

# ARE EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVERSITIES IMPACTING MY CHILD'S LEARNING?

2019-2020

## Understanding ACEs & Learning

This handout explores how adversities (early traumas, poverty, witnessing violence and other events) are known to greatly impact a child's social, emotional and academic success. The more you know about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) - also known as early childhood trauma—and how these traumas could be impacting your student...the better able you are to help them heal and succeed.

### Agora is a Designated Trauma-Informed School

This information has been prepared for Learning Coaches of Agora because of the school's Trauma-Informed Initiative. Trauma-Informed schools:

- Realize the prevalence of trauma (as informed by ACEs).
- Recognize the impact trauma has on learning and behavior.
- Respond in a trauma-informed way.
- Resist Re-traumatization by training everyone in the school about trauma-informed care.

In conjunction with the Attachment & Trauma Network (ATN), Agora is providing this information, along with trainings and access to resources through ATN.



## Inside

- What is Trauma?
- How Does Trauma Impact a Growing Brain?
- What Can I Do?
- Let's Talk About Resilience
- Resources



One out of every 5 children across the US have significant enough ACEs (3 or 4...or more) putting them at risk of their early traumas impacting their ability to learn.

But there's hope...



Brains grow from bottom up; inside out...early experiences have HUGE impact.

## How does Trauma impact a growing brain?

Brains are built from the **bottom up** and **inside out** in an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues through adulthood. Babies and toddlers have fast-growing brains, and early connections lay the foundation for future growth. This means that early and ongoing toxic stress from trauma can change the brain's architecture and weaken its foundation. The earlier the trauma, often the greater the impact.

Very often, children whose brains have been impacted by trauma respond in ways that are very different from other children their same age. Behaviors can be problematic, like

- Struggling to control their emotions and impulses
- Inability to focus, especially if emotionally triggered
- Misreading relational and social situations, often negatively
- Overreacting (or underreacting) to sensory input
- Lashing out, shutting down or trying to avoid situations, when the "cause" isn't obvious to us as adults

Trauma can include things like:

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Witnessing violence
- Poverty
- Being separated from primary caregiver
- Homelessness
- Unresolved pain, such as medical procedures/hospitalizations

## What is Trauma?

*"Trauma is a psychological distressing event that is outside the range of usual experience. Trauma often involves intense fear, terror and helplessness."*

— Dr. Bruce Perry  
Child Trauma Academy



*"Trauma isn't what happens to you; it's what happens inside of you."*

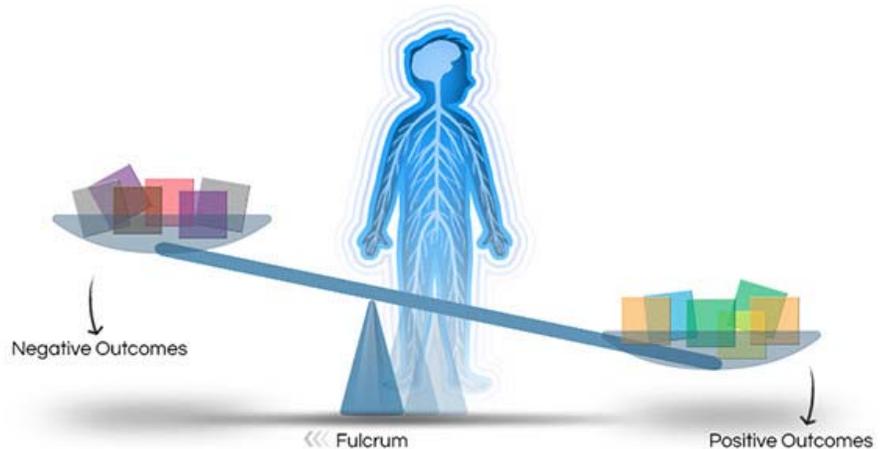
- Gabor Mate

## What Can I Do?

Brain science tells us that environment is the biggest factor for changing/growing our brains. So, as parents, caregivers and learning coaches we have the most direct opportunities to help our children who have experienced trauma to heal. We do this by focusing on what builds Resilience.

*There's always an adult who is key to providing that relationship that helps to build resilience.*

—Jack Shonkoff, PhD.,  
Center of the Developing  
Child, Harvard



**Over time, the cumulative impact of positive life experiences and coping skills can shift the fulcrum's position, making it easier to achieve positive outcome** *Center for the Developing Child, Harvard, University*

## Let's Talk About Resilience

**Resilience is the ability to withstand hardships...to bounce back from adversity.** Resilience isn't something you're born with; it's a learned skill that your brain acquires, often when that early strong attachment is built. Research shows that a child's resilience can grow stronger with the support from at least one caring adult. Children enduring trauma without that primary caregiver are often not as resilient as those who have had strong attachments from the start. But remember...brains continue to grow...it's never too late to build greater resilience.

Healing Happens in **Relationships** – Parents and caregivers have the best chance of providing our children with the building blocks for healing and growing more resilient, because it's at the core of our role.. Actively working on increasing attachment, focusing on healthy relationships over rules and modeling caring and compassionate interactions that create a safe family can shift a child's development and support their emotional health and resilience.

Staying **Regulated** is the Key – Trauma often impairs a child's ability to regulate their emotions and their actions. Self-regulation needs to be directly taught as a skill, especially if the child missed that developmentally. Co-regulation, where the adult stays calm and helps the child's brain to mirror that level of calmness, is the start of teaching self-regulation skills. Parents see huge improvements in behaviors and interactions when using a calm, co-regulating approach.

## Want to Learn More?

Watch for the upcoming webinars and Q&A session on how trauma can impact a child's development, behaviors and ability to learn...and things we parents and caregivers can do about it. Julie Beem, Executive Director of the Attachment & Trauma Network, will lead us through some practical trauma-informed ways address our children's behaviors, enhance our relationships, AND help them learn!



## Helpful Resources

Attachment & Trauma Network  
<http://attachtrauma.org>

ACEs Survey/Information  
<https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>

Center for the Developing Child  
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

Trauma-Informed Parenting Series (Click to view):

- 1.1 - [What is Trauma](#)
- 1.2 - [Brain Basics and Attachment](#)
  
- 2.1 - [Could it Be Trauma?](#)
- 2.2 - [Strategies: Trauma-Informed Parenting](#)
  
- 3.1 - [Tips for Learning Coaches Part A](#)
- 3.2 - [Tips for Learning Coaches Part B](#)

## Need Support? Contact ATN

As part of Agora's Trauma-Informed Initiative, memberships to the Attachment & Trauma NetworkCurrent nighttime residence status- (options are doubled up, hotel/motel, Shelter/Transitional Housing, unsheltered)rk (ATN) are available for FREE to any Agora parent or caregiver whose child has experienced trauma.

ATN free memberships include access to ATN's online Support Groups monitored by experienced parent mentors, as well as ATN's Journal emailed to you and discounts on other trainings and events.

To learn more:

[www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/getinvolved/#join](http://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/getinvolved/#join)

Or email:  
[membership@attachtrauma.org](mailto:membership@attachtrauma.org)

