

Poverty and Foster Care

- More than 16 million children live below the poverty line (\$20,090 for a family of three).
- 1.5 million households live on an average of less than \$2 a day.
- One out of 30 children experience homelessness.
- Homeless families make up 40% of the homeless population in America.
- 75% of foster care cases involve families with less than \$10,000.
- Children in families with incomes under \$15,000 had abuse/neglect rates 22 times the rates of children in families with incomes over \$30,000

Poverty and neglect

- Poverty increases the likelihood of maltreatment
- Poverty is defined as neglect
- Poverty can lead to detection
- Living in poor neighborhoods may increase risks

\$1 increase in the minimum wage could reduce the number of neglect reports by 9.6%

Reduction in TANF rates increased foster care population

DID YOU KNOW ?

Children who participated in Head Start preschools were 93% less likely to be removed from their homes

1 out of 3 children in foster care could be reunified if their families had adequate housing



“There’s so much research on [the harm of removal] that if people paid attention at all to the science, they would never do this.”

Dr. Charles Nelson
Professor of Pediatrics
Harvard Medical School

Early Trauma and the Developing Brain:

- Trauma/Neglect may be most impactful at times of rapid development and transformation
 - Greatest growth in the first three years
 - Next major period of growth occurs in adolescence
- Stress hormones (eg cortisol) can negatively impact neuronal growth and connection
- This may be one of the mechanisms linking early risk to later outcomes– trauma truly “gets under the skin”

High levels of the stress hormone cortisol is neurotoxic for the developing brain

Causing...

Delay of myelination

Loss of existing neurons

Pruning abnormalities

Inhibition of neurogenesis

De Bellis, M.D., 2005

Limitations inherent to framing potentially conflicting goals of “family preservation **versus** child protection”

Iatrogenic Effects:

A (not infrequent) child welfare dilemma...
What we do to be helpful may also cause harm

Removal Harms Children

- “Monsoon” of stress hormones flood the brain.
- Increased risk for mental health problems.
- Insecure attachment
- Impact on physical health
- Disrupted stress reactivity
- Multiple ambiguous losses
- Harms children of all ages

Young Children in Particular

- Largest group entering care
- Centrality of attachment for all development
- Cognitive and language limitations constrain understanding and communicating
- Different sense of time
- Separation from a primary caregiver is trauma
- Likelihood of grief and trauma reactions being missed or misunderstood
- Increased risk of repeat separations and losses

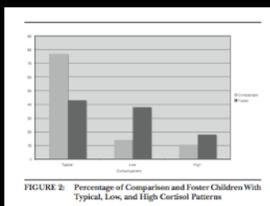
Some of the psychological crises children may experience with separation...

- Separation as a potential significant rejection or loss
- Loss of control, feeling kidnapped, powerless, helplessness
- Betrayal (incl. by person they "told"), loss of trust, world is unsafe
- Confusion, unpredictability, "it doesn't make sense"
- Fear of unknown, lack of information
- Sense of guilt or failure

Some of the psychological crises children may experience with separation (cont'd)...

- Painful interviewing about possible negative self and family traits ("Is this how I/we are understood?")
- Abrupt overwhelming changes- loss of all things familiar incl. pets, routines, possessions, friends, schools, culture, language
- Attachment disruption, loss of caregiver
- Older children may worry about parents and siblings
- Confused and conflicted- a loyalty bind- both with unfamiliar foster parents and with kin

Children in Foster Care have Atypical Patterns of Cortisol



Dozier, Manni, et al., (2006). *Child Maltreatment*.

Just as the removal of a child from their biological family is associated with a host of changes in a child's life, so too is the subsequent reunification to that family of origin

Lau et al, 2003

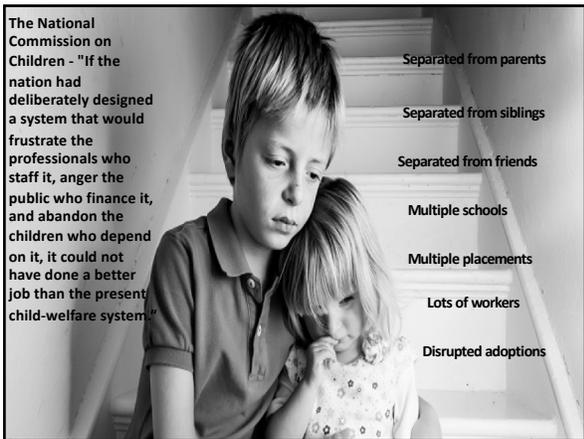
Even with time to prepare and support... separations and reunions are associated with heightened risk among families with young children



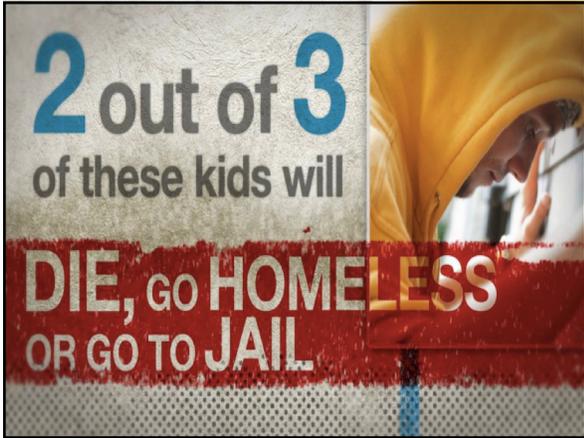


Foster care can be harmful to children...

- Children in foster care developed **more significant behavioral problems** than similarly-maltreated children who remained at home (e.g., Lawrence et al, 2006)
- An MIT economist studied 15,000 kids and found that children taken from their families and placed in foster care fared **worse** in life than similarly-maltreated children who were simply left with their families. (Doyle et al., 2007)



14% of youth self-report being physically assaulted in child welfare placements



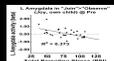
I had so many losses, man. I felt like my life was taken away, I felt like I didn't have no freedom, no independence, it was, to be completely honest with you really, it was one of the worst experiences in my life, going on 21 years that I've been on this Earth that was definitely one of the worst experience in my life, right there.... You know, it was terrible. You know, I, I lost my strength, I lost my life, I lost myself. It was, it was, it was hell man. (Jasper, male participant)

Prevention, Intervention, and Addressing Root Causes

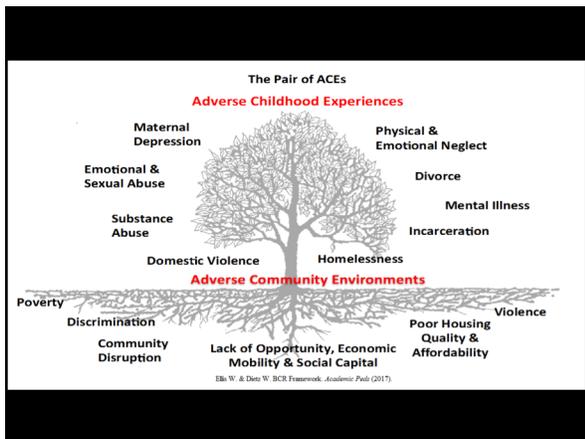
Interventions with Bio Parents can make a Difference...



- Examples:
Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (Mary Dozier)
Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)
Child Parent Psychotherapy (Alicia Liberman, et al)
Mom Power - alters mothers' own brain-based responses to baby cues (Rosenblum, et al., 2017; Swain et al, 2017)



- For evidence-based interventions across ages see also nctsn.org and the California Evidence-based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (cebc4cw.org)



ACE Questionnaire: Expanded (Urban) ACEs

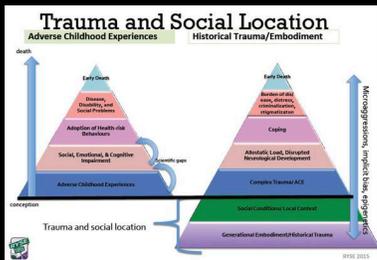
ACE Category	Question	Choices
Expanded ACEs		
Witness Violence	How often, if ever, did you see or hear someone being beaten up, stabbed, or shot in real life?	Many times A few times Once Never
Felt Discrimination	How often did you feel that you were treated badly or unfairly because of your race or ethnicity?	Very often true Often Sometimes true Rarely true Never true
Unsupportive Neighborhood	Did you feel people in your neighborhood looked out for each other, stood up for each other, and could be trusted?	All the time Most of the time Some of the time None of the time
Unsafe Neighborhood	Overall, did you feel safe in the neighborhoods you grew up in?	All the time Most of the time Some of the time None of the time
Bullied	How often were you bullied by a peer or classmate:	All the time Most of the time Some of the time None of the time
Lived in Foster Care	Were you ever in foster care?	Yes No

Links Between Original A.C.E.s (Atrocious Cultural Experiences) and Current A.C.E.s (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

Original A.C.E.s	Examples of Systemic Oppression/Inequities	Adverse Childhood Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genocide • Slavery • Colonization • Forced family separations • Sanctioned attacks on individuals' bodies • Removal of property/land • Denial of basic human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police violence • Mass incarceration • Disparities in preschool expulsions • Inequities in access to jobs and housing • Inequities in pay • Inequities in the child welfare system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Physical ◦ Emotional ◦ Sexual + Neglect ◦ Physical ◦ Emotional • Household dysfunction ◦ Mental illness ◦ Incarcerated relative ◦ Mother treated violently ◦ Substance abuse ◦ Divorce

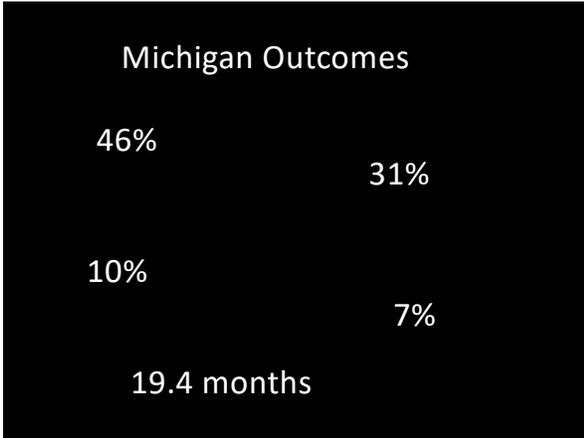
(Ghosh Ippen, 2016)

Layers beneath the ACE pyramid.... Historical Trauma, Systemic Racism, Implicit Bias



We pay billions of dollars for substitute care

- Foster care subsidies
- Adoption/guardianship subsidies
- Uncapped federal funds to pay for the costs of foster care.
- New development – Families First Act







You Be The Judge



The Law

- “A child can be removed if there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is at **substantial risk of harm** or is in surroundings that present an **imminent risk of harm** and the child's immediate removal from those surroundings is necessary to protect the child's health and safety.”

Exercise

- Review fact pattern
- How would you approach the decision about whether this child must be removed?
- The Law: “A child can be removed there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is at substantial risk of harm or is in surroundings that present an imminent risk of harm and the child's immediate removal from those surroundings is necessary to protect the child's health and safety.”

Additional issues if child is removed

- Visitation – supervised/unsupervised
- Services to reunify the family
- Where should the child live?
- Goal of case (reunification, adoption)
- How long should we give the family to reunify?

What should our response be?

- Invest in effective community-based, anti-poverty programs
- Make federal funding consistent with our values (e.g. flexible foster care funding).
- More nuanced decision-making.
 - Decisions always involve a balancing of harms. Foster care is not the “safe” option.

How can you help?

- Support local community centers – e.g. Community Action Network in Washtenaw County: <https://www.canwashtenaw.org/>
- Mentor youth – e.g. Big Brother/Big Sisters: <http://www.bbbswashtenaw.org/>; Girls Group: <https://www.girlsgroup.org/>
- Join the Foster Care Review Board: <http://courts.mi.gov/administration/scao/officesprograms/fcrbp/pages/default.aspx>
- Support programs for foster youth at the University of Michigan – Blavins Scholars: <https://blavinscholars.umich.edu/>; Child Advocacy Law Clinic: www.law.umich.edu/calcl
- Support youth aging out of foster care – e.g. Our House: <https://www.ourhousemi.org/>

Stay in touch

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