

# Why Childhood Trauma Needs Our Schools' Immediate Attention

PPT Created by Amanda Merck  
*Salud America!* Community Health Program  
University of Texas Health San Antonio



2018





# Trauma-Sensitive School

---

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):

- **Definition & Impact**
- **Effects**
- **Response**



# ACEs: Definition & Impact

---

**Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being**

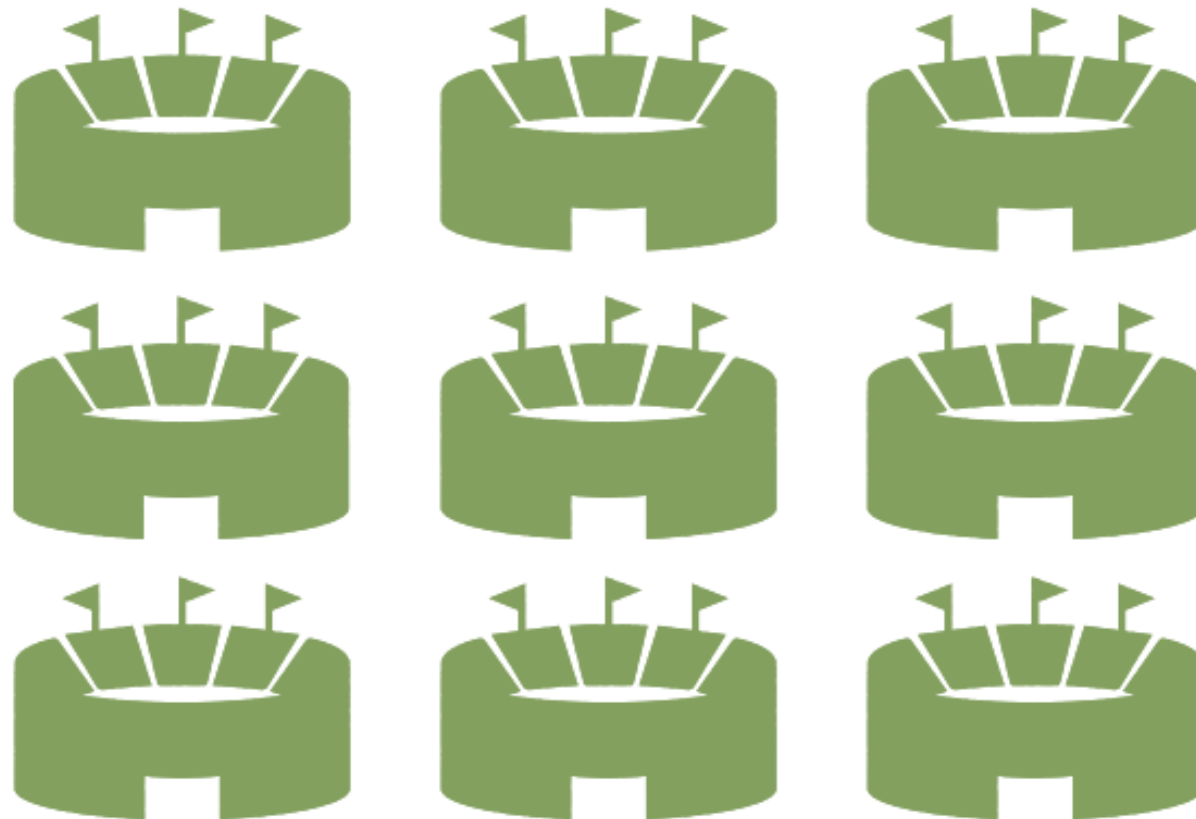
- Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
- Physical and emotional neglect
- Divorce
- Domestic violence
- Parental incarceration
- Parental death
- Parental substance abuse
- Witnessing violence
- Food insecurity
- Racism and bullying
- Mental illness in family
- Chronic poverty



# ACEs: Definition & Impact

---

Each year, the number of youth requiring hospital treatment for physical assault-related injuries would fill **EVERY SEAT IN 9 STADIUMS.**<sup>3</sup>



Source: Substance Abuse  
and Mental Health  
Service Administration

---

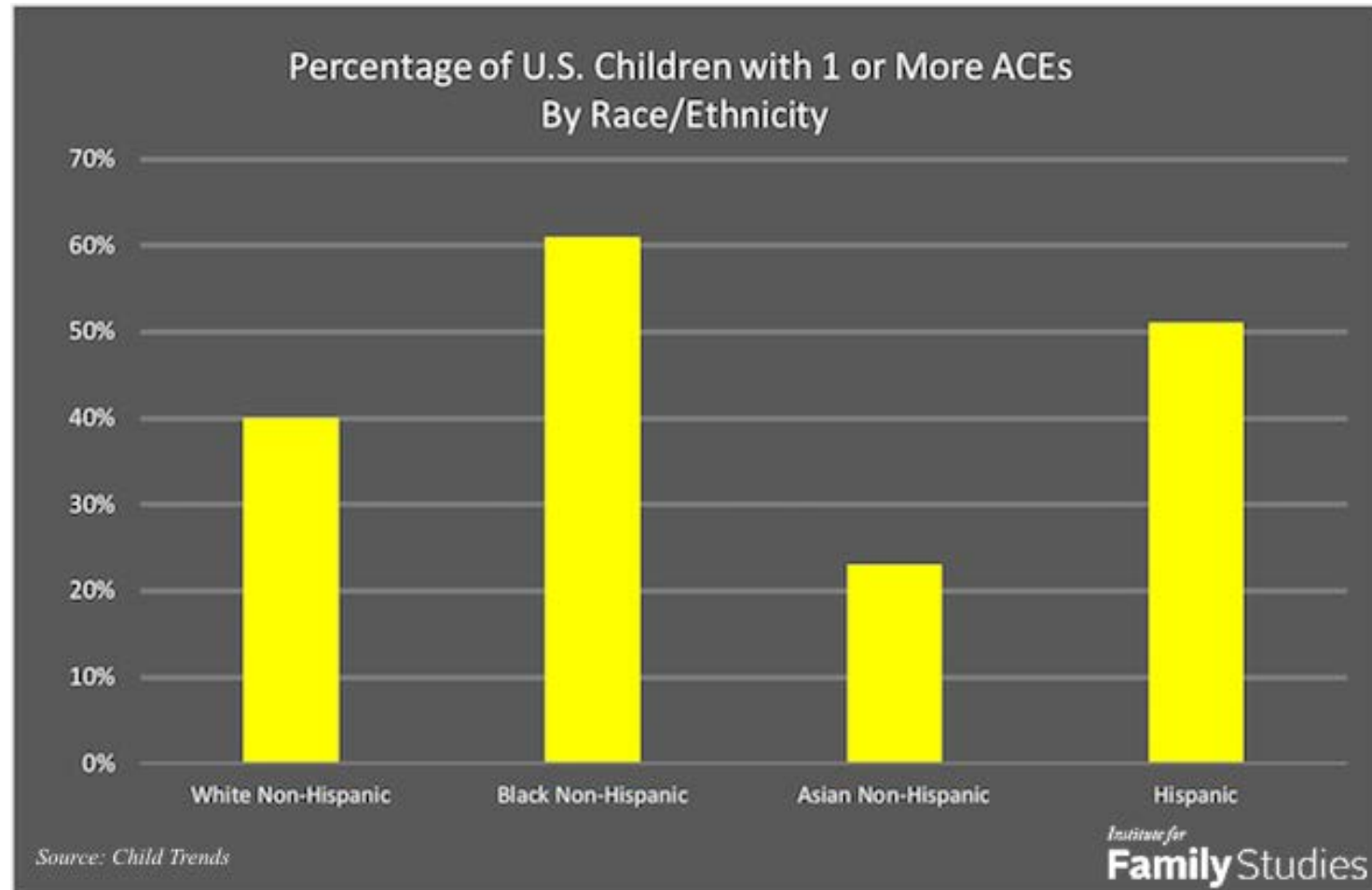


# ACEs: Definition & Impact

**National study of 5,117 Latinos ages 18-74 found 77.8% experienced at least one ACE in childhood (in contrast to the 46% of youth in general who are currently exposed to ACEs).**

**The same study found that 28.7% of Latinos experienced four ACEs or more.**

Learn more: *Salud America!*  
Research Review, 2017,  
<http://salud.to/latinochild>





# Trauma-Sensitive School

---

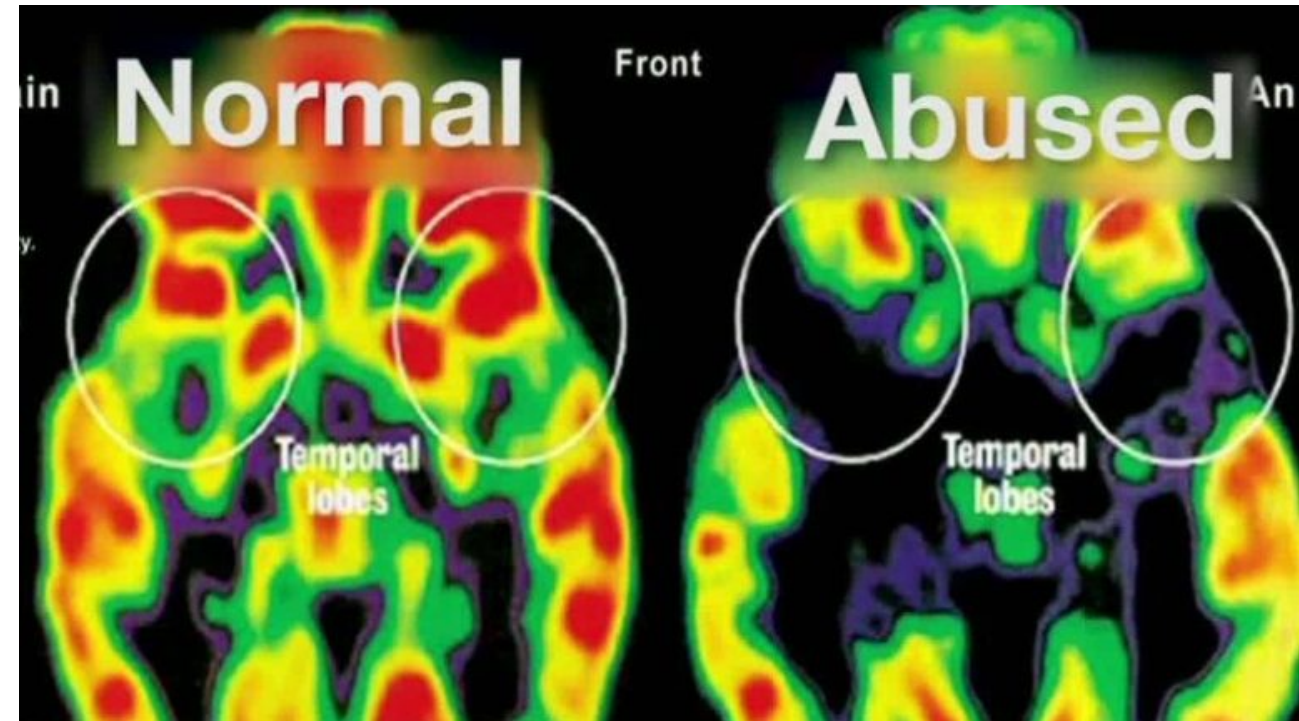
## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):

- **Definition & Impact**
- **Effects**
- **Response**

# ACEs: Effects

## Changes a child's brain:

- Repeated/chronic activation of stress hormones bypass thinking part of brain and activate survival part of brain, aka fight, flight, or freeze
- Strengthens fight, flight, or freeze neural pathways then become efficient and predominant
- Interrupts normal development and impairs complex thought and learning





# ACEs: Effects

---

## Changes a child's behavior:

- Aggression, irritable, whiny, clingy, moody
- More headaches, stomachaches, and overreaction to minor bumps and bruises
- Difficulty identifying or labeling feelings, communicating needs and controlling impulses
- Problems with focus, easily startled, and over-reacts to sounds, touch, and sirens
- Distrust of others, authority
- Dissociation, checking out, and under-reaction







# ACEs: Effects

---

## Causes long-term problems:

- Chronic absenteeism, attention problems, suspension, and expulsion
- Smoking, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, dropping out of high school, failed relationships, domestic violence, and involvement in criminal justice system
- Anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, stroke, asthma, lupus, multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis, viral infections and autoimmune diseases.





# Trauma-Sensitive School

---

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):

- **Definition & Impact**
- **Effects**
- **Response**



# ACEs: Response

---



**“Many of these children are not at-risk anymore.**

**They are wounded.**

Their deep scars of emotional, physical, and mental pain are stuffed deep inside because, as a society, we are led to believe that they will go away.”

-Joe Hendershott  
Author, “Reaching the Wounded Student”



# ACEs: Response

---

## Good news: Resiliency!

Many changes can be reversed if the trauma is interrupted AND the child is nurtured in a safe environment:

- Provide stable, consistent, predictable relationships
- Recognize trauma-related behaviors in children so your reaction to their behavior does not further traumatize the child
- Help kids feel safe, first, then teach skills for self-regulation





# ACEs: Response

---

## Good news: Resiliency!

- Extend empathy, mercy, grace
- Alternative discipline, like community service
- Give wounded students different avenues to express themselves (music, art, etc.)
- Build self-esteem, find redeeming qualities
- Understand/work on student's emotional intelligence
- Self care





# ACEs: Response

---

**Two big questions...**

**“What’s  
wrong with  
you?”**

**“What  
happened to  
you?”**



# ACEs: Response

---

**...with two schools of thought:**

## **“What’s wrong with you?”**

You can point the finger at parents and wait for them to change. Counseling would help, but they’d have to agree to participate. Free or low-cost counseling for people who can’t afford it isn’t a given in these days of social service budgets stripped to the bone. And counseling would take months, if not years to change the family dynamics. In the meantime, the boy continues to suffer and his behavior grows more belligerent.

## **“What happened to you?”**

Change the schools to become safe and nurturing, so that kids can learn no matter what’s going on at home...or in their neighborhoods...or in their extended families. The reality is, a school’s traditional response – suspending, expelling or putting a child like Sam into special education classes – further traumatizes already traumatized children. That’s the tried and true road to prison or dropping out of school, and a life damaged for no good reason.



# ACEs: Response Example

East Central ISD in San Antonio is taking a “**what happened to you?**” approach with its new Trauma-Informed Care System (EC Cares) thanks to its Student Services Director, John Hernandez

Read *Salud America!* case study on how they did it: [salud.to/ECCares](https://salud.to/ECCares)

Watch *Salud America!* video on how they did it: [salud.to/ECCaresVid](https://salud.to/ECCaresVid)







# Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

---



“Never worry about numbers.

Help one person at a time, and  
always start with the person  
nearest you.”

-Mother Teresa



*Inspiring people to drive community change  
for the health of Latino and all kids.*

[www.salud-america.org](http://www.salud-america.org)



[saludamerica@uthscsa.edu](mailto:saludamerica@uthscsa.edu)

*Creating Culturally Relevant Multimedia Research | Supporting Policy, System, & Environmental Changes*