

ACEs in Alaska (ACEs- Adverse Childhood Experience)

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Part 3: ACEs, Kids, and School.....The ACEs Pyramid

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Many of the things children have to do in school in order to be learn successfully are more difficult if their brains and bodies have been exposed to ACEs-level chronic stress. Children in the stressed group have a hard time keeping themselves calm and focusing their attention. Little things in the classroom or out on the playground can trigger reactions that are way out of proportion or inappropriate. When a child feels like he/she is being attacked by a bear it is hard for them to pay attention to the teacher, hard to ignore provocative words or gestures from their classmates, and hard to keep their attention on learning.

Sometimes children affected by ACEs look to their teachers as though they have ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Although this is a real condition, not everyone who looks distracted has true ADHD, but there are probably a fair number of misdiagnosed children who are taking Ritalin.

Teachers who are “trauma-informed” have learned that keeping an over-reacting child in the classroom, rather than sending them home for some kind of punishment is better for the child. Sending unruly children home is often sending them into the very stressful situations that are contributing to their condition. Instead, a disruptive or distraught child in the primary grades might be directed to sit in a comfy bean bag chair with some fuzzy stuffed animals while they calm down. Disruptive middle school or high school students might be helped by practicing yoga or Tai Chi in PE because it helps teach focused breathing, calm attention to movements. Enter “Just breathe” into your browser and select the one associated with the ACE website, rather than the song. You will find charming reports by early elementary grade children about how the breathing technique helps them regain a sense of calm.

Acestoohigh.com website has in its archives stories about how schools that kept children in the classroom and worked with them to lower their stress were more likely to have those kids remain in school through their high school years. The numbers of juvenile arrests in students from such schools were down also. You are invited to go to the Acestoohigh.com website and find articles that document the success of their efforts.

Homework:

1. Google “ACES pyramids”. You will see a number of variations on the ACEs idea of causality of disease. It starts at the bottom and goes upward. There are five steps in the classic pyramid. A valuable addition to the pyramid was made by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to reflect the contribution of historical trauma imposed on indigenous peoples in this country. Imagine two levels below the bottom of the original ACEs pyramid. The very bottom level is titled: “Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, Historical Trauma”. The next level is titled “Structural Racism, White Supremacy, Social Devaluation of People of Color.” The original of this may be viewed at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/> I have been unsuccessful in importing the chart into this document. I believe the content is important to all of us in Alaska.

2. Google acestoohigh.com and browse for articles about what other communities are doing to address ACEs.

Next time, in Part 4 of ACEs in Alaska we will learn about resilience, the ability to bounce back and recover from ACEs.

Questions? Whenever you have questions, please e-mail me, Jan Adasiak, at adasiakjan@gmail.com and I will answer them as best I can.