

**A Few Common Key Messages**  
**Core Concepts on Adverse Childhood Experiences,**  
**Brain Science and Resilience**

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are Common Across All People, Across the World.
- Trauma Response is Intergenerationally Transmitted—through Biology and Behavior.
- Dose matters. Individuals with 3 or more ACEs in their history have a higher health and behavioral risks.
- There are many more types of trauma than were studied in the original ACE study.
- What is good for a child/family who has experienced high levels of trauma—is good for a child/family who has not.
- ACE score is not a diagnostic tool. Your ACE score is not your destiny—it is not an individual predictor of life outcomes. ACEs are what happened to you—not who you are!
- Being ACE aware helps us shift in thinking from “what’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?”
- There are no bad kids/no bad parents—no maladaptive behavior. Rather behavior is adapted to meet needs of individuals. When individuals live in environments of toxic stress their behavior adapts accordingly.
- Understanding ACEs and being trauma informed is not a matter of “us and them”, it’s about all of us.

**Brain Science/Biology**

- Early Exposure to Toxic Stress Effects Brain Development.
- Response to Toxic Stress becomes Embedded in Our Biology.
- Neural pathways used most often are strengthened and often develop into behavioral habits. Unused neural pathways are pared away. Making changing behavior without learning and support very challenging for individuals.
- Children experiencing chronic, toxic stress use very different parts of their brain from children living primarily in safe, nurturing, and light stress environments. Thus, different behaviors and strengths are developed.
- Brains continue to develop and change across the life span;

- However two developmental periods are foundational to the long term well being of individuals:
  - Ages 0 to 3 are a critical time of brain development. Attachment and brain building experiences are incredibly important during this time.
  - Adolescence: Middle School through Early College Years are a time of growth and increased brain plasticity coupled with independence of behavioral choice.
- Individuals can learn how to self-regulate --manage social-emotional triggers-- across the life span. Brains heal!
- Stress hormones triggered during *Fight, Flight or Freeze* experiences impact the body in many ways. When the body is regularly flooded with these hormones, physical systems are triggered and often get strained, which can lead to illness or disease in the long run.

### **Building & Inspiring Resilience**

- *“In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.” (Ungar, M., n.d.) Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University, Toronto, CA.*
- Resilience is dynamic. There are individual AND community contexts for resilience.
- Across cultures, communities and contexts—the words used to describe, what we are calling Resilience tonight, are many—Grit; Wisdom; Courage; Strength; Love; Compassion; Justice; Support; Caring; Family; Mentoring; Case Management. There is not one way to be or experience Resilience.
- One caring person/relationship can really help another heal from trauma.
- Adult self-regulation skills in responding to children are important. Help an adult (parent, teacher, coach, etc) respond calmly, rather than to react based on their own trauma triggers and we begin to mitigate the intergenerational transmission of trauma.
- Teaching social-emotional skills to children helps them learn early on how to respond in high stress situations.

## **You Are a Resilient Individual!**

### **Whatcom County is a Resilient Community!**

As individuals, we have resilience in and around us. Our individual resilience has brought us this far. Our community's resilience has likely helped us along the journey.

Can we build or inspire more resilience individually and as a community?

Yes, absolutely, it is possible.

At WFCN we envision the future knowing we have more work to do together—each of us finding our role, whether that is better managing our own emotional and physical responses to personal history of trauma; working to bring trauma-informed practices into our workplaces and social systems, or changing our mind set to see others through a trauma-informed lens. When people do that...somehow one's whole world view shifts. We stop asking "What is wrong with me, you or those people? We start asking what has happened to me, you or us? We can begin to show more compassion. We can connect authentically and ask: What can I do to make a difference?

### **Whatcom Family & Community Network**

1231 N. Garden Street, #210

Bellingham, WA 98226

360-738-1196

## **REFERENCES**

*Ungar, M. (n.d). What is Resilience?* Retrieved from <http://resilienceresearch.org/about-the-rrc/resilience/14-what-is-resilience>