OPIOID TRAINING MODULE 3
CONNECTING PARENTAL OPIOID USE TO CHILD TOXIC STRESS
This training is offered by the Florida (FL) Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association and JBS International. It is supported by funding from the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (Contract #LD987) as part of its Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis (O-STR) grant efforts.
THE PURPOSE OF THE OPIOID STR GRANT

Through prevention, treatment, and recovery activities for opioid use disorder (OUD) including prescription opioids and illicit drugs (e.g., heroin), the grant aims to address the opioid crisis by:

- Increasing access to treatment;
- Reducing unmet treatment needs; and
- Reducing opioid overdose-related deaths.
Participants will:

- Name the three types of childhood stress and provide an example of each
- Describe the specific ways in which parents with OUD can contribute to the development of toxic stress in their children
- Articulate at least one action they can take to identify or ameliorate toxic stress in children of parents with OUD.
Little research has focused on the effects on children of parents who abuse prescription opioids, despite their recent sharp increase in use.

Staff and advocates who work in the child welfare and judicial systems may have greater understanding of connections between methamphetamine and child maltreatment (e.g., dramatic mood swings, violent behavior, and sexual aggression).

Emerging research, however, makes an important case for the need to better understand the less overt parental behaviors (e.g., absence of responsive care) that can have devastating consequences for children.
OPIOID USE CONSEQUENCES

- Poor ability to regulate one’s own behaviors.
- Impaired memory.
- Decreased capacity for making decisions.
- Decreased ability to imagine future events and interactions.

- Poor executive functioning:
  - Diminished ability in being flexible with tasks.
  - Impaired reasoning skills.
  - Poor ability to problem-solve.
  - Poor planning skills.
REDUCED ABILITY TO CARE FOR CHILDREN

- Parents with an OUD have a reduced ability to care for their children.
- In the most extreme circumstances, opioid abuse can lead to a child’s removal from their home, and placement in foster care.
Florida’s Opioid Crisis: Thousands of Babies Born to Addicts or Removed From Users’ Homes

Drug-Addiction Epidemic Creates Crisis in Foster Care

- October 07, 2016
- By Tressa Witt
A critical aspect of the opioid epidemic is its effect on the ability of opioid-dependent parents to care for their children.

ABSTRACT A critical aspect of the opioid epidemic is its effect on the ability of opioid-dependent parents to care for their children. In this article we investigate the association between the rate of removals of children from their homes and the opioid prescription rate in Florida counties during 2012–15. We performed a panel data analysis of opioid prescriptions that also controlled for the prescription rates of benzodiazepines and stimulants and for other risk factors for child removal. We found that a one-standard-deviation increase in the opioid prescription rate was associated with a 32 percent increase in the removal rate for parental neglect. When we obtained subset samples by percentage of white residents, the estimated relationships were approximately twice as large in the counties with the highest concentration of whites than in the counties with the lowest. Policy makers should consider the opioid epidemic’s effects on child welfare when determining the appropriate public health response.
REMOVAL STUDY

- The analysis was limited to prescription rates, and did not measure illicit opioids (heroin).
EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

- Aside from the direct or indirect harm caused by parental substance abuse, placement out of the home has been associated with many deleterious effects on children, including higher rates of juvenile delinquency and teen motherhood; mental and physical health problems; and higher rates of adult criminality.
The fiscal costs of placing a child in foster care (excluding health care and food assistance) is roughly $20,000 per year.

Recently states have sued opioid manufacturers, in part because of the costs associated with having the children of opioid dependents enter their foster care systems.
When children are removed because of parental drug abuse, their stay periods away from home are longer, and the removal is less likely to result in reunification with the parent (compared to removals for other reasons).
“OF A GOOD BEGINNING COMETH A GOOD END.”
CHINESE PROVERB
EARLY EXPERIENCES

- Early experiences and environmental influences can leave a lasting signature on the genetic predispositions that affect emerging brain architecture and long-term health.

- Increasing investments are being made in the preschool years to promote the foundations of learning.
COMPLEX INTERACTION

- Interventions that reduce adversity are also likely to strengthen the foundations of physical and mental health.

- Beginning prenatally, continuing through infancy, and extending into childhood and beyond, development is driven by an ongoing, complex interaction between biology (genetic predispositions) and ecology (social and physical environment).

PRE AND POST-NATAL STRESS

- Beginning as early as the prenatal period, both animal and human studies suggest that fetal exposure to maternal stress can influence later stress responsiveness.
- Early postnatal experiences with adversity are also thought to affect future reactivity to stress.
EXCESSIVELY HIGH LEVELS OR PROLONGED EXPOSURES TO STRESS

- Increases in stress hormones are protective and even essential for survival; however excessively high levels or prolonged exposures can be quite harmful or toxic, and can lead to a chronic “wear and tear” effect on multiple organ systems, including the brain.
Three Stress Response Types

POSITIVE
Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

TOLERABLE
Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.

TOXIC
Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships.
POSITIVE STRESS

- Example: the availability of a caring and responsive adult who helps the child cope with the stressor, thereby providing a protective effect.
A TOLERABLE STRESS RESPONSE

- Example: exposure to non-normative experiences that present a greater magnitude of adversity or threat (e.g., the death of a family member, a serious illness or injury, a contentious divorce, a natural disaster, or an act of terrorism)
TOXIC STRESS

- Examples: results from strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the body's stress response systems in the absence of the buffering protection of a supportive, adult relationship
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toxic Stress in Young Children</th>
<th>Researchers are working to develop, test, and refine new and more effective strategies for reducing toxic stress and mitigating its effects as early as possible, before irrevocable damage is done.</th>
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<td>Toxic stress in young children can lead to less outwardly visible (yet permanent) changes in brain structure and function.</td>
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There is a strong association between early adverse experiences and subsequent problems in the development of linguistic, cognitive, and social-emotional skills, all of which are inextricably intertwined in the wiring of the developing brain.

The brain changes from toxic stress can have potentially permanent effects on a range of important functions, such as regulating stress physiology, learning new skills, and developing the capacity to make healthy adaptations to future adversity.
NEGLECT:

PERSISTENT ABSENCE OF RESPONSIVE CARE DISRUPTS THE DEVELOPING BRAIN.
There is growing documentation of the extent to which both the cumulative burden of stress over time (e.g., from chronic maltreatment) and the timing of specific environmental insults during sensitive developmental periods (e.g., prenatal alcohol exposure) can create structural and functional disruptions that lead to a wide range of physical and mental illnesses later in adult life.

Adults who manifest higher rates of risk-taking behaviors are also more likely to have trouble maintaining supportive social networks and are at higher risk of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, violent crime, incarceration, and becoming single parents.

Those who become parents themselves are less likely to be able to provide the kind of stable and supportive relationships that are needed to protect their children from the damages of toxic stress (intergenerational cycle of significant adversity).
CRITICAL OPPORTUNITIES TO PREVENT

- The lifelong problems caused by toxic stress are enormous, as manifested in adverse impacts on learning, behavior, and health. Effective early childhood interventions provide critical opportunities to prevent these undesirable outcomes, and generate large economic returns for all of society.
ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

- Understand how opioid use affects parental behavior (nodding out, pre-occupation with drug seeking and using).
- Recognize the connection between such behaviors and child neglect (e.g., the consequence of a wet or soiled diaper left on for many hours may not just mean a diaper rash; the lack of parental responsivity could contribute to toxic stress).
- Consider ways to provide stable and supportive relationships to prevent or mitigate toxic stress.
- Promote comprehensive developmental assessment to assess/address milestones.
- Connect child to preschool and other early learning opportunities to promote the foundations of learning.
OTHER RESOURCES

- HHS Administration for Children & Families at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive/resources
- FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy at https://www.cpeip.fsu.edu/
- https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/
For additional opioid training modules:

- FADAA.org

For additional information about Florida’s opioid treatment options or other DCF opioid information:

Walter Castle LCSW, MCAP
Opioid STR Project Director
Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Florida Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Blvd., Bldg. 6, Room 250
Tallahassee, FL 32399
Office: (850) 717-4277
Email: walter.castle@myflfamilies.com
REFERENCES


Slide 6: https://heroin.net/heroin-effects/heroin-effects-sub-page-1/heroin-effects-on-the-brain/


Slide 8: Florida newspaper headlines


Slide 14: Chinese proverb


Slide 27: National Council on the Developing Child (Harvard University)