Foster & Kinship Care Education Program

BEHAVIORS IN YOUTH & TEENS

Caregiving and Supporting Teens and Young Adults with Adverse Childhood Experiences.



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What does this mean?

Children in foster care are more likely to experience mental health challenges

- Present Trauma, epigenetics, historical trauma
- Attachment disruption-multiple placements, multiple caregivers
- Caretaking environment

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Trauma and It's Impacts

- Early childhood experiences greatly impact later functioning
- Difficulty with mood regulation
- Inconsistent caregiving
- Parental figures unable to regulate
- Lack of future planning

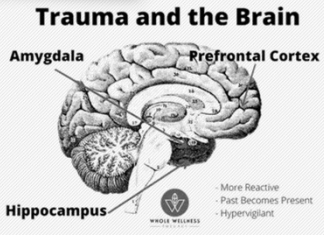


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Brain Development

Pre-frontal cortex

- Reasoning ability
- Not fully developed until age 25
- Substance use could impact development

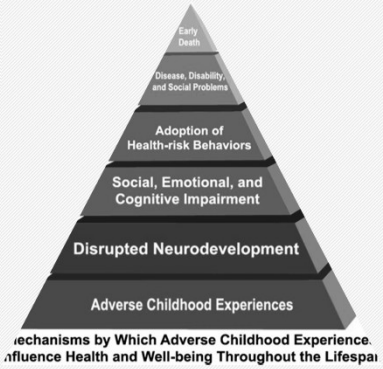


Early childhood experiences—Domestic violence, in-utero drug exposure, unavailable/unresponsive caregivers

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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

- ACES- experiences like poverty, violence, racism, caregiver mental health issues, physical/emotional/sexual abuse, household violence
- The more ACES the more likely the individual will have physical health problems
- Prevention-eliminating exposure to ACES
- Healing-mental health treatment, exposure to nature, caring adult/mentor figure, education on how stressful experiences impact the physical body



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ACES/Epigenetics video 15 mins

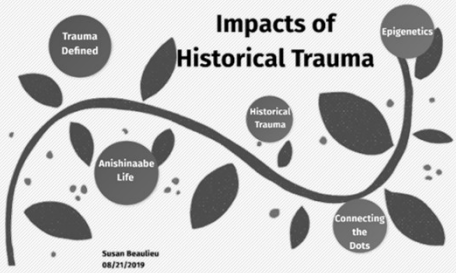


- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovIJ3dsNk

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Historical Trauma

- Generations previously experiencing trauma (war, starvation, etc) may be passed biologically.
- Native Americans long history of historical trauma-large percentage in foster care in Humboldt County
  - Boarding schools
  - Genocide
  - Loss of traditions



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Understanding Behaviors

- Discipline is to teach, not to punish
- Most punishments increase stress
- Most behaviors come from a state of stress
- Most behaviors are done unconsciously-from a state of fear or stress
- Dysregulation—stress outside of your window of tolerance

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Stress!

- An acting out child is a stressed child- Dr. Bryan Post
  - When stressed your brain isn't thinking clearly, and short-term memory is suppressed
  - As a result-not going to remember or comprehend consequences—need to wait until they are calm to reason/discipline
- What to do: Decrease the stress! Try to regulate the child
  - Take deep breaths, empathize, checking on if they ate recently (low blood sugar?)
  - Children need to know it's okay to have emotions, important for caregivers to help child put words into their feelings

    *Caregivers need to not react back, need to stay regulated

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ED Tips in the Classroom (and home)

Keep Rules and Activities Clear and Simple



- 3-5 main rules
  - Have them be part of the rule creating
  - Focus on safety, not control

Reward Positive Behaviors

- Discipline is often viewed as a personal attack, likely not learn from it
- Celebrate success more than reprimand their mistakes
  - Positive benefit for having good behavior

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ED Tips in the Classroom (and home)

Allow for mini-breaks

- Breaks when doing homework or chores-active breaks if possible

Fair Treatment for All

- All rules and consequences should be the same for every child in the home
- If child doesn't get the same treatment be sure to give specific reasons why

Use Motivational Strategies

- Celebrate hard work, praise efforts



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Risk Taking Behaviors

Adolescence/teen risk taking-why?

- ✓Gain peer acceptance
- ✓Feelings of independence
- ✓Lack of understanding of immediate behavior and long term consequences
- ✓Tendency to assess themselves as less vulnerable in a risky situation



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Reducing Risk Taking Behaviors

- Caregivers who are responsive to their questions, concerns, and feelings
- Maintaining an open, ongoing dialogue about risk-taking and typical risky behaviors
- Respecting the developmental need for increasing freedom-not being too unnecessarily strict/rigid
- Encouraging extra-curricular activities, decreases likelihood of taking risks out of boredom
- Strong, cohesive, family structure



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Aggression and Defiance

- Refuse to engage in the conflict, give space initially
- Reason: Amygdala is being activated-stress response (fight, flight, freeze) seeing situation as a threat
- Ask the child what they need—why are you so upset, what do you need from me?
- **How to Help**
  - **Encourage child to be aware of their feelings and emotions-give child control over their state, give them time to realize it is not a threat, try to figure out what the underlying issue could be -likely scared, afraid of failure/disappointment**



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Stealing/Self Harm

- Addictive behaviors-an external attempt to self-soothe
  - Rush of the action, momentarily relief of dysregulation
  - ➢ **How to Help**
    - **make child feel safe, alleviate symptoms of threat, give them other things to do to get sensation, explain and empower**

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Substance Use/Abuse

Experimental stage
- Peer pressure, curiosity, risk-taking

Social Stage
- Expected activity within social circle, or way to gain access to social circle

Instrumental Stage
- Used for purpose of how the substance affects them-feeling good, numbing unpleasant emotions

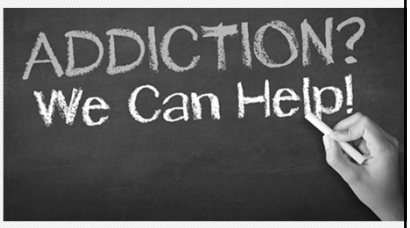
Habitual Stage
- Becomes integral part of the user's life. May neglect relationships and previously enjoyed activities. User develops tolerance and dependence

Compulsive stage
- User is addicted and will experience withdrawals without continual use.



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Substance Use/Abuse – How to Help



- Information and education-focused on reducing risk and promoting competencies
- Focus on reducing susceptibility to abuse, help teen learn healthier alternatives to coping with external stressors
- Explore alternative methods for teen to achieve benefits they perceive the substance provides for them
- Harm reduction model may be most helpful for teens with active addiction

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Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis

Significant changes in behavior

- Inability to cope with daily tasks
- Rapid mood swings
- Increase in energy
- Increased agitation
- Displays abusive behavior
- Loses touch with reality (psychosis)
- Isolation from school, family, friends
- Unexplained physical symptoms



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Depression

- More than everyday sadness
- Last for more than 2 weeks
- Affects ability to do activities of daily living
- Often recurrent-person recovers, but it comes back
- Symptoms:
  - ✓Unusually sad mood
  - ✓Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities
  - ✓Lack of energy
  - ✓Difficulty concentrating
  - ✓Changes in eating habits



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Anxiety

Normal to have some anxiety, problematic when it is more severe, long lasting, or interferes with daily living

- Could be physical symptoms (increased heart rate, sweating, chest pain)
- Excessive fear and worry
- Racing thoughts
- Indecisiveness
- Irritability



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ADHD/Disruptive Disorders

When children and adolescents have difficulty following the rules that most other young people accept. ADHD is a disorder in which inattention, over activity, impulsivity, or a combination.

- Difficulty paying attention to details
- Easily distracted
- Difficulty finishing schoolwork
- Disorganized and prone to making mistakes
- Difficulty with authority figures
- Difficulty with change

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Eating Disorders

Can be life threatening, goes beyond dieting and normal weight management

- Behavioral symptoms
  - Extreme dieting behaviors-fasting, avoidance of food groups, types (vegan/vegetarian/keto-protein)
  - Evidence of binge eating-hoarding food
  - Evidence of purging—laxatives, eating easy to vomit foods, going to bathroom immediately after eating
  - Obsessive, excessive or ritualistic exercise
  - Rigid patterns around food selection
  - Obsession with weight and body image (low self-esteem)

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Safety First!

- ✓Are they in danger of hurting themselves or others?
- ✓Do you need emergency assistance?
- ✓Do you need to contact support from a mental health professional or crisis team?
- ✓Do you need law enforcement?
- ✓Encourage self-help/professional help
- ✓Give reassurance and information
- ✓Listen non-judgmentally



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Video-Parent Teen Communication, 6 mins



- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_HfbiM5jjE

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Healthy Communication

- ✓Use of "I statements"
- ✓Creating a space of mutual respect and trust
- ✓Balance of respect and consequences
- ✓Focus on safety instead of control
- ✓Flexibility versus rigidness
- ✓Normal for adults to make mistakes-own them



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Understanding Exploring Identity

- ➢Normal exploration into personality and gender identity
- ➢May try different ways of expressing themselves
  - Status
  - Clothes-self expression
  - Exploring independence-clothing is one thing teens have some control in
- ➢Helps them feel connected to peers/community groups
- ➢Caregivers-help them identify their values
  - May not fully align with caregivers
  - Have them make list of things they view as important to them

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Respecting Pronouns, Chosen Names



- Normal for teens to explore gender and sexual expression
- May want to go by different pronouns than what their assigned birth sex may be
- May decide to go by a different name other than their birth name

Caregivers-this is normal exploration, important to maintain the relationship and respect teens chosen names and pronouns despite how you may feel about it—this shows respect and care.

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Sexuality

- Adolescent attitudes of sexuality largely influenced by culture
- Potentially due to limited concrete operational reasoning base sexual behavior on the present rather than consideration of long-term consequences
- Lapses in judgement under stress of managing sexuality- "It won't happen to me."
- Higher frequency of sexual activity reported among disadvantaged teens—poor educational resources, poverty, fatalistic attitudes
- Pregnancy-teens most at risk are girls from father absent homes, live in poverty, or have been sexually abused

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Safer Sex Practices

Information/education/supplies
- STD symptoms, reproduction education, access to birth control

Motivation
- Testimonies from peers, discussion of personal goals, myth busting

Behavioral Skills
- Healthy communication and assertiveness training/practice

Self-Efficacy
- Need to believe in their ability to act in their own best interests

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Resolving Conflicts



- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9_WwuGF4dM

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Crisis Verbal De-escalation

In a crisis, reasoning is nearly impossible

- ✓Empathize with child's feelings
- ✓Help de-escalate the crisis
- ✓Assess the situation on if further assistance is needed-seek outside help



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De-escalation Techniques

- Keep your voice calm
- Avoid overacting
- Listen
- Don't argue or reason
- Express concern and support
- Ask how you can help



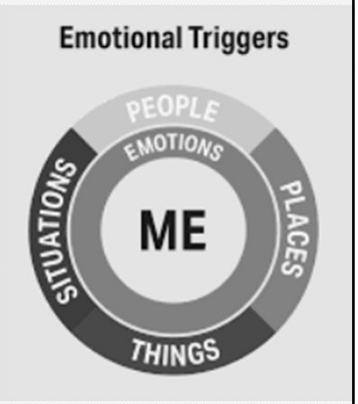
- Keep stimulation level low
- Move slowly
- Offer options instead of trying to take control
- Be patient
- Gently announce actions before initiating them
- Give them space

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Understanding Triggers

- Built in alarm system that signals when we are in danger
- Brain labels something in environment as dangerous
- Normative Danger Response

  Brain recognizes danger, it prepares body to fight
  - ✓Fight,
  - ✓Flight
  - ✓Freeze



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Understanding Triggers

Overactive Response

- Goes off often due to repeated danger in the past
- Perceive danger more quickly and may label non-threatening things as potentially dangerous



What triggers alarm?

- When we hear, see, or feel something that reminds us of a dangerous/frightening event
- Brain has learned to recognize them as dangerous due to past experiences

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Understanding Triggers

Common Triggers for Traumatized Adolescents/Teens

- ✓Unpredictability or sudden change
- ✓Transitioning from activities
- ✓Loss of control
- ✓Feelings of vulnerability or rejection
- ✓Confrontation, authority, or limit setting
- ✓Loneliness
- ✓Sensory overload



Triggers may not always make sense or may difficult for the person to verbalize.

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How to Help with Triggers



- ➢ Help achieve safety in the face of perceived danger
- ➢ Listen without judgement, empathize
- ➢ Encourage healthy coping strategies
  - ✓Breathing exercises, taking a walk, listening to music
  - ✓Mindfulness activities
  - ✓Phone Apps-CALM

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Engagement with Young People

Its all about the relationship!

- Build rapport
- Ask open ended questions
- Listen without judgement
- Be interested in their interests



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Transition to Independence Skills

TIP: The **Transition to Independence Process** is a system that helps engage youth in their own futures planning process, provides them with services/supports, & involves them (& others) in a process that prepares & facilitates greater self-sufficiency & successful achievement of goals related to each Transition Domain.

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Transition Domains

- ✓Educational Opportunity
- ✓Employment and Career
- ✓Living Situation
- ✓Personal Effectiveness and Wellbeing

Big areas in a young persons life that they are navigating and are in constant flow/change



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Transition Domains: Subdomains

Personal Effectiveness and Wellbeing

- Interpersonal relationships
- Emotionally and Behavioral Wellbeing
- Self-Determination
- Physical Health and Wellbeing

Community Life Functioning

- Daily living skills
- Leisure activities
- Community Participation

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TIP Guidelines



- ✓Services should be tailored for the client
- ✓Focus on building strengths
- ✓Focus on relationship and rapport building
- ✓Meeting with the teen where it is most comfortable
  - Outside spaces, walks, they get to choose

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Teens in Foster Care



- Harder to find resource family homes
- More likely to be placed in group home type settings
- Often separated from younger siblings
- Option to exit foster care at 21 if eligible
  - Needs to be making progress in school, work, or eliminating barriers
  - Young person gets funding and social work case management

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Permanency and Teens



Less likely to be adopted
- Harder to find permanent long term placements
- Teen gets to choose permanency options

Benefits for adopted teens
- AAP assistance and insurance until 21 years old automatically

Every young person needs a caring mentor/adult to help them be successful.

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Local Resources in our Community

Department of Health and Human Services, TAY Division
- Independent Living Skills Program
- Extended Foster Care
- Behavioral Health
- Drop In space



Redwood Coast Community Action Agency
- Raven Project
- Youth Service Bureau (YSB)

Wellness Centers in Schools

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Foster and Kinship Care Education Program



Website: www.redwoods.edu/foster

Facebook: Foster/Kinship Care Education Program-College of the Redwoods

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