

# Stress, Adversity, & Trauma

## *Helping Students Develop*

# **Resilience**

**Mike Paget, presenter**



## **Stress & Adversity**

### **Stress**

mental or emotional tension from  
challenging or demanding circumstances



### **Adversity**

A state of difficulties, misfortune, hardship,  
or challenge.

Common adversities include physical,  
mental, emotional, social, and financial  
circumstances.



# Trauma

- An event that is physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening.
- **The event:** Personal & direct; indirect: the event occurred to a family member or friend; witnessing trauma.
- **Acute:** single event
- **Chronic & complex:** repeated &/or multiple types



## The impact of TRAUMA: a longitudinal study

[www.cestudy.org](http://www.cestudy.org)

principal investigators: Vincent J. Felitti, M.D. & Robert F. Anda, M.D.  
a collaborative effort of Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control

1. emotional abuse
2. physical abuse
3. sexual abuse
4. emotional neglect
5. physical neglect
6. divorce
7. domestic violence
8. Substance abuse of a parent
9. Parent with mental illness
10. Incarcerated parent

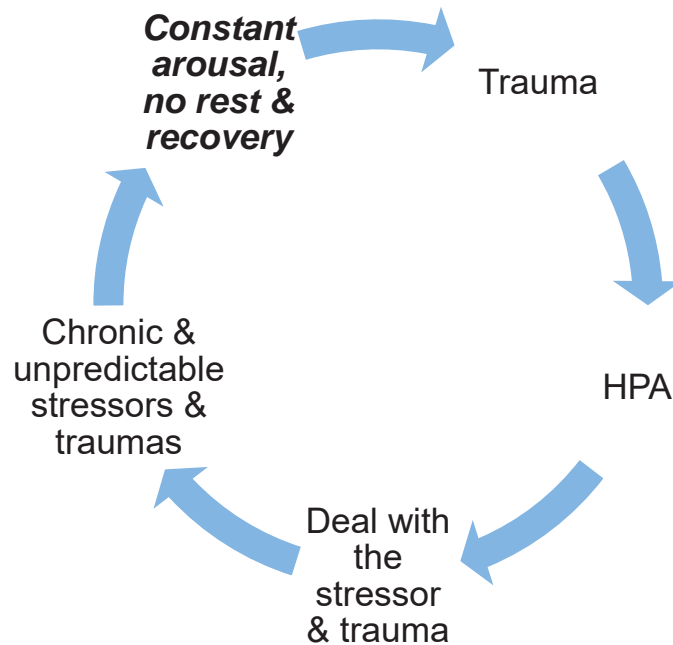
*The ACE study looked at the 10 most common experienced by a group of 300 Kaiser employees. There are many other examples of adversity and trauma.*

- **Bullying**
- **Learning challenges**
- **Watching a sibling being abused**
- **Losing a caregiver**
- **Poverty**
- **Homelessness**
- **Involvement with foster care or juvenile justice**
- **Community violence**
- **Covid**
- **Historical trauma:** Racial trauma, American Indian & Alaska Native communities, Holocaust survivors, Japanese-American survivors of internment camps, LGBTQ communities

## 3+ Traumas

- **In a typical classroom of 30 students 43% have enough traumas to impact behavior!**
- 5x more likely to have attendance issues
- 6x times more likely to have behavior problems
- 3x times more likely to experience academic failure
- Attachments: relationships, empathy, friendships
- Managing your emotions & behavior

# What if the stress rises to the level of trauma, & is chronic & unpredictable???



## Children exposed to Trauma

- Are Wired Differently
  - Trauma disrupts normal neurodevelopment
  - Hypervigilant & Hyper-aroused
- Don't feel safe
- Don't know who to trust
- Are “wired” to protect themselves
- Are at risk for acting out & acting in behaviors
- Require special handling

# Experience has homed in on 6 ways to nurture & strengthen Resiliency

1. Building **positive trusting relationships** is the most important way to build resilience
2. Students need lots of **calm, predictable, & positive experiences** to rewire their brains
3. Students need experiences **practicing new trauma coping skills**
4. Work intentionally on identifying & building **student strengths**
5. Being **positively connected** to your “tribe” and **being useful** strengthen your ability to handle life
6. Fostering **connections to culture, faith and community**

**1. Building positive trusting relationships is the most important way to build resilience**

# Building Relationships

- The “2 X 10” approach to building connections: Have a 2-minute conversation with the student about anything, 10 days in a row
- Make small talk before getting going
- 1:1 conversations with students where you acknowledge their efforts.
- Explore: what they enjoy, what they’re good at, what helps them feel relaxed and able to work and connect.
- Greet students at the door

# Building Relationships

- Support the student in **experimenting** with ideas to improve focus, attention, confidence, mood
  - Preferential seating; Noise-cancelling headphones; a quiet corner; Posted daily schedule/class agenda/weekly planners; Extended time; Break large assignments into smaller chunks; Offer instructions in multiple formats (oral, written, digital); Set small, achievable goals for long-term projects; Provide rubrics; Movement options; Chew gum; Fidgets; Tutoring; Peer help
- Practice smiling
- Each day spend 10 minutes talking to one student.

# **Building Relationships**

## ***Ensure Dignity when Disciplining***

- Avoid public “shaming” through practices like behavior charts.
- Speak in private with students about behavior and take an instructional approach.
- Before taking any action about a student’s behavior, listen very carefully to understand what is going on.

## **The impact of early attachment failures on adolescents**

- A tendency to resist adult engagement in sullen & remote ways
  - Avoid responding in kind.
  - Show unwavering & persistent interest.
- A tendency to cling too quickly to anyone who shows any interest; without healthy boundaries, both peers & adults may take advantage
  - Be aware of appropriate boundaries in your relationships with students.

# More powerful than words

- Non-verbal communication: 93%
  - Your voice: rate, tone, volume
  - Your facial expression
  - Do you smile or frown?
  - Your gestures
  - Your personal distance
- Students with trauma “HEAR” your non-verbal signals more than your words

## **The committed presence of a sensitive, nurturing, & responsive adult is the strongest protective factor**

- ***At least*** one relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult who can help children by restoring a sense of safety, predictability, & control
- “Co-regulation” - Experiencing adversity with a self-regulated adult who models how to manage adversities
- Providing a way to process traumatic events



## 2. Students need lots of **calm, predictable, & positive experiences** to rewire their brains

### Calm, safe, predictable

- All kids benefit from being surrounded by “calm/safe/predictable”, but especially those with high ACEs
  - Predictable consistent routine
  - Clear expectations
  - Posted visuals to reinforce expectations
  - Adults who are predictable
  - Visual schedules
- Show up
  - Accept the student no matter what behaviors happen
  - Be an adult in that student’s life who is going to accept him and believe in him

# Awareness Accommodations

- Become aware of “hot buttons” or things that cause a student to be uncomfortable
- Make sensitive adjustments
- Involve the student in identifying when they need something adjusted

***– “I think this might make it more comfortable for you. What do you think?”***

**Give frequent opportunities to “do something” with the information they are learning**

- Examples:
- talk with a peer
- Teacher-student/student-teacher pairings
- hands-on activities
- think-pair-share
- PowerPoints
- interactive note-taking (writing phrases or drawing pictures to express what you’re learning)

### 3. Students need experiences practicing new trauma coping skills

#### Learning to handle yourself

- Takes lots of repetition and practice
- **Carving out didactic SEL instruction times isn't enough; students need to be surrounded by "good handling" of feelings**
  - Adults who constantly model good handling
  - Routines for dealing with situations that include fairness and kindness and repairing wrongs



# Co-Regulation

- Many students need an adult to help them regulate: “CO-REGULATION”
- Only a well-regulated adult can help
- Co-regulation is sharing the experience of being regulated
- It is primarily a non-verbal, right brained process
- Listen, tune in, and focus on empathy

## Teach social skills to all

- Class wide social skills on problem solving, emotional intelligence, & handling emotions will be helpful for all.
- Students with trauma histories will get the instruction without being stigmatized.
- Classmates will improve the teaching by sharing.

# Redefine “success” with new trauma handling skills

- Social emotional skills are slow to soak in
- Kids need lots of practice
- Practice happens in the presence of adults
- Kids need praise and positive feedback for *practicing* SEL skills



## Restorative Justice

Consider implementing school wide restorative justice practices.



## 4. Work intentionally on identifying & building **student strengths**

### Building Student Strengths

- Power Capes
- Appreciate “neurodiversity”
- Dr. Thomas Armstrong
  - *Neurodiversity In The Classroom*
  - *You’re Smarter Than You Think*
- Literature, e.g., *The Pact*
- Power Stones



## 5. Being **positively connected** to your “tribe” and **being useful** strengthen your ability to handle life

### Connected & Useful

- Look at your roster and figure out who is on the margins.
  - Assign an adult to reel them in.
  - Find a peer who might help connect them.
- Clubs & Activities
- Student focus groups
- Watch for ways students may be helpful to others
- Watch for skills students have that may help a teacher, a class, or the school

## 6. Fostering connections to culture, faith and community

### Cultures, Faith traditions, & Families

- Identify the Variety of Cultures represented in the school
  - Consider a hallway with flags, information, pictures of food, pictures of musical instruments; Have special cultural appreciation days including sample menus and music
- Faith traditions
  - Identify the holidays and celebrations of faith traditions represented in your school. Teach about them and ensure respect for all faith traditions.
- A **Supported Family** creates a space to nurture resilience
  - Food, Shelter, Financial stability