like that multiple days per day. It's the reaction that causes the injury.

At Children's training on trauma...maybe schools should do same.

Two paths: 1. Reduce the number of adverse experiences. The more adverse experiences they're exposed to, the more there are poor outcomes. 2. Equip students with the knowledge of how adversity is experienced.

Social connections are one of the most powerful resilience factors.

90 percent of the brain is developed by age five. During school-age years, executive function can be developed.

Physical education and the arts are really important for kids who have developed ACEs.

ACEs causes elevated prolonged stress.

Here at Lakota we're creating a community kids can go to, especially if they're family doesn't support them. We created this group as a little family...we can help find a school or a job that's safe for them. We provide tools, support, love, and help them blossom.

What can we do as individuals, or as a community?

Training. Money.

Address not just the behavior, but the cause.

Impact of a smaller group. Access education in a smaller setting.

Just talking about issues. Having the ability to sit in a classroom and talk with a student.

Massage – a study showed massage showed more learning and reduced problems. It's healthy touch.
But try to get a school to implement – good luck.

Teach mindfulness to all kids. Teach them about the parts of the brain and their different functions.