

Childhood trauma's lasting impact

Finding ways to create safe spaces for youth

Sexual assault has lasting effects on individuals and communities. Assault and abuse in childhood impacts growth and development for decades, even a lifetime. Although children are incredibly resilient, it is up to adults and caring professionals to keep children safe and support their well-being. Every community has the power and responsibility to create safer spaces for children. This fact sheet offers background and recommendations for communities interested in starting necessary conversations around preventing child sexual abuse.

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Trauma experienced in childhood can have lasting effects into adulthood. Abuse and neglect can impact how a child perceives the world around them and how they interact with other children and adults.

Children are incredibly resilient and often overcome trauma with the support of caring adults and responsive systems.

Child sexual abuse

A person sexually abuses a child when they coerce or manipulate that child into witnessing or participating in a sexual act. **Almost 93% of abusers know and are trusted by the child they abuse.** Sexual abuse can be contact or non-contact (e.g. watching pornographic material). People who abuse children will often push non-contact boundaries before escalating to contact sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse is a serious public health problem effecting hundreds of thousands of children and families each year. According to a recent national study (Black et al., 2011), 42% of women who experienced a completed rape experienced it before the age of 18. Twenty-eight percent of men who experienced a completed rape reported an assault happened before the age of 10.



While New Jersey state law defines child sexual abuse as **an act committed by “a parent, guardian, or other person having custody and control,”** New Jersey takes all reports of child sexual abuse seriously, regardless of the relationship between survivor and offender.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

In the late 1990s the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) partnered with Kaiser Permanente, a health management organization in California. The first wave of the project included over 17,000 people about current mental, physical, and emotional well-being, as well as past experiences. **They called some of these “Adverse Childhood Experiences” or ACEs.**



Do you suspect a child is being abused or hurt by someone in their life?

**Call the State Central Registry at
1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)**

A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously.

ACEs included:

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Contact Sexual Abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Mother treated violently
- Someone in the house who has a mental illness
- Someone in the house who has been incarcerated
- Parental separation or divorce
- Someone in the house with a substance use history

Almost 66% of participants reported at least one ACE, and 21% reported experiencing contact sexual abuse as a child (Anda & Felitti, 2003). **ACEs have been linked to an increased likelihood of harmful physical health outcomes, such as smoking and obesity.** People with an ACE score at least four were twice as likely to be smokers, seven times more likely to experience alcoholism, 10 times more likely to use illicit drugs, and 12 times more likely to have attempted suicide (Anda & Felitti, 2003).

What does the ACE Study tell us?

ACEs impact physical and mental health beyond the initial years of the trauma. **Proactive and intentional prevention and early intervention are keys to reducing the long-term impact of trauma and abuse.**

CREATING SAFER SPACES FOR YOUTH

Communities have the wisdom, resources, and strength to create safer spaces for all children. In the past, education and prevention efforts have focused on talking to children about their boundaries and personal safety. While this is important work, adults must now take responsibility for keeping children safe and holding other adults accountable for inappropriate behavior. **We can, and must, show children in our communities that their safety is important.**

Begin by believing

It takes a tremendous amount of courage for a child to tell someone about abuse they are experiencing or have experienced. It is especially hard when the person abusing them is a family member, friend, or trusted adult. Simply saying “I believe you and you have the right to feel safe” can have a tremendous impact on how that child will feel.

RESOURCES

New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault

www.njcasa.org

A full listing of rape crisis centers and contact information can be found on NJCASA's website. For immediate assistance call the 24-hour Statewide Hotline at 1-800-601-7200.

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey

www.preventchildabuse.nj.org

REFERENCES

Anda, R. & Felitti, V. (2003). Origins and essence of the study. *ACE Reporter*, (1/1).

Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 summary report*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/>