

# Trauma-Informed Practices for Postsecondary Education

Shannon Davidson, Ph.D.

NPC Research



# Agenda

- Equity Lens
- Trauma in Postsecondary Education
- Strategies

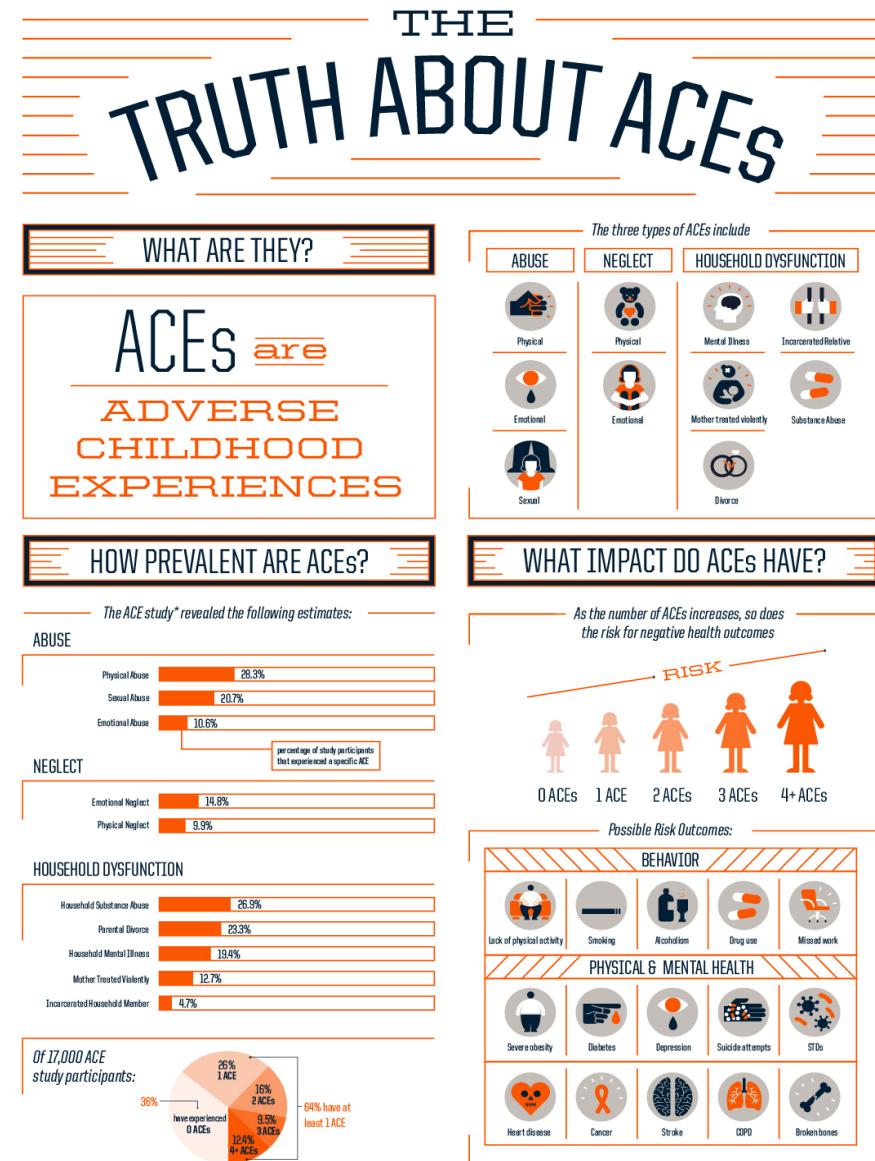
## Trauma-Informed Practices for Postsecondary Education: A Guide

*By Shannon Davidson, Ph.D., Education Northwest*



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# Equity and Trauma-Informed Practices

- Trauma-informed approach can be too deficit-based
- Stresses individual vs. collective or historical experience
- Disregards environmental context; easy to discount lived experiences with racism and white privilege
- Focus on reducing pathology can eclipse the promotion of well-being



# Medium



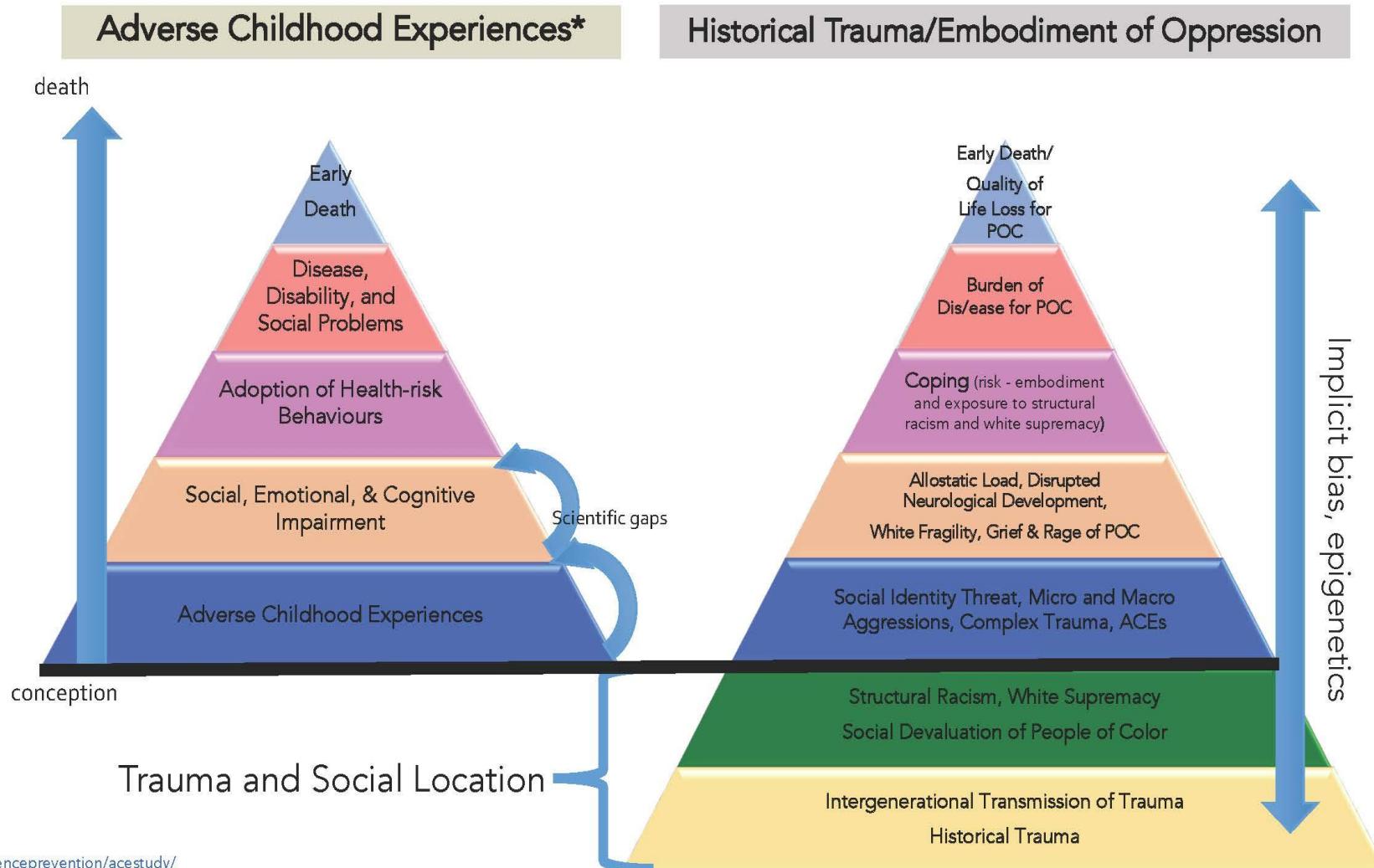
“I am **more** than what happened to me.”

## The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement

*Shawn Ginwright Ph.D.*

# Racing ACEs

if it's not racially just, it's not trauma informed



\*<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>

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## Trauma in postsecondary learners: What you might see

- Difficulty focusing, attending, retaining, and recalling
- Tendency to miss a lot of classes
- Challenges with emotional regulation
- Fear of taking risks
- Anxiety about deadlines, exams, group work, or public speaking
- Anger, helplessness, or dissociation when stressed
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Involvement in unhealthy relationships

Source: Hoch et al., 2015.

# Trauma on a college campus

- The impact of childhood trauma persists into adulthood
- College campuses can be overwhelming places to seek connection and belonging while negotiating new roles
- Students face exposure to new potentially traumatizing events (PTE)
- Prior trauma influences risk for new trauma

# Pay attention to:

Team-building exercises

Closed spaces or noises

Rules

Ambiguity

Forced sharing



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Core values for trauma-informed practices in postsecondary institutions

Safety | Trustworthiness | Choice and control | Collaboration | Empowerment

# A whole-campus approach

Diversity, Equity,  
and Inclusion  
Committees

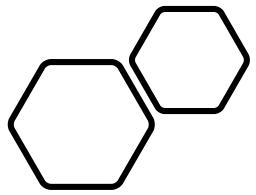
Counseling  
Departments

Libraries

Veterans' Centers

Multicultural  
Centers

Guided Pathways  
or other  
approaches to  
student advising



## Promote inclusion and belonging

- Assess infrastructure, such as signage and bathrooms
- Anticipate and adapt to the changing needs of different groups of students



# Spotlight: Advising and pathway programs

- **Advising** builds relationships and promotes belonging
- **Articulating a pathway** helps to eliminate ambiguity that can activate a trauma response
- **Rethinking assessments** can make room for different learning styles

# Spotlight: Student Center and Community Commons

- Student Services building complex that includes “one place” where **staff go to students** rather than students going to staff.
- All student related **services are consolidated** in the community center where they are easy to find and navigate.

# Individual approach: The importance of language



- Be aware of different family structures
- Use person-first, asset-based language
- Examine where the blame lies
- Avoid microaggression
- Avoid tone and vocabulary that suggest charity or a “savior complex”

# If tension rises...

- Pause and ask yourself: What is going on? Are basic needs being met?
- Don't immediately assume trauma but be mindful of it.
- Practice de-escalation techniques
- Reach out to the counseling center
- Practice self care



# Next steps

- Investigate programming and connect to the initiatives that are happening on campus
- Continuous improvement (learn from what you're doing)
- Allocate resources to this work
- Focus on your own emotional and physical health



Thank you!