

Parents Were Children Once Too

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Learning to be a parent

Parents learn how to be parents from their own experience of childhood.



In a 2010 ZERO TO THREE survey, over 80% of parents of infants and toddlers reported their parents as important influences on their parenting.

Lack of accurate information

Popular misconceptions about early development:

- ***Their ability to experience sadness and fear***
- ***When they can be affected by their parents' moods***
- ***How early in life they are capable of feeling good or bad about themselves***
- ***When it is appropriate to expect them to control their emotions***



Adverse Childhood Experiences

- ***Recurrent physical abuse***
- ***Recurrent emotional abuse***
- ***Contact sexual abuse***
- ***Emotional neglect***
- ***Physical neglect***
- ***An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household***
- ***An incarcerated household member***
- ***A member of the household who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal***
- ***Mother is treated violently***
- ***One or no parents***

Adverse Childhood Experiences Linked to:

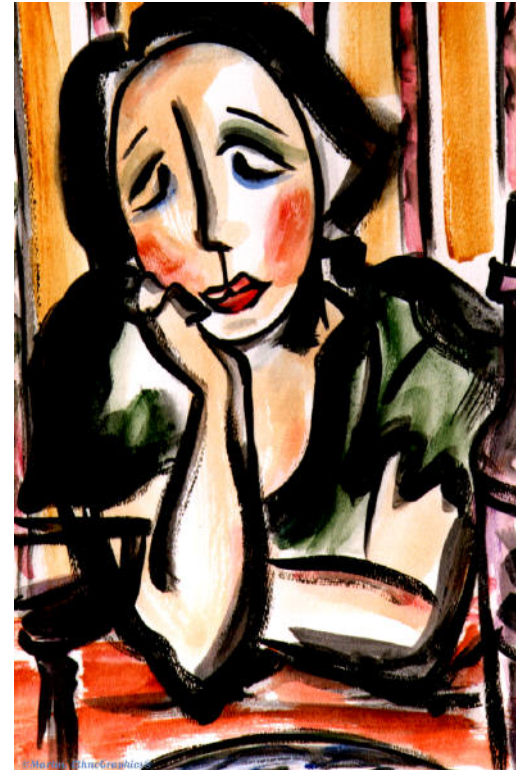
- **Teen pregnancy**
- **Sexual behavior**
- **Alcoholism**
- **Stability of relationships**
- **Risk of revictimization**
- **Mental health**
- **Suicide attempts**



The more troubling the childhood, the greater the number and severity of medical and psychological conditions in adulthood.

Co-occurrence of:

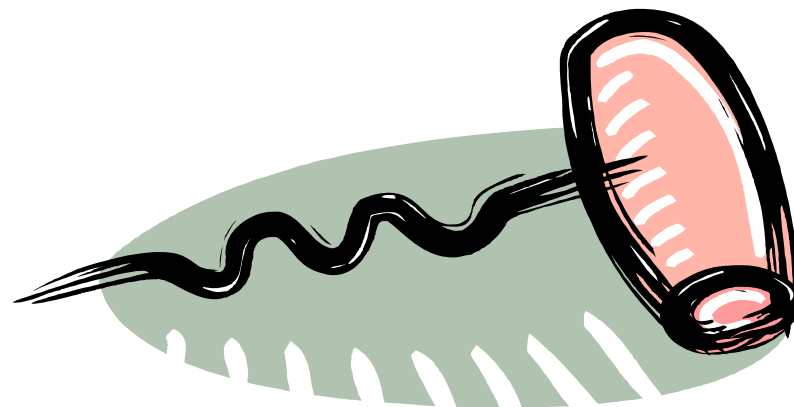
- Poverty
- Substance abuse
- Depression
- Mental health disorder(s)
- Domestic violence
- Housing insecurity
- Medical problems
- Educational failure
- Job loss/unemployment
- Absent or insufficient support network



- Being born poor is a good predictor of later poverty.***
- The more years the child spends in poverty the worse his adult outcomes:***
- less likely to graduate from high school.***
 - more likely to be poor as adults.***
- Adolescent childbearing is three times more likely among women who were born poor.***
- Poor mothers of infants who are suffering from severe depression are more likely to be dealing with domestic violence and substance abuse.***

Parents with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

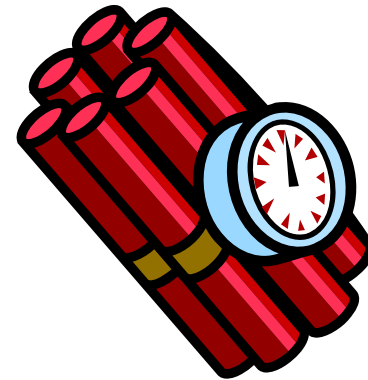
- ***Difficulty planning, organizing, prioritizing, initiating and following through***
- ***Difficulty learning from past experiences***
- ***Impaired judgment***
- ***Poor receptive language skills***
- ***Difficulty switching gears***
- ***Defective memory***



- ***Maturity consistent with a much younger age than their chronological age***
- ***Inability to predict outcomes***
- ***Short trigger***

Impulse control issues that lead to:

- ***Irritability***
- ***Aggression***
- ***Episodes of rage***
- ***Promiscuity***
- ***A lot of time spent in the principal's office, in in-school detention, suspension, and ultimately expulsion if their aberrant behavior is dangerous enough.***
- ***Delinquent acts as adolescents that turn into repeated offenses as they age, escalating the legal consequences with each arrest.***



FASD Secondary Symptoms

- ***Fatigue***
- ***Anxiety***
- ***Aggressiveness***
- ***Destructiveness***
- ***Social isolation***
- ***Family***
or school problems
(fighting, suspension,
expulsion)
- ***Trouble with the law***
- ***Depression***



Does this parent...

- ***Seem disorganized?***
- ***Have trouble following through on plans or keeping appointments?***
- ***Repeat the same mistake over and over?***
- ***Quickly forget things you told them recently?***
- ***Take personal risks that could put them or their child in danger?***
- ***Seem very eager to please you to the point where they provide incorrect information if they think that's what you want to hear?***
- ***Spend a long time thinking before answering questions?***
- ***Display discomfort (tears, anger, frustration) when transitioning from one activity or routine to another?***
- ***Exhibit behavior you typically associate with a much younger person?***
- ***Have trouble getting and keeping jobs?***
- ***Act impulsively?***
- ***Have a history of delinquent or criminal behavior without much ability to explain what they did wrong?***
- ***Seem stubborn?***
- ***Misread social cues?***
- ***Have problems with depression or isolation?***
- ***Drink or use drugs?***
- ***Demonstrate an inability to manage money?***

Depression



Experiencing child maltreatment between birth and two years of age is associated with depression in adulthood.

Women who were victims of child sexual abuse were found to be at increased risk for maternal depression.

How Depression Affects Parenting

- ***Maternal depression during the prenatal period is associated with complicated deliveries and after birth with crying, fussiness, and inconsolability in newborns.***
- ***Four out of every ten poor infants lives with a depressed mother.***
- ***Almost half (48%) of parents evaluated by the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project were found to be depressed.***
- ***Depressed mothers are at increased risk for committing physical abuse.***
- ***Substance abuse and domestic violence frequently occur in homes with depressed mothers.***

Adult victims suffer from:

- ***low self esteem***
- ***eating disorders***
- ***depression***

They are at risk for suicide.



Domestic Violence Risk Factors

For the victim...

Childhood exposure to:

- ***domestic violence***
- ***physical abuse***
- ***sexual abuse***

made women 3.5 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence as adults

And victimizer...

Witnessing or experiencing violence as a child is a major risk factor for growing up to become abusive in intimate relationships.

Historical Trauma



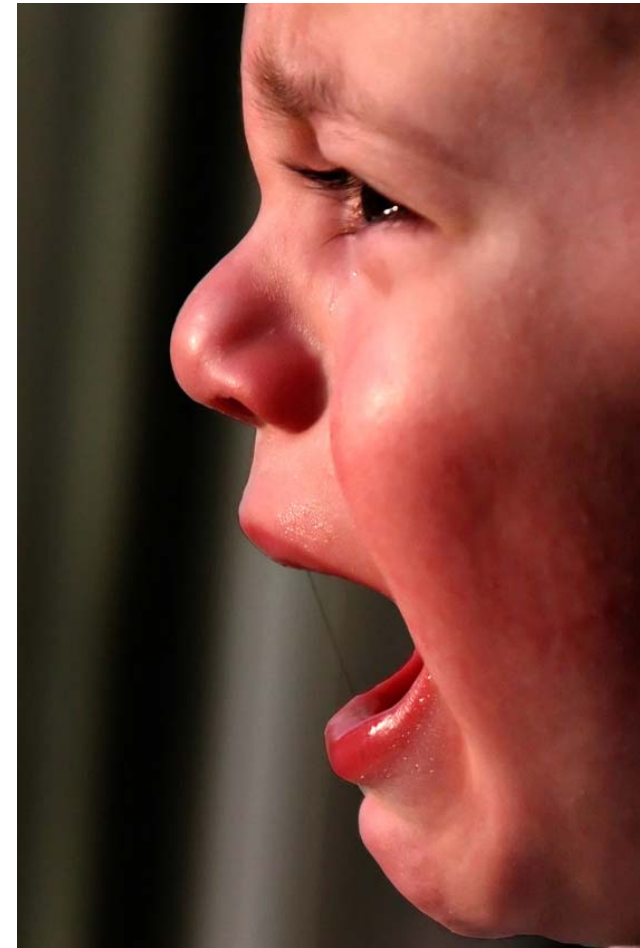
The Other Side of the Coin

“Social privilege is usually something that facilitates the optimal development of an individual, increases access to societal opportunities, or simply makes life easier but is not acquired by virtue of merit or personal effort. It is gained simply by being a member of the group that is privileged... The privileged characteristic is legitimized as the norm and those who stand outside of it are considered deviant, deficient, or defective.”

—Greene, B. (2003). *What Difference Does a Difference Make? Societal Privilege, Disadvantage, and Discord in Human Relationships* in Diversity in Human Interactions. Robinson, J.D., James, L.C. (ed.) New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Child Sexual Abuse

- ***Post Traumatic Stress Disorder***
- ***Suicidal behavior***
- ***Depression and anxiety***
- ***Low self esteem***
- ***Dissociation, phobias, paranoid thoughts, obsessive compulsive disorder***
- ***Substance abuse***
- ***Eating disorders***
- ***Personality disorder***
- ***Increased risk for marrying an alcoholic***
- ***Teen parenting***



Child Sexual Abuse Victims as Parents



- ***Less in tune with their children***
- ***Less responsive to their children's needs***
- ***More punitive in child-rearing practices***
- ***Greater use of physical methods of discipline***
- ***Disrespectful of the child's boundaries***
- ***Unable to appropriately read a baby's cues***
- ***Physically intrusive***

Parents who Physically Abuse

- **Impaired social skills**
- **Impaired cognitive skills**
- **Poor problem- solving skills**
- **Negative attributional bias**
- **History of childhood abuse (as many as 75%)**
- **More negative perceptions of their children**
- **Unrealistically high expectations for their children's behavior**



Parents who Neglect Their Young Children

- ***Young age***
- ***Low self-esteem***
- ***Reduced knowledge of child development***
- ***Impaired empathy***
- ***History of maltreatment when they were children***

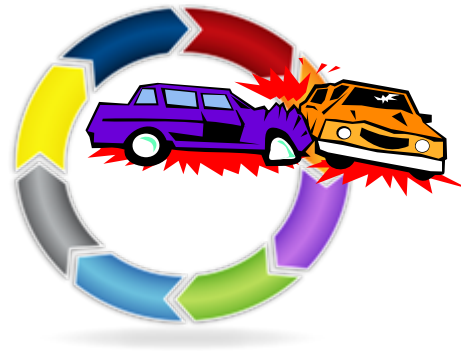
Highly likely to experience:

- ***Maternal depression***
- ***Substance abuse***



Overlapping findings (ACE Study)

Adult children of alcoholics were more likely to be depressed as adults.



Childhood sexual abuse was much more likely when the parent was an alcoholic.

Substance abuse, domestic violence, and depression are the adult sequellae of significant childhood trauma.

Treating them in isolation from the root causes will not address the problems parents need to overcome to be good enough caregivers.

Rely on Objective Data



- ***Use risk assessment instruments, checklists, and guidelines when evaluating family functioning.***
- ***Examine all the evidence before reaching a conclusion and keep an open mind.***
- ***Be willing to consider facts that conflict with your initial assessment.***

Looking at Every Angle

- ***Re-evaluate the family's strengths and challenges regularly. Look for patterns of behavior over time rather than basing decisions only on present-day issues.***
- ***Incorporate research findings about risk factors for child maltreatment into analysis of each family's circumstances.***
- ***Review written records. Witnesses are unreliable for a host of reasons including their feelings about the parents and the children.***



Therapeutic Considerations

Treatment planning for people with FASD related cognitive and information processing deficits should be very different from treatment planning for people who have the ability to learn from their mistakes, predict the future based on past experiences, and remember instructions.

Alcohol and drugs are used to make otherwise unbearable circumstances bearable. Unless and until the painful memories and current stressors are addressed, substance abuse will continue to be the chief symptom of the parent's dysfunctional relationship with his or her child.

Building a healthy parent-child relationship requires a focus on that relationship. Professionals can support this goal through:

- ***Child-parent psychotherapy.***
- ***Parent-child contact that includes a therapeutic or coaching component.***
- ***Foster placements for parents and child together and/or where the foster parent mentors the birth parents.***
- ***Recognition and support of parents in coming to terms with their traumatic histories.***

Some Parents Won't Be Able to Reunify

Many of the parents who come into the child welfare system are very damaged by their experiences in life. Some of them are so damaged that they may never be appropriate caregivers for their children. By respecting and valuing their love for their children, we give them the gift of dignity, whatever the permanency outcome.

Contact information

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ZERO TO THREE is moving on January 21, 2011

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