Trauma, Adversity, and Learning

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Child physical abuse
- Child sexual abuse
- Child emotional abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Mentally ill, depressed or suicidal person in the home
- Drug addicted or alcoholic family member
- Witnessing domestic violence against the mother
- Loss of a parent to death or abandonment, including abandonment by parental divorce
- Incarceration of any family member for a crime

Note: Other categories of ACEs have been studied in subsequent research.

COUNTING ACEs

The ACE Score is the number of categories of adverse childhood experience to which a person was exposed.

The ACE Study found that the number of categories, not necessarily the frequency or severity of the experiences within a category, determine health outcomes across the population as a whole.

Improving Classroom Climate and Culture for Learning and Student Accountability

Ron Hertel, Program Supervisor
Readiness to Learn, Compassionate Schools
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Liz Frausto, Director
Family and Community Partnerships
Puget Sound Educational District

Adverse Childhood Experiences

The 1998 Adverse Childhood Experiences study

- 17,421 adult members of a large HMO,
- 44 percent of respondents reported suffering sexual, physical, or psychological abuse as children, and
- 12.5 percent reported domestic violence in the home.

(Felitti et al., 1998)
Alcoholism & alcohol abuse  
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease & ischemic heart disease  
Depression  
Fetal death  
High risk sexual activity  
Illicit drug use  
Intimate partner violence  
Liver disease  
Obesity  
Sexually transmitted disease  
Smoking  
Suicide attempts  
Unintended pregnancy  
Early Death

The higher the ACE Score, the greater the incidence of co-occurring conditions from this list.
PIERCE COUNTY JUVENILE COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT:
A CASE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF ACEs IN COSTLY SOCIAL PROBLEMS

(Grevstad, 2007)

This past winter the Pierce County Juvenile Court provided the Tacoma Urban Network with ACE data for 1,980 youth who were discharged from probation between January 2004 and December 2006 (Grevstad, 2007).

School Performance & ACE Category

HIGH ACE STUDENTS OFTEN HAVE HIGH ACE PARENTS

Childhood Resiliency Starts With:
A shift in thinking from “What’s wrong with you?”
↓ ↓ ↓

to “What happened to you?”

Resilient students need resilient teachers.

The Heart of Learning and Teaching:
Compassion, Resiliency, and Academic Success
It’s difficult to play chess in a hurricane.”

Dr. Kenneth Fox
Mount Vernon School District
Mount Vernon, Washington

Trauma Response

- Survival trumps learning.
- Restrict their processing of what is happening around them, disconnect or act coercively toward others, and cannot formulate a coherent, organized response.
- They have difficulty regulating their emotions, managing stress, developing empathy, and using language to solve problems.

Biology of the Impact of Trauma

Persistent trauma can cause the brain to be underdeveloped or damaged.

A damaged or undeveloped brain often causes a child to react differently to a stressful situation than a child without those constrictions.

Therefore, a child who is more reflexive than reflective may have a biological reason for behaving the way they did which is beyond their control. This is an essential understanding for all school staff in order to modify their approach to the behavior.

Brain Functioning

The brain was designed to solve problems related to surviving in an unstable outdoor environment and to do so in almost constant motion.

John Medina, Brain Rules
**BRAIN RULE # 8**

Stressed brains don’t’ learn in the same way that non stressed brains do.

John Medina, PhD, Seattle Pacific University
University of Washington

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**RIPPLE EFFECT**

- **COMPASSION FATIGUE**
- **VICARIOUS TRAUMA**
- **BURN OUT**

Traumatic events are like rocks thrown into our pond. Each rock causes a series of ripples.

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**How We Teach Compassionate Teaching and Discipline Principles**

2. Provide unconditional positive regard.
3. Maintain high expectations.
5. Be a relationship coach.
6. Provide guided opportunities for helpful participation.

**What We Teach Compassionate Strategies**

- **Domain One**
  - Safety, Connection, and Assurance of Well-Being
- **Domain Two**
  - Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation
- **Domain Three**
  - Competencies of Personal Agency, Social Skills and Academics

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**Building Compassionate School-Community Partnerships That Work**

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Three Essential Steps

1. Assess the school’s needs to determine the level of information required so that professional development training could target staff needs.

2. Implementation of staff development focusing on a definition of adverse childhood experiences and complex trauma and potential effects on student learning.

3. Equipping staff with strategies to work with children who had been exposed to adverse childhood experiences and complex trauma.

Mental Models Affect

- Staff to staff
- Staff to students
- Students to students
- School to parents and community
Compassionate Schools Key Points

- Benefits all students, including trauma affected
- Part of overall school plan, improvement plan
- Leadership engaged
- ACES content changes the mental model
- A process, not a program

Compassionate Learning Communities (CLC)

- Leadership team 4-8 people
- Vision
- Guiding behaviors
- Rubric leading to goals
- Time to think and learn together

Compassionate Learning Community Matrix Components

1. Vision/Value, Goals and Leadership
2. Safety
3. Collaborative Culture
4. Behavior
5. Positive Discipline
6. Positive Climate
7. Social Skills
8. Family Partnerships
9. Community Partnerships
10. Cultural Competency

Component 3 – Collaborative Culture

1. Little or No Development
2. Limited Development
3. Mostly Functional
4. Fully Functional

Component 5 – Positive Discipline

1. Little or No Development
2. Limited Development
3. Mostly Functional
4. Fully Functional
Evaluation

Thanks for all you do to support students!