Building Resilience: 
Supporting Patients Through Their Trauma

The Peony Project
Child Life

Trauma

“Results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

A study was conducted to see if there was a relationship between childhood experiences and health outcomes and behaviors. This study found that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are highly correlated with an increase in health and well-being issues throughout that individual’s life.

Impact of ACES

Approximately 34 million children in the US are impacted by ACEs. Two out of three adults have experienced one or more ACE and one out of every eight have experienced four or more.

Being exposed to higher amounts of ACEs negatively impacts a child’s stress response. This keeps the child in a constant state of “fight or flight”. As a result, the impact of this toxic stress negatively affects a child’s brain and body and can stick with this child for the rest of his or her life if left unaddressed. Some problems include learning difficulties, lifelong health problems, depression, substance abuse, and suicide.

Healthcare settings can aid in the reduction of the impact of ACEs on patients by practicing trauma-informed care and helping the patient develop resilience.

Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-Informed Care- “An approach to engaging people with histories of trauma that recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma has played in their lives”

4 R’s of providing Trauma Informed Care within a Hospital:

♥ Realize- the impact of trauma and the potential for recovery
♥ Recognize- the signs and symptoms of trauma
♥ Respond- by integrating knowledge into policies, procedures, and practices
♥ Resist Re-traumatization- actively and intentionally use best practice as to not re-traumatize patients

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Mechanism by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

What is considered an ACE?

There are three categories that make up ACEs. They include: Abuse, Neglect, and Household Dysfunction.

Abuse
Emotional
Physical
Sexual

Neglect
Emotional
Physical

Household Dysfunction
Domestic Violence
Mental Illness
Separation or Divorce
Incarceration

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Resilience—“an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

Resilience can be learned when risk factors are lowered and protective factors are improved.

Protective Factors Include:

- Good relationships with family and friends/social support
- Interests and hobbies
- Coping skills
- Positive self-esteem
- Good social skills

The Certified Child Life Specialists that are on the Peony Project spend 7 days a week working to help increase these protective factors with each patient that is followed by ACS and CPS.

To aid in each child gaining resilience, these Certified Child Life Specialists create a supportive relationship, help patients build their own self-regulation skills, and alter the patient’s environment when needed.

**Ways to Create a Supportive Relationship**

- Be patient
- Give choices and control when possible
- Be available
- Respond, don’t react
- Actively and reflectively listen
- Act consistently and predictably
- Don’t take behavior personally
- Teach relaxation skills

**Ways to be a Reflective Listener:**

- Make eye contact
- Be mindful of your tone, volume, and speed in which you speak
- Use nonthreatening and positive body language (arms uncrossed, appropriate proximity to the individual, facing towards the individual, fitting facial expressions, etc.)

**Self-Regulation**—“ability to monitor and control one’s behavior, emotions, or thoughts, altering them in accordance to the situation.”

Children who have difficulties with self-regulation may display externalized behaviors (tantrums, fighting, not following directions) or internalized behaviors (anxiety, sadness, easily upset).

Certified Child Life Specialists aid in patients strengthening and gaining self-regulation skills by introducing tools such as deep breathing, taking a break, turning off lights, exercise, music, drawing/writing, play, and choices with time to process.

When working with a patient who has experienced abuse/neglect, be mindful of the impact of your interactions and avoid creating a challenging incident.

**Factors That May Cause a Challenging Incident:**

- Lack or loss of control
- Observing threats
- Isolation
- Interacting with authority figures
- Lack of information
- Being told what to do
- Transitions and disruptions in routine
- Feelings of vulnerability and rejection
- Being touched
- Being watched
- Personal questions
- Being locked in a room
- Condescending looks
- Insecurity
- Separation or loss
- Sensory overload (loud sounds, too many people)
- Lack of privacy
- Feeling threatened/attacked
- Loud noises
- Darkness
- Being ignored

**Always feel free to contact Child Life!!**

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