Identifying Mental Health Issues, Child Abuse, and ACEs During a Pandemic

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Adverse Childhood Experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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What are ACEs?
How Prevalent Are ACEs?

How common are ACEs?

Number of ACEs

- Zero: 36%
- One: 26%
- Two: 16%
- Three: 9.5%
- Four: 12.5%
Are there more ACES than the original 10?
Stress in Children

### Positive Stress
Mild stress in the context of good attachment
- Temporary, mild elevation in stress hormones & brief increase in heart rate
- No buffering, support necessary
- Increased RESILIENCE and confidence
- Development of coping skills

### Tolerable Stress
Serious, temporary stress, buffered by supportive relationships
- More severe, continuing cardiovascular and hormonal response
- Presence of buffering caring adult
- Adaptation and recovery with some possibility for physical/emotional damage

### Toxic Stress
Prolonged activation of stress response system without protection
- Prolonged activation of stress response system & disrupted development of brain and immune system
- No adult
- Buffers

Lifelong consequences:
- Heart disease
- Alcoholism
- Memory & learning difficulties
- Anxiety/depression
- Cancer

https://www.70-30.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Toxic-Stress-large-1.png
Physiologic Impacts of Toxic Stress

• Chronic neuroendocrine activation
  • Sympathetic adrenal medullary system
  • Hypothalamic pituitary adrenocortical system

• Brain Architecture changes
  • Atrophy of prefrontal cortex and hippocampus
  • Hypertrophy of amygdala

• Immune suppression

• Additional systemic impacts

• Behavioral/memory impairment
What are the Impacts of ACEs and Toxic Stress?

https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/images/ace_pyramid_lrg.png
What Do We Know about ACEs During COVID-19?

The New York Times

A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide

Movement restrictions aimed to stop the spread of the coronavirus may be making violence in homes more frequent, more severe and more dangerous.

Surge in divorces anticipated in wake of COVID-19 quarantine

"This is what we are hearing around the country," one lawyer said.

PBS NEWS HOUR

Why child welfare experts fear a spike of abuse during COVID-19

THE LANCET Public Health

Alcohol use and misuse during the COVID-19 pandemic: a potential public health crisis?

James M Clay + Matthew O Parker

Open Access • Published: April 08, 2020 • DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2867(20)30088-8
How Pediatricians Can Promote Resilience

**PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE**

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from setbacks in our lives. It is the way we can prevent stress from causing serious physical, mental and emotional issues. Practicing positive and often simple activities can actually **retrain our brain to be more resilient**!

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Warning Signs of Child Physical Abuse

Ada Booth, MD, FAAP
Driscoll Children’s Hospital
A professional who has direct contact with children in the normal course of business must report child abuse within 48 hours after the professional first suspects that the child has been or may be abused or neglected.

The professional must make the report and may not have another person make the report on behalf of the professional.

1-800-252-5400 CPS Hotline

Family Code §34.01 – 34.08
Who is at Risk?

- Children of all ages, from infancy to adolescence, from any kind of home and background can be abused.
Demographics

- Neglect is actually the most common form of maltreatment (~80%)
- Parents are most often the perpetrator of the child maltreatment (~80%)
- Young children are most vulnerable
  - Infants (<1 year old) make up ~50% of child abuse/neglect fatalities
  - Children under 4 years old make up ~80% of child fatalities
- Domestic violence is a risk factor that often precedes child physical abuse
Risk Factors

• In the Parent:
  • Previous child abused
  • Poor understanding child development
  • Poor impulse control
  • Young age
  • Single parent, few supports
  • Mental illness
  • Domestic violence
  • Substance abuse...

• In the Child:
  • Unwanted pregnancy
  • Different from expectations
  • Born prematurely
  • Handicapped
  • Perceived as difficult
  • Hyperactivity
  • Developmental delays...

PREVIOUS CPS INVOLVEMENT
Physical Abuse

• Consider abuse when...
  • There is no history provided for the injury
  • The injury is inconsistent with the reported history
  • The injury is patterned
  • When domestic violence is present in the home
    • Children present during a domestic violence incident should have an evaluation for physical abuse especially young children

• In older children, bruises are commonly seen abusive injuries
Screening

- Ask the caregiver to describe their child
  - Notice if they use the child’s name to reference them
  - Specifically ask them to tell you a positive attribute of the child if they don’t offer one

- Ask about current stressors and coping mechanisms or supports
  - Can preface it by saying everyone’s stress level is increased during the pandemic
Screening (Telemedicine)

- If doing a telemedicine visit, notice additional household members in the background
  - These could be possible supports or a new partner (or other unrelated adult)
- Also notice the background if visible
  - Is there electricity?
  - Is the home clean and relatively tidy?
- If children are misbehaving or interrupting how does the parent handle it?
  - May give insight into their frustration level or preferred discipline method
Home Visiting Programs
Resources for Parenting
Thank You!!

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Quaran-Teen: Adolescent Mental Health During COVID-19 Pandemic

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Objectives

• Discuss the effects of social isolation on youth
• Incorporate mental health screenings during virtual visits
• Describe places youth seek mental health services
• Use the discussed resources in practice
Adolescent Development

• Oxytocin facilitates bonding and makes social connections more rewarding

• Increase in oxytocin receptors heighten pleasure of socializing

• Friendships excite reward systems in the adolescent brain

• Time spent with peers > time spent with parents and other adults
Why Teens Find Social Distancing Difficult

- Time of separating from parents and bond with peers
- Loss of opportunities
- Adolescent isolation can increase psychological distress
  - Worsen psychiatric vulnerability and exacerbate existing psychological difficulties
  - Lack of in-person peer interaction can negatively impact social skills
- Risky behaviors may increase due to boredom and serve as opportunity to exert independence

Young Adults, Loneliness, and Anxiety During COVID-19

• Over ¼ feel more lonely
• Over ¾ more anxious
• Almost ½ worried about returning into society
• Over ¼ relieved not to socialize as much

https://socialpronow.com/loneliness-corona/#1
Youth, Loneliness, and Mental Health

• Association between loneliness and mental health problems
• Mental health problems seen up to 9 years later
  • Strongest association with depression
  • Possible gender differences
  • Post-traumatic stress disorder
• Loneliness duration predictor of future mental health problems

Loades ME et al. JAACAP May 2020. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009
Case: Sophie

- 14 year-old girl seen by telehealth for abnormal uterine bleeding
- How do you conduct confidential social history?
- How do you conduct mental health screening?
Mental Health Screening

• Mental Health Screeners: PHQ-2/PHQ-9 and GAD-7

• Youth
  • Prefer completing screeners electronically vs. on paper
    • Send by electronic medical record, email, or mail
    • Complete day prior and returned electronically or reviewed day of visit
  • Expressed concerns about confidential screening
    • Make it part of the confidential adolescent history

Case: Sophie

- PHQ-9 = 12 -> moderate depression
- GAD-7 = 10 -> generalized anxiety disorder
- What do you do?
Adolescents, Mental Health, and Emergency Room

- Over 2/3 increase in emergency room (ER) visits for adolescents for mental health issues in last 10 years
  - Girls > boys
  - Non-suicidal self-injury visits up by over 300%
- Almost 1/3 of mental health visits to ER by youth ended up being admitted or transferred

Adolescents, Depression, and Mental Health Services

• <1/3 of youth who are suicidal and about 1/3 of youth with major depression seek professional treatment
• Less likely to use mental health services
  • Latino and African-American youth
  • First-generation immigrant youth
  • First-generation Latinos and Asian-Americans

Adolescents, Schools, and Mental Health Services

- Over 13% of adolescents received some mental health services in school setting
- For adolescents who used mental health services, over half received school-based mental health services
  - 35% of these youth received mental health services only at school
- Racial/ethnic minorities, family income, and insurance type associated with receiving mental health services only at school

Adolescents, Depression, and Telemental Services

• Most youth talk to friends about stress and problems
  • Almost 1/5 had no one to talk to about their feelings
• Almost 1/5 of youth used telemental services
  • Online therapist
  • Chat rooms
  • Self-help resources
  • Crisis line
• Youth who attempted suicide, had suicidal ideation, or a suicide plan more likely to use all telemental services

Toscos T et al. JMIR Ment Health. 2019; 6(6): e13230
Telehealth Challenges for Mental Health Services

• Internet access
• Available device with camera
• Confidential space for session
  • Headphones
• Connecting with provider
Texas Mental Health Resources for Youth

• Child Psychiatry Access Network
  • 1-888-901-CPAN (2726)
  • Resource and referral assistance
  • Behavioral Planning for youth in the care of the pediatrician
  • Psychiatry consultation with a child/adolescent psychiatrist

• Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT)
  • Telemedicine program to provide in-school behavioral health care to at-risk youth
Recommendations for Parents

- Understand their teens frustration on not seeing friends
- Reach out to their teens and validate feelings
- Encourage their teens have a daily routine and healthy habits
- Spend time with friends virtually/in person
- Practice mindfulness
Additional Resources

- Society of Adolescent Health and Medicine
- Child Mind Institute
- HealthyChildren.Org
  - Mental Health During COVID-19: Signs Your Teen May Need More Support

Summary

• Social isolation may have long-term mental health effects on youth
• Mental health screens can be performed during virtual medical visits
• Schools and telemental services can provide important mental health services
• Support and resources available to assist youth and parents during COVID-19
Thank You!!

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Q&A

Evaluation Link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C9572VW