



San Diego Trauma-Informed Guide Team

Learning Exchange

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Understanding Trauma Across the Lifespan

- ❖ **Resilience:** Strength in the face of adversity
- ❖ **Risk Factors:** Exposure to experiences, conditions that can stretch even the most resilient among us beyond our limits of emotional endurance - in the absence of protective processes
- ❖ **Protective Processes:** Experiences, conditions that can outweigh or neutralize the effects of exposure to known risk factors

Questions

- ❖ Why is it that some people exposed to multiple childhood risks and adversities “beat the odds” and manage to go on to lead meaningful and productive lives?
- ❖ Why is it that others succumb then rebound decades later?
- ❖ Is it because those who “beat the odds” are more resilient?
- ❖ Are we sure?

More Questions

- ❖ Might some who succumb to adversity be every bit as resilient as those who endure, or even more so? (Might some adults?)
- ❖ What could cause otherwise resilient people to succumb to childhood risks and adversities?
- ❖ And why do a number then rebound decades later?

Are There Limits to Emotional Endurance?

- ❖ ACE Study and 10 ACE categories (ACE score) as a framework to explore impact of childhood trauma on later life physical health, mental health and later life adjustment
- ❖ Some are helping us see beyond 10 ACE categories
- ❖ Helping us understand the impact of historical trauma
- ❖ Helping us understand the impact of trauma embedded in social conditions

Turnaround for Children

<https://www.turnaroundusa.org/what-we-do/tools/>

- ❖ Schools in U.S. where poverty rate is <10%
 - score at or near the top of the world on PISA math and reading tests.

- ❖ When the poverty rate exceeds 50%
 - ranks 17th in reading, 27th in math, and 20th in science, despite spending more money per student than any country

School as a Potential Source of Prolonged Inescapable Stress

- ❖ Some school-age children begin school impacted by neurodevelopmental challenges that can potentially go unnoticed or misunderstood (learning differences, ADHD, executive function challenges, etc)
- ❖ Neurodevelopmental risks can potentially co-occur with/be exacerbated by ACES and other environmental risks and adverse life experiences

Are There Limits to Emotional Endurance?

- ❖ 6 Year old, exposed to multiple ACES (Type II trauma), family is poor, living in impoverished neighborhood, inner city war zone, begins school with uneven abilities (ADHD/LD)
- ❖ At 16, many conditions may still be present.
- ❖ If risk exposure persists, vulnerability persists.

Are There Limits to Emotional Endurance?

- ❖ If vulnerability persists, need experiences that can potentially buffer child/youth/family from potentially harmful effects of prolonged risk exposure.
- ❖ Treatment programs when effective, will end. But risks persist.
- ❖ Among the reasons why it's so important to look beyond treatment for experiences that can prevent harm in the face of adversity, or overcome the effects of a difficult past

Protective Influences

Events, Experiences, Conditions
That Can Outweigh or Neutralize
the Effects of Exposure
to Known Risk Factors

Overcoming Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- ❖ The good news is that researchers have identified broad based protective processes in the lives of individuals who have overcome exposure to multiple risks.
- ❖ The risks varied, but the protective processes were similar.
- ❖ Introducing protective processes that can outweigh the effects of multiple childhood risk exposure may reduce the risk a range of negative life outcomes down the road.

Protective Processes That Researchers Feel Can Offset the Effects of Multiple Childhood Risks

(Werner et al, 2001)

1. Experiences That Reduce the Impact of Prevailing Risks:
 - A. Learning to see adversities in a new light
 - B. Reducing the amount of exposure to risks or adverse conditions (role of context); buffers
2. Preventing a Chain Reaction of Negative Life Events; Creating Safety Nets
3. Experiences That Promote a Sense of Mastery (Mastery to meaning connection)
4. Opening the Door to Turning Point Experiences or Second Chance Opportunities

Final Thoughts

- ❖ It's impossible to predict with absolute certainty any one person's life course.
- ❖ It's among the mysteries in life that makes one a believer in turning point experiences, in second, third, and fourth chance opportunities, and in knowing that lives can change for the better at any point in time, sometimes in response to completely unanticipated and unpredictable events.