



TexProtects
Champions for Safe Children

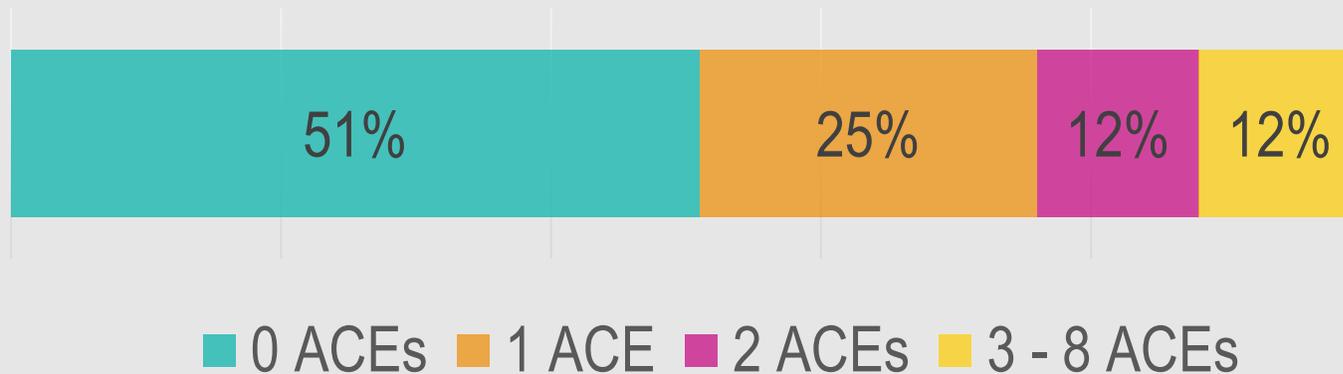


Prevent Child Abuse
Texas™

Senate Education Committee
Testimony on HB 18
May 7, 2019

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TexProtects

Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Texas Children



Adversities measured include child abuse and neglect and household dysfunction, including living with a caregiver who is experiencing mental illness, substance use, violence, incarceration, or divorce.

7,500,272
2017 TX child population

1,800,064
Texas children have multiple ACEs

Source - Sacks, Vanessa & Murphy, David (2018) *The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, nationally, by state, and by race or ethnicity*. Retrieved from Child Trends at <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity>

What is trauma?

Trauma refers to **intense and overwhelming experiences** that involve serious loss, threat or harm to a person's physical and/or emotional well being.

These experiences may occur at any time in a person's life. They may involve a single traumatic event or may be repeated over many years.

These trauma experiences often **overwhelm** the individual's coping resources. This often leads the person to find a way of coping that may work in the short run but may **cause serious harm** in the long run.

Experiences that can cause trauma include:

- Physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse
- Neglect or abandonment (food insufficiency, lack of money to meet basic needs, homelessness)
- Death of a parent
- Divorce
- Family life that includes drug addiction, alcoholism, parental incarceration, violence
- Serious medical illness or disease (disabling conditions, loss of function, invasive and distressing procedures)
- Catastrophic losses of one's home, livelihood, people, pets due to flood, tornado, hurricane or other disasters of nature

Trauma can impair learning

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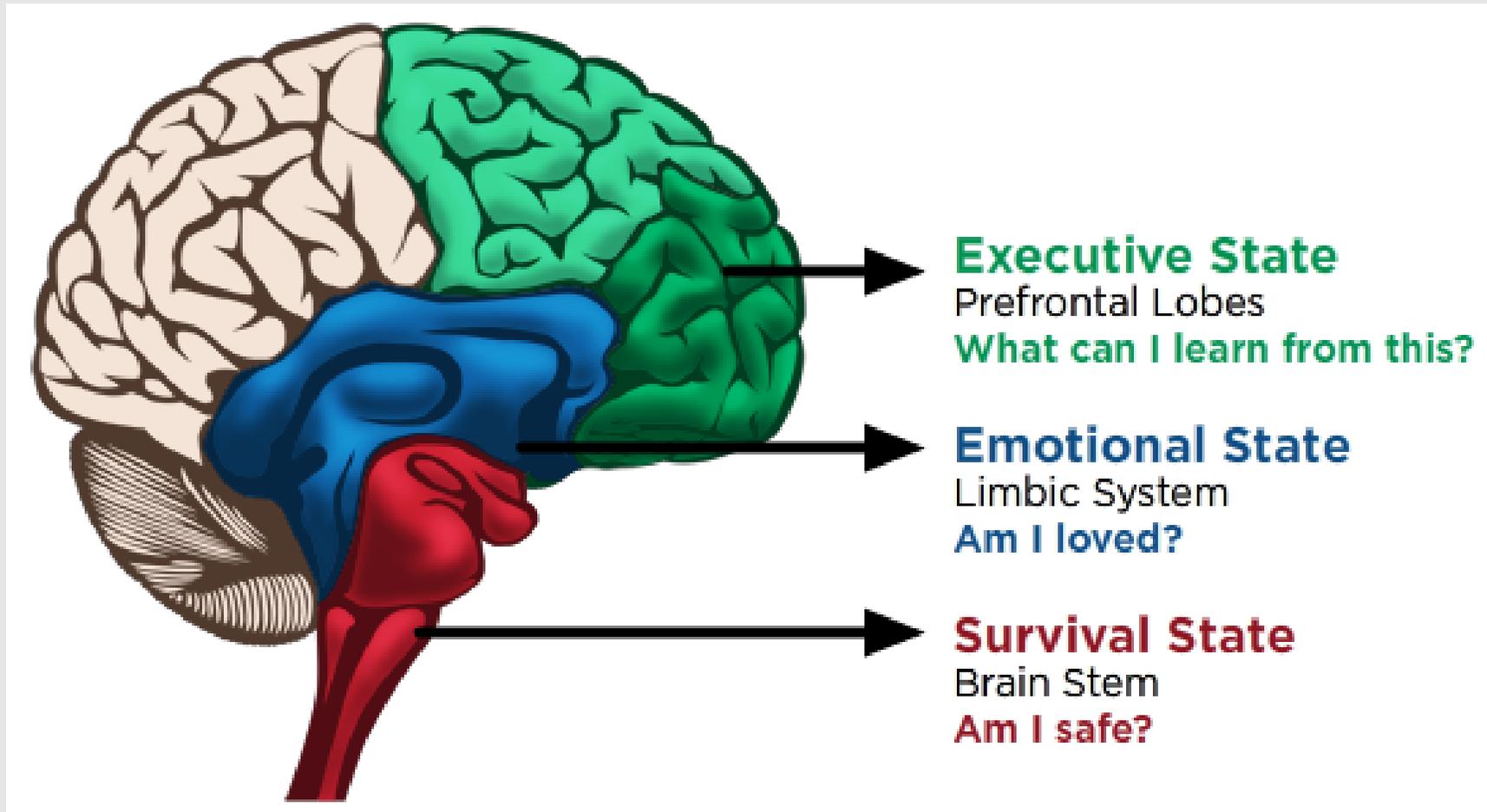
Exposure to traumatic events can have physical and emotional impacts including

- Interrupted sleep and nightmares
- Headaches and stomachaches
- Over or under reacting to physical contact, loud noises, sudden movements, or lighting
- Poor emotional control or intense reactions to reminders of their traumatic event

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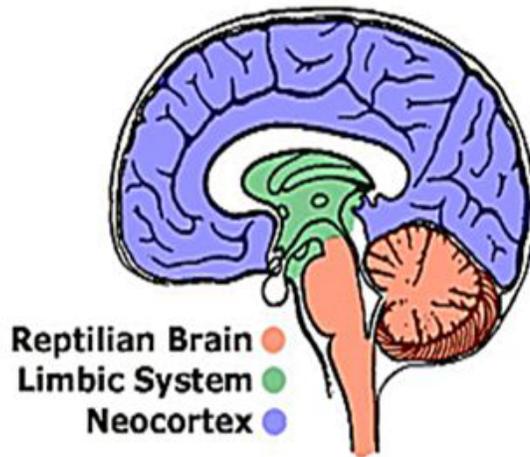
Chronic exposure to traumatic events can

- affect attention, memory, and cognition
- reduce a child's ability to focus, organize, and process information
- interfere with effective problem solving and/or planning
- result in overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety

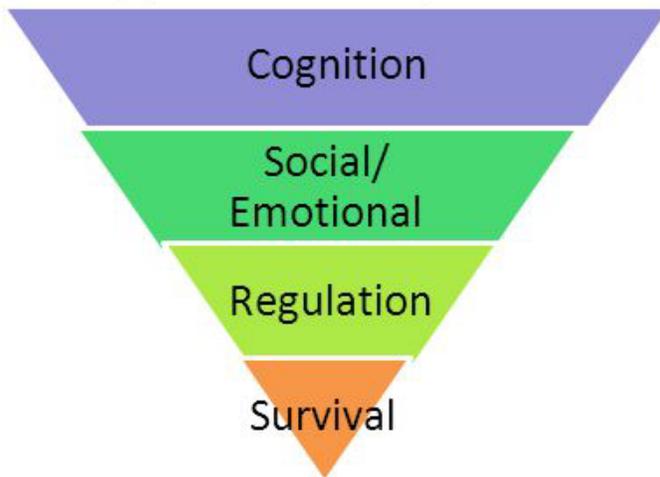


When children have experienced trauma AND have not experienced healthy attachment with a supportive adult, **the thinking brain can be hijacked by overactivation of the survival brain and emotional systems.**

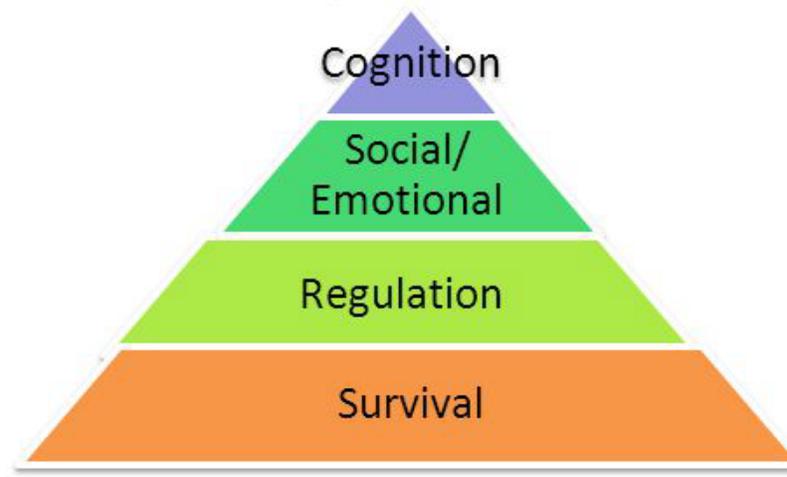
Trauma & Brain Development



Typical Development



Developmental Trauma



Trauma in early life can disrupt healthy development by **impacting neurobiology**. This can result in an **overactive alarm system** in the brain and **struggles with self-regulation and social interaction** that create obstacles to engaging in higher order thinking.

Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

Trauma results in the increased likelihood of negative outcomes across the lifetime



Mothers & Babies

- Low birth pregnancy weight
- Pre-term birth
- Health risks during pregnancy
- Health risks to the infant



Brain Development

- Cognitive impairment
- Structural abnormalities
- A toxic stress response system



Mental & Physical Health

- Chronic disease (diabetes & cancer)
- STIs
- Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar Disorder
- Eating disorders
- Suicide attempts or completion



School & Work

- Expulsion from school
- Academic failure
- Lost time from work for treatment



Risky Behaviors

- Substance use & Smoking
- Violence against others
- Unsafe/risky sex

What might be included in the typical training for teachers on trauma?

Objectives may include:

- Increase knowledge and awareness about the types of experiences that can cause distress or trauma, and how these relate to brain development
- Recognize when a student's behavior might be the result of trauma or distress
- Lead conversations with a student about how they might be feeling
- Problem-solve ways that their class or school can become a more comfortable place for students who have experienced trauma
- Assess the need for referral, motivating students to seek help when needed
- Consider educators' own needs for self-care

Trained teachers are able to:

Minimize disruptions and strengthen academic learning for all classroom students.

Help students in trauma heal and thrive academically and socially, rather than exacerbate the trauma to grow into future mental health and safety issues.

Identify which student behaviors require expert referrals and ensure students receive the mental health support they need.

Examples of Trauma Informed Strategies

Maintain usual routines. A return to “normalcy” will communicate the message that the child is safe and life will go on.

Give children choices. Often traumatic events involve loss of control and/or chaos, so you can help children feel safe by providing them with some choices or control when appropriate.

Increase the level of support and encouragement given to the traumatized child. Designate an adult who can provide additional support if needed.

Set clear, firm limits for inappropriate behavior and develop logical—rather than punitive consequences.

Recognize that behavioral problems may be transient and related to trauma. Remember that even the most disruptive behaviors can be driven by trauma-related anxiety.

Be sensitive to the cues in the environment that may cause a reaction in the traumatized child. For example, victims of natural storm-related disasters might react very badly to threatening weather or storm warnings. Children may increase problem behaviors near an anniversary of a traumatic event.

Warn children if you will be doing something out of the ordinary, such as turning off the lights or making a sudden loud noise.

Potential benefits of a trauma informed approach

Trauma-informed training for school personnel can mitigate the impact of ACEs on children and enhance the development of a child's self-regulation, awareness of others, empathy, optimism and perseverance, ultimately resulting in improved behavioral and academic outcomes.

Trauma-informed practices increase the likelihood of long-term positive education and employment outcomes, and decrease the likelihood of criminal behavior, substance abuse, and mental health issues in adulthood.

- **Students participating in trauma-informed programs had fewer conduct problems and better academic achievement**, scoring 11 percentile points higher on standardized tests than students not in such programs.
- Low-income students at the Momentous Institute in Dallas significantly benefit from trauma-informed practices. Compared to other low-income 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students throughout Texas, the **STEAR reading passing rates of Momentous School students were between 7 and 17 percentage points higher than the state.**

Sources: Jones, D., Greenberg, M., Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105, 2283-2290. Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405-432. Annual evaluation report of Momentous School, 2017-18

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