

Responding to the Uncertainty

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The Impact

- Trauma: Parental Incarceration as an Adverse Childhood Experience
- Uncertainty as a trigger for trauma
- Specific uncertainties for children of parents in pretrial detention compounded by COVID

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Paying Attention to Childhood Trauma and Toxic Stress

Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

The ACE Study is an ongoing collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente. Led by Co-principal Investigators Robert F. Anda, MD, and Vincent J. Felitti, MD. The ACE Study is perhaps the largest scientific research study of its kind, analyzing the relationship between multiple categories of childhood trauma (ACEs), and health and behavioral outcomes later in life.

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Adverse Childhood Experiences

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

Source: Felitti V., Anda R., Nordenberg D., Williamson D., Spitz A., Edwards V, Koss M., Marks J.(1998)

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Why ACES Matter Trauma: Impact on brain development related to Cortisol regulation



- Impulse Control-inability to stop oneself
- Cause and Effect-limited capacity to anticipate consequences
- Predictability-lack of social "cueing"
- Emotional Regulation – extreme difficulty self regulating emotion
- Reciprocal Engagement-inability to "share" in interactions

These behaviors lead to poor school performance & increased drop out rates.

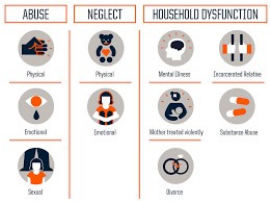
Attachment disruption trauma can lead to gang involvement & early pregnancies.

Self medicating in the wake of trauma and toxic stress leads to drug use, abuse and addiction.

Source:De Bellis MD, Zisk A. The Biological Effects of Childhood Trauma. Child and adolescent psychiatric clinics of North America. 2014;23(2):185-222. doi:10.1016/j.chc.2014.01.002

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First Do No More Harm: Potentially Dangerous Interpretation of the ACES



ABUSE	NEGLECT	HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION	
Physical	Physical	Mental Illness	Interparental Conflict
Emotional	Emotional	Mother Involvement & Ability	Substance Abuse
Sexual		Divorce	

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Alternative and Additional Aces:



- Bullying
- Poverty
- Peer rejection and having no friends
- Experience of racism
- Death, multiple and traumatic loss
- Community violence
- Food scarcity
- Experience of the care system
- Poor academic performance
- Living in an unsafe environment

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New Labeling for ACES from the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention

TYPES of ACES

The ACE study looked at three categories of adverse experience: **childhood abuse**, which included emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; **neglect**, including both physical and emotional neglect; and **household challenges**, which included growing up in a household where there was substance abuse, mental illness, violent treatment of a member or caregiver, parental separation/divorce or lack of a member of the household for a period. Respondents were given an ACE score between 0 and 10 based on how many of these 10 types of adverse experience to which they reported being exposed.

ABUSE	HOUSEHOLD CHALLENGES	NEGLECT
11% EMOTIONAL	13% MOTHER TREATED VIOLENTLY	15% EMOTIONAL
28% PHYSICAL	27% SUBSTANCE ABUSE	
21% SEXUAL	19% MENTAL ILLNESS	
	23% SEPARATION/DIVORCE	
	5% INCARCERATED HOUSEHOLD MEMBER	10% PHYSICAL

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Trauma & Uncertainty



- One definition of trauma from neurologist Robert Scaer is any negative life event that occurs in a context of uncertainty and in a position of relative helplessness.
- Children and others who struggle with helplessness can perceive uncertainty as danger and it activates their stress response system and traumatic stress reaction patterns.

Scaer, R. (2005). The trauma spectrum: Hidden wounds and human resiliency. W.W. Norton & Co.

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Additional Trauma

Witnessing the arrest of a parent intensifies the child's loss and creates additional trauma.



Source: Roberts YH, Snyder FJ, Kaufman JS, et al. Children Exposed to the Arrest of a Family Member: Associations with Mental Health. Journal of Child and Family Studies. 2014;23(2):214-224. doi:10.1007/s10826-013-9717-2

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Toxic Stress as Trauma



Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children's Learning and Development and change brain architecture.

Scientists now know that chronic, unrelenting stress in childhood, caused by abrupt separation from caregivers, extreme poverty, parental depression, or general and persistent uncertainty can be perceived as dangerous and be toxic to the developing brain in the same way as repeated abuse and witnessing violence changes brain architecture.

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development. NGA, Center for Best Practices, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2008, www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

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All loss raises old loss and trauma triggers are everywhere.

Many experiences that include sights, sounds and smells that remind one of a trauma can re-traumatize a child or adult as can situations characterized by additional threats **or even simple uncertainty**. Losses that are not interpreted as loss to others, can be triggers for traumatic reactions but not understood as such by those that could help.



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The other hormone in this story



The presence of parents or other adult attachment figures raises dopamine levels and lowers the dangerous levels of cortisol. (Dozier, 2005)

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Incarcerated Parents as Protective Buffers



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Incarcerated Parents as Protective Buffers

The earliest stages of separation, the remand period, often follows in the wake of witnessing the arrest. Access to the parent buffer at this time is extremely important to managing trauma.

Correctional policy and pre-trial detention protocols often pose barriers to this access.



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Carers as Protective Buffers

Those that care for children with parents in pre-trial detention are often overwhelmed with anxiety, have limited access to supports, are experiencing their own trauma, battling stigma and dealing with financial and life crises all as they try to answer children's questions and respond to their needs.



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Additional Uncertainty of Pre-Trial Detention

"He won't be in there long so we don't need to tell the kids yet."

We will have to move in with my Mother until the trial. After that, who knows?

"On top of everything else, I had to tell her she can't go to gymnastics anymore."

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What causes the most uncertainty?



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Assessing Needs:
What causes the most uncertainty or anxiety for the Carers during pre-trial detention?

- Stigma limiting access to support
- Decisions about what or whether or how to tell the children
- Financial stress
- Housing or changes in residence
- Lack of predictability in the legal system
- Access to the imprisoned parent
- Other

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Implications for Services During Pre-trial Detention The Conspiracy of Silence

- > Children are not told the truth about their parent's whereabouts
- > Children are told the truth but told not to tell
- > Children are told the truth, allowed to tell but discouraged from speaking their feelings at home.



Adkins-Estrin, A. (2009). Family and Youth Responses to CSG Report. Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Action Plan for Federal Policymakers. Transcript of regional focus groups. Unpublished manuscript.

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Implications for Services: The Conspiracy of Silence

**Truth
Spoken
Here**

Provide caregivers and IP with support to help children cope including tools to tell age-appropriate truths to children about their incarcerated parents whereabouts and answers to questions about the process during pre-trial detention.

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Minimizing the uncertainty and bolstering resilience

Strategies for families

- Addressing confusion, answering children honestly
- Allowing children to express themselves
- Checking in regularly with children-their feelings and preferences may change
- Establishing routines
- Removing barriers to accessing the incarcerated parent

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Minimizing the uncertainty and bolstering resilience

Policies and practices for prisons and systems

Supporting connections for children with incarcerated parents through policy and practice
 Providing opportunities for engagement with other children with incarcerated parents
 Supporting caregivers: Caregiver Guides
 Transparency of information
 Predictable policies for visits-in person and remote.

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CONTACT



NRCCFI

- Disseminating accurate data
- Training, inspiring, preparing and connecting
- Guiding family strengthening policy and practice
- Centering families in defining the problem and designing solutions

<https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/>

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