Children and ACES

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I believe that children are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty they possess inside
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let the children’s laughter remind us how we used to be

-Whitney Houston
Case Presentation

• “Billy” is now an 8 year old boy
• Born to mother and father with substance abuse
• Placed in foster care at age 4 months due to neglect
• Making good developmental progress, thriving and growing
• Returned to parents at age 15 months
• Parents relapsed on substance abuse, reports of domestic violence before Billy is again returned to foster care
ACES: Adverse Childhood Experiences

• Events that occur in a child’s life that affect long term health

• Associated with subsequent adult health concerns:
  • Mental health issues
  • Substance abuse
  • Obesity
  • Cancer
  • Diabetes
  • Heart disease and stroke
Toxic Stress

Prolonged activation of the stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships
Healthy Stress

Our bodies are built to deal with episodes of high stress

- Produces adrenalin and cortisol
- Elevates heart rate and blood pressure
- Shifts blood flow to our muscles
- Slows digestion

Everything happens to protect our bodies from a physical threat
Ongoing stress

- Keeps our blood pressure elevated
- Interferes with appetite
- Lowers our immune system response
- Makes our body resistant to adrenalin and cortisol
- Interferes with our higher brain function
  - Slows learning
  - Slows memory

To assess stressful events in childhood, we use ACES
Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire
Finding your ACE Score

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often …
   Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?
   or
   Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  __________

2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often …
   Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?
   or
   Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  __________

3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever…
   Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
   or
   Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  __________

4. Did you often feel that …
   No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?
   or
   Your family didn’t look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  __________
5. Did you often feel that …
   You didn’t have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?  **Physical neglect**
   or
   Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________  **Divorce**

7. Was your mother or stepmother:
   **Often** pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?
   or
   **Sometimes or often** kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?
   or
   **Ever** repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________  **Domestic Violence**

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________  **Substance abuse**

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?
   Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________  **Mental illness**

10. Did a household member go to prison?
    Yes  No  If yes enter 1  ________  **Incarceration**

    **Now add up your “Yes” answers:  7/10**  This is your ACE Score
Our DNA
Billy (continued)

• When Billy returns to foster care at age 2 he is placed back with his original foster family
• He is now delayed in speech and social skills
• Starts into intensive services – speech, occupational therapy
• Has chronic ear infections, needs multiple sets of surgeries
Resilience

• The ability to withstand stressful events
• Some people have more innate resilience
• Mostly due to the support of their community
  – in children that is their family
• Best protection against the effects of severe stress is responsive and caring parents (and other adults)
Family First Prevention Services Act

• Provides services to improve parenting and to prevent the need for foster care
• Releases funds to prevent out of home placement
  - In home parenting support (Nurse-Family partnership)
  - Substance abuse treatment for parents

Substance abuse is responsible for the dramatic rise in referrals for foster care

In Montana that was 48% of the cases in 2017
Family First (cont)

• Supports family based foster care rather than institutional care
  • Requires that children be in a home rather than an institution
  • Group homes or institutions are a last resort for children... and the least helpful in terms of their long term health
Billy at 8 years of age

- Adopted by his foster family
- Needs speech and occupational therapy
- Has global developmental delays – 3 years
- Making tremendous strides – in 9 months of school, he “caught up” 17 months of progress
- Has a loving and supportive family

Billy’s future is still uncertain. With preventive services he might have been like his younger brother