



A scenic landscape featuring a forest of green and yellow trees on a hillside overlooking a calm, teal-colored lake. The text "Defining Trauma" is overlaid in the center.

Defining Trauma

Objectives – To equip individuals with a clear understanding of what trauma is and a deeper understanding of how it affects feelings, thoughts, and behavior.

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Overwhelm

Integrate

What does it mean to be
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of a traumatic event?

The three H's: Helplessness,
Hopelessness, and
Horror/Terror.

Helplessness, hopelessness and horror/terror are highly psychological *and* physiological experiences, involving extremely quick interpretations of the event and acute, uncomfortable physical sensations such as difficulty breathing and a pounding heart.

What is Helplessness?

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- Helplessness is the inability or perceived inability to defend oneself or others from threat or harm.
- Helplessness is the inability or perceived inability to self-preserve (such as fleeing, fighting, freezing, or fawning).
- Helplessness is usually accompanied by the physical experience of 'freezing,' or paralysis. Emotionally it can be delirium.

What is Hopelessness?

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- Hopelessness is accompanied by an internal sense of 'sinking.'

What is Horror/Terror?

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- Psychologically, the experience of horror/terror is the realization that the traumatic event is far, or exceedingly far, beyond the realm of ordinary human experience and threatens existence.
- Horror/terror is accompanied by an internal sense of shock.

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A powerful cascade of neurochemicals often rushes in to dampen or obliterate consciousness of the most painful aspects of the event

Those aspects of the traumatic experience that fragment from conscious awareness at the time of the occurrence become post-traumatic stress.

Definition: *Trauma is any overwhelming, distressing experience that cannot be integrated at or near the time of the event (within three days).*

Which two words in this definition might need further clarification?

Overwhelm

Integrate

What is Integration?

What is Integration?

To become fully conscious of the sensations, feelings, and implications of the traumatic event – that one's life or another's life, physical integrity, or emotional and psychological cohesion has been threatened.

What is Integration?

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- During integration, one becomes aware of how the event affected self or loved ones.
- One may reflect on the impact the event has had on one's future life or the future life of others such as one's children or future generations.
- One may reflect on the effect the event has had on one's business or ability to work or to *live ably*.

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- One may contemplate the temporary or near loss of psychological and emotional cohesion, 'losing one's mind.'

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- One may contemplate the temporary or near loss of psychological and emotional cohesion, 'losing one's mind.'
- One may struggle to reorient oneself to an expanded vision of herself/himself that includes the capacity to feel helplessness, hopelessness, and horror/terror.

What is Integration?

- During integration, one completes the cycle of emotional response that was initiated at the occurrence of the event, but that may have been cut off due to the overwhelming nature of the event.

What is Integration?

- As feelings rise to consciousness to become felt and incorporated into conscious awareness, uncomfortable physical sensations may emerge as the body struggles to resolve physical tension created when the energy from cut off emotional responses was stored in the body for later reconciliation to consciousness.

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- As feelings rise to consciousness to become felt and incorporated into conscious awareness, uncomfortable physical sensations may emerge as the body struggles to resolve physical tension created when the energy from cut off emotional responses was stored in the body for later reconciliation to consciousness.
- These might include: muscle cramping, nausea, neck pain, stomach pain, and headaches.

What is Integration?

Integration means that one has incorporated a reorientation to life that involves personally unprecedented feelings and emotions.

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Integration means that one has incorporated a reorientation to life that involves personally unprecedented feelings and emotions.

Integration includes incorporating an expanded concept of self that includes the traumatic event and its consequences.

...back to an earlier question

What are some traumas that are often not thought of as traumatic events?

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- Neglect
- Humiliation
- Bullying
- Being manipulated
- Being betrayed
- Divorce/break-up of intimate relationship
- Any distressing loss or event on top of previous unresolved trauma

What are some traumas that are often not thought of as traumatic events?

- Prenatal or perinatal trauma (pre-birth or surrounding birth). These are important to keep in mind because we must remember that there are some traumatic events that happen so far back that there is no memory or other record of them; and yet, they still may be the driving force of inscrutable behavior.

What are some traumas that are often not thought of as traumatic events?

- Abuse or trauma that occurs in an environment in which the abuse or trauma has become *socially normalized*; e.g., living in violence-prone housing complexes or zones of warfare.

What are some signs of unresolved trauma?

Sudden full memory of the event
Worrying
Irritability
Emotional numbness
Difficulty with memory
Uncontrollable thoughts about the event
Nightmares
Fear about the environment
Bizarre beliefs or understandings
Visions
Hearing sounds or voices
Fear of specific objects or situations
Panic attacks
Rage
Inability to trust others
Not 'being here'

What are some resultant behaviors of unresolved trauma?

Substance use

Avoidant behavior

Compulsive behavior

Staying active

Staying still

Isolating/withdrawing

Manipulation

Lying

Collecting

Lack of concern for one's safety

Lack of concern for others' safety

Tendency toward homelessness

Each of these behaviors is an effort to find safety and to extinguish danger



Common outcomes of resolved, i.e., integrated trauma, are *wisdom* and an *enriched ability to cherish and enjoy life.*



Validating Trauma and It's Effects
By Brenda Vezina, LSW

“What Happened to You?”

a documentary about Trauma

Trauma is often overlooked in connection to our understanding of people who are experiencing mental health issues, or have been given mental health diagnoses. Studies show that the impact of Trauma, especially childhood Trauma, is profound and life altering.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? is a documentary produced by the Central Mass Recovery Learning Community which focuses on the cause-and-effect relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and the challenges we face in life.

“What Happened to You?”

a documentary about Trauma

The film is highlighted by an interview with Dr. Robert Anda of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), co-researcher of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, the largest long-term study to examine this link.

Our environment and our experiences matter. Often, individuals who end up diagnosed with “mental illness” are simply caught in a trauma response to early adverse experiences. Instead of saying “What’s Wrong With You” we should be asking “What Happened to You?”



DOCUMENTARY



- *A Sister's Call*
- *Heart and Soul*
- *Inocente*
- *Mind Zone*
- *Shine*
- *The Invisible War*
- *What Happened to You?*

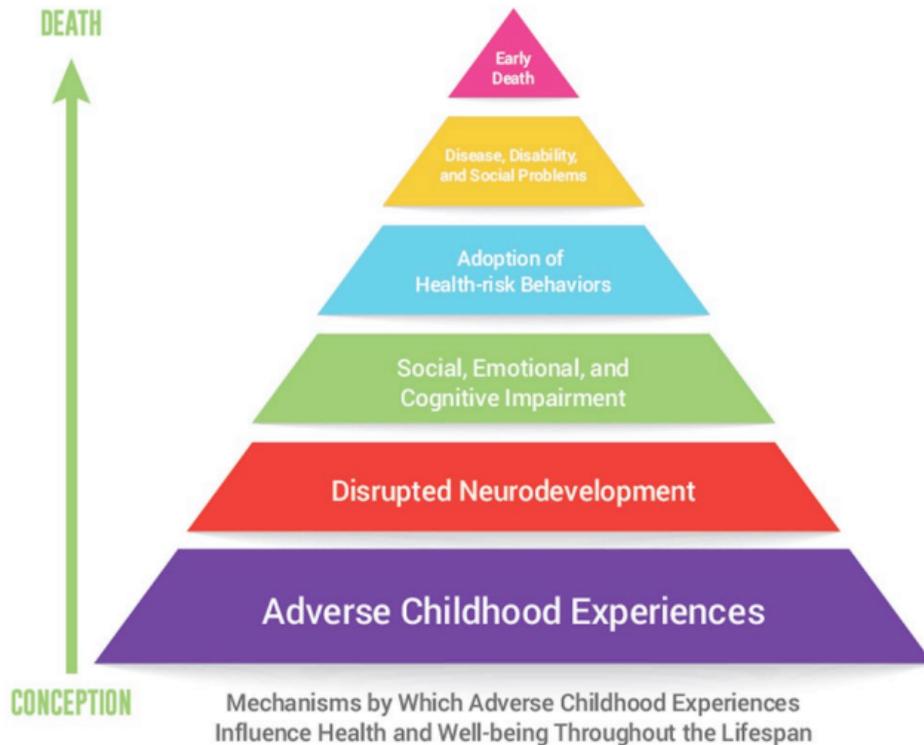
- **"Army Wives"**
Domestic Maneuvers | Season 6, Episode 22
- **"Girls"**
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Storyline | Season 2
- **"Grey's Anatomy"**
Remember the Time | Season 9, Episode 2
- **"Law & Order: Special Victims Unit"**
Dreams Deferred | Season 14, Episode 9
- **"Nurse Jackie"**
Substance Use Disorder Storyline | Season 4
- **"Parenthood"**
Asperger's Syndrome Storyline | Season 4



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



The A.C.E. Study



“We needed something that pulled all of this research together, and looked at it from a public health perspective.”

- Dr. Rob Anda

The A.C.E. Study

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (A.C.E.) Study is the most significant long term study ever conducted examining the intrinsic link between childhood trauma or neglect, and emotional, physiological, and social issues in life.

The ACE Study included more than 17,000 Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) members undergoing comprehensive physical examinations and providing detailed information about their childhood experience of abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction.

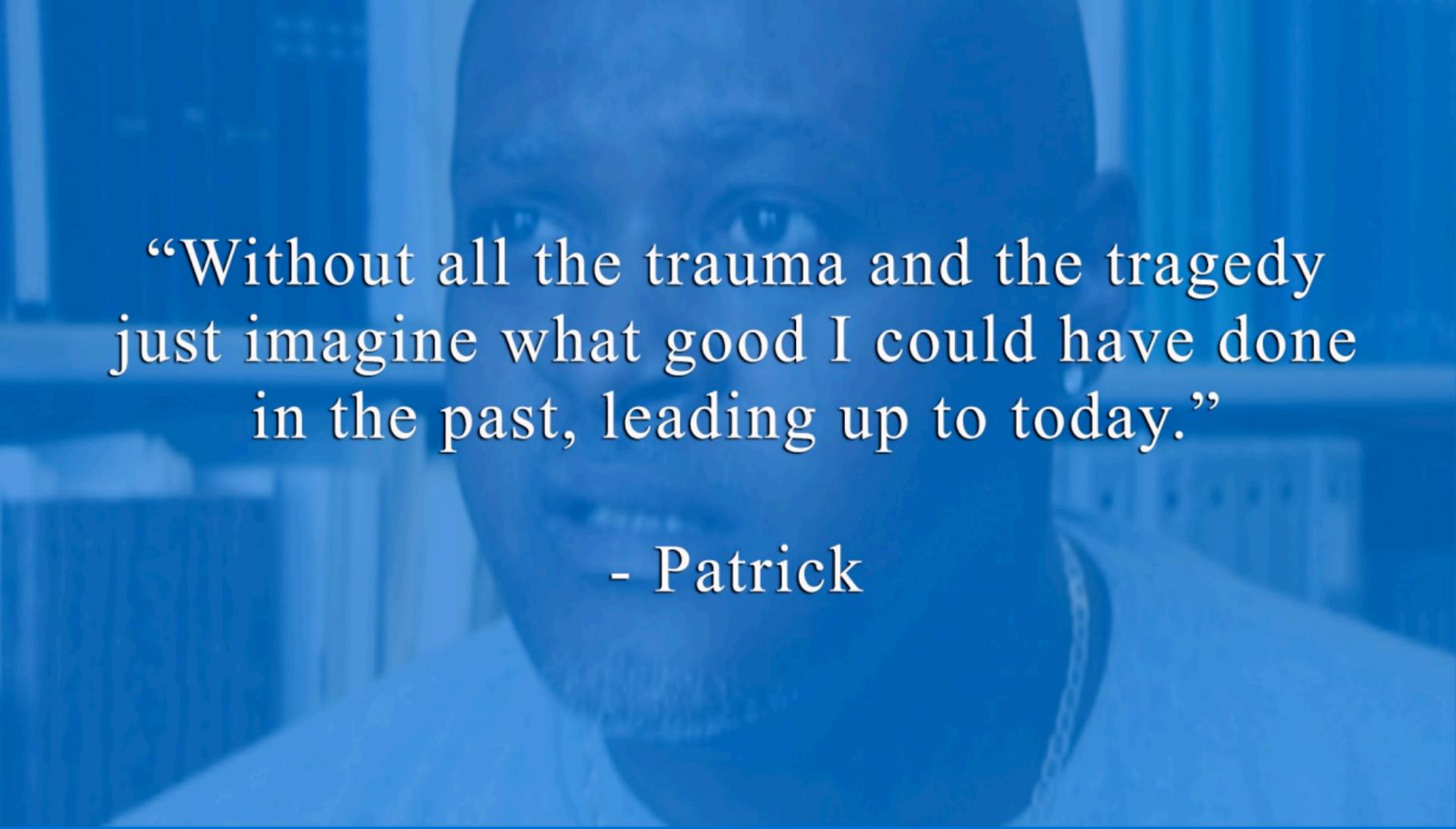
ACEs have a statistically significant influence on:

- Adolescent health**
- Teen pregnancy**
- Smoking**
- Alcohol abuse**
- Illicit drug use**
- Sexual behavior**
- Mental Health**
- Risk of re-victimization**
- Stability of relationships**
- Performance in the workforce**

ACEs have a statistically significant influence on:

- Heart disease**
- Chronic lung disease**
- Liver disease**
- Suicide**
- Injuries**
- HIV and STDs**
- Other risks for leading causes of death**

ACE Study findings suggest that certain experiences are major risk factors for the leading causes of illness and death, as well as poor quality of life, in the United States.



“Without all the trauma and the tragedy
just imagine what good I could have done
in the past, leading up to today.”

- Patrick



“Everyone has their story, and this is just mine. I think it makes me more of an empathetic person, in that everyone is going through something.”

- Katie

“I thought there would be more help coming for me. And when those nights went by, and there wasn’t any... I knew that I needed to be that help for myself.”

- Brenda Vezina, LSW

**This documentary was created with
the intention of informing systems of care,
communities, individuals and families, to make
it safe to discuss, understand and heal from
trauma, and its devastating effects.**

WHAT'S NEXT?

How do we validate Trauma?

**How do we address the centrality
of Trauma and Public Health?**

**How do we apply Trauma Informed Care
and help people build Resilience?**

**The Kiva Center of the Central Mass
Recovery Learning Community hopes to
enhance awareness of trauma and support public
health, by providing trauma-informed education
and supports to systems and communities of
care, and by building emotional resilience
for our communities and partners.**

**I am not what happened to me.
I am still with purity and innocence.
No one can take that away from me.**

- Carlos Santana