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Reflection #5

Some of the ways that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) impact health across a lifetime are that they found the higher a child's ACE score was the worse their health outcome would be. For a child with an ACE score of four or more, their risk of COPD and hepatitis was two and a half times that of someone with an ACE score of zero. For depression, it was four and a half times. For suicidality, it was 12 times. A child with an ACE score of seven or more had triple the lifetime risk of lung cancer and three and a half times the risk of ischemic heart disease. 67% of the population had at least one ACE and 12.6% or one in eight had four or more ACEs.

Childhood trauma impacts brain development in areas like the nucleus accumbens, which is the brain's pleasure and reward center, and the area that is involved in substance dependence. It also hinders the prefrontal cortex, which is needed for impulse control and decision-making. It's essential for learning. There are also differences seen on MRIs of the amygdala of children with childhood trauma. The brain and body have a fight or flight response in reaction to stress. The body releases hormones like adrenaline and cortisol which in short doses can be beneficial, but when the body is in a continuous state of heightened and extreme stress, in the case of trauma, becomes maladaptive and health-damaging. Trauma not only affects the brain structure and function of the child, but it also affects the immune system, hormonal systems, and even the way the DNA is read and transcribed in a child that is still developing and growing.

Some of the best practices mentioned to intervene with children and families impacted by adversity and toxic stress are routine screenings at their regular physicals, home visits, care coordination, mental health care, nutrition, holistic interventions, medication when necessary, and parental education about the impacts of ACEs and toxic stress.