

### Trauma in Early Childhood: The First Step to Healing is Recognizing that a Wound Exists



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### Early Trauma Treatment Network National Child Traumatic Stress Network

#### Mission

To raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children aged 0-5, their families, and communities throughout the United States.

[nctsn.org](http://nctsn.org)

### What are the Critical Tasks of Early Development?

- Attachment
- Self regulation, including affect modulation
- Cognitive development and capacity to use symbolism

- Relationships
- Affect regulation
- Physiological development
- Cognitive development
- Symptomatology
- Developmental trajectory



### Domestic Violence Exposure

Latest study shows that:

- 15.5 million children live in families with partner violence (McDonald, Jouriles, Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano & Green, 2006)
- Police reports of domestic violence show children under age 5 are more likely to be exposed (Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007)
- Minnesota Parent-Child Project, 25 year longitudinal study of mothers and children in poverty: 12% of mothers reported mild partner violence, 25% reported severe partner violence when children were 18-64 months old (Yates, Dodds, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2003)

### Maltreatment Exposure

In the United States each year . . .

- In 2005, 3.6 million children nationally received a Child Protective Service (CPS) investigation; children aged birth-3 years had the highest rates of victimization (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).
- Randomly selected community sample of parents of 3-7 year old in Suffolk County, NY, 87% of children experienced some form of physical aggression, 13% experienced physical aggression severe enough to meet many definitions of physical abuse (Slep & O'Leary, 2005)
- Half of all child victims of maltreatment are younger than 7; 85% of child fatalities are younger than age 6 (NCCAN, 1996)

### Community Violence Exposure

- Boston non-referred pediatric sample of 3-5 year old children (Linares et al., 2001).
  - 42% had seen at least one violent event
  - 21% experienced 3+ violent events
  - 12% witnessed 8+ events
- Washington, DC Head Start: 67% of parents and 78% of children reported child had witnessed or been victim to at least one incidence of violence (Shanifar, Fox, & Leavitt, 2000)
- SF Bay Area study of Chinese middle school students (age=12): 75% reported exposure to community violence within past 6 months (Ozer & McDonald, 2006)
  - 21% knew someone who was shot or stabbed
  - 9% saw a stranger shot, stabbed, or killed
  - 36% knew someone who was beaten up
- Boston urban pediatric setting: 1 in 10 children had witnessed a knifing or shooting by age 6 (Taylor et al, 1995)

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### Domestic Violence in Alaska

- In 2005, there were over 6,000 reported cases of domestic violence in Alaska.
- 3 of 4 women in Alaska experienced or know someone who has experienced domestic violence or sexual assault
- Among students in Alaska public high schools, 12% were hit slapped or physically hurt by a girlfriend or boyfriend in the prior year and 9% were forced to have sexual intercourse
- More than 3 of 4 American Indian and Alaska Native women will be physically assaulted in her lifetime
- In 2007, Alaska had the nation's 7<sup>th</sup> highest rate of violence
- Alaska ranks first in the nation for homicide rates for female victims killed by a male perpetrator (2.87 per 100,000)

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence <http://www.ncadv.org/files/Alaska.pdf>  
 2009 Annual Report Alaska Network on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault:  
<http://www.andvsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/2009-annual-report-copy-final-9-25-09.pdf>

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### Alaska Maltreatment Data: Alleged Victims by Age and Race

- March 2010: 908 victims screened in
- 45% age 0-5
- 49% Alaska native or American Indian

[http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Statistics/pdf/201003\\_AllgVctmRaceAge.pdf](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Statistics/pdf/201003_AllgVctmRaceAge.pdf)

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### Adverse Childhood Experiences

Growing up (prior to age 18) in a household with:

- Recurrent physical abuse.
- Recurrent emotional abuse.
- Sexual abuse.
- An alcohol or drug abuser.
- An incarcerated household member.
- Someone who is chronically depressed, suicidal, institutionalized or mentally ill.
- Mother being treated violently.
- One or no parents.
- Emotional or physical neglect.

(ACE Study, Felitti et al. 1998; www.acestudy.org)

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### ACE Score and Health Risks

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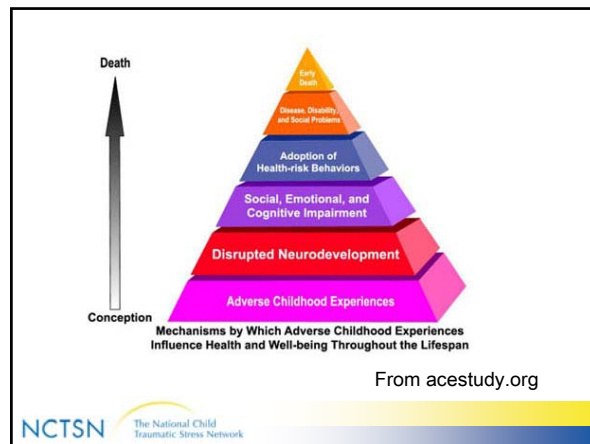
### ACE Score and Health Risks

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### Childhood Adversity Predicts Future Dysfunction

- Physical Illness
- Mental Illness
- School Failure
- Aggression
- Substance Abuse
- Criminal Behavior

(Cook et al., 2003; Felitti et al., 1998; Pynoos et al., 1999)



### Percentage Adverse Childhood Exposure Among Native American Tribes (Koss et al., 2003)

Variable	Range (across tribe & gender)
Parental alcoholism	48-79
Childhood abuse	
Physical abuse	11-70
Physical neglect	28-74
Sexual abuse	4-53
Emotional abuse	9-45
Emotional neglect	6-34
Out-of-home placement	
Boarding school attendance	8-66
Foster care placement	0-27
Adoption	0-7



Study	1+ACE	4+ACE
Felitti et al., 1998	52%	6%
Koss et al., 2003	86%	33%



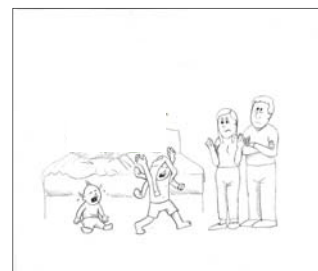
### Incidence versus disease

- Cystic Fibrosis: 1:2500 births
- Diabetes Mellitus: 1: 1000 children
- Childhood Leukemia: 1: 30,000
- Domestic violence: 1: 5
- Child abuse: 1: 25

What would Willie do?

Willie Sutton a famous bank robber – when asked why do you rob banks? Cause that's where the money is.

Slide courtesy of John Stirling, MD




- How do we understand this behavior?
- How do the parents understand this behavior?
- How does society understand this behavior?



### Core Message

- Our assumptions shape our interventions and our systems.

Is trauma part of the picture?  
If not, what might we be missing?




### Core Message: Our assumptions shape our interventions

**Problem**

- Child - 4 year old hitting and biting other children in preschool. Kicked the preschool director when the director intervened.
- Mom confronts the school. "It's the school's fault." Other children are attacking her child and no one is doing anything.


Assumptions	Inputs	Outputs	Impact (Goal)
Child - juvenile Delinquent in training			↓ symptoms ↑ parent-child relationship ↓ mental health disparities ↓ Provider burnout
Child - witnessed violence and was physically abused			
Borderline mother			
Mother with a long history of trauma			



### Understanding Behavior Through a Trauma Lens


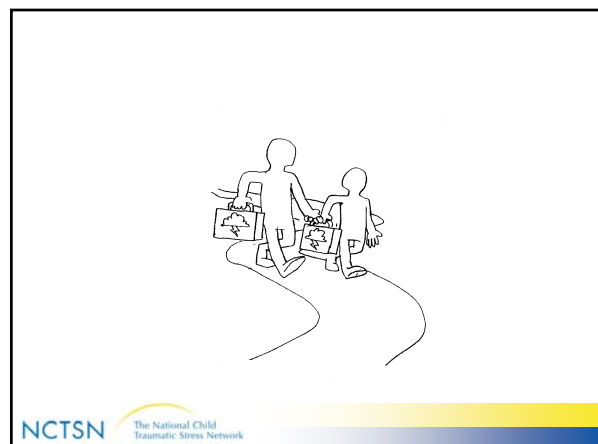
Jonathan is a 34 month-old boy. He is happily playing with blocks, building a ramp and putting cars down it. Ryan, a 38-month old, starts taking some of the blocks

- Think about the core tasks of early development (attachment, affect regulation, and cognitive development).
  - How does Jonathan's development in these areas affect his response?
  - How might Jonathan's experience of trauma affect his development in these areas and his response?
- Is our opinion of the children affected by their size and/or ethnicity?



### Conceptual Premises

- The attachment system is the main organizer of children's responses to danger and safety in the first five years of life
- Emotional and behavioral problems in infancy and early childhood need to be addressed in the context of primary attachment relationships
- Promoting growth in the caregiver-child relationship supports healthy development of the child long after the intervention ends

### Understand the Meaning of Behavior

**Behavior=Communication**

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### Understanding Aggression Using a Trauma Frame

- Emotional dysregulation – children feel “icky” inside and don’t know what to do. Young children tend to share whatever they are feeling with the people who are around them.
- Trauma triggers. Child is triggered and acts in a dysregulated way in response to the trigger (young children don’t have a lot of ways to share distress)
- Reexperiencing – Reenactments of trauma that look like aggressive behavior
- Anger and/or anxiety directed at caregiver
- Loss of the protective shield, identification with the aggressor. You are not bigger, kinder, and wiser, so how will I protect myself? Feel less scared when you can “control” the situation.
- Child misperceives intentions of others – sees aggression directed at him or her when there is none

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### How the Work May Affect Us

- Can affect our view of the world and our sense of safety
- Difficult to think about what these very little children have experienced
- At the same time that we worry about what they have been through, we may also worry about whether it’s ok to talk about it

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