

PROMOTING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH A HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

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Objectives

- Discuss dimensions of wellness and how they relate to successful aging
- Explain the connection between childhood adversity and the quality of the aging experience
- Describe trauma-informed, healing-centered approaches for working with adults with experiences of childhood (and adult) adversity

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Development...

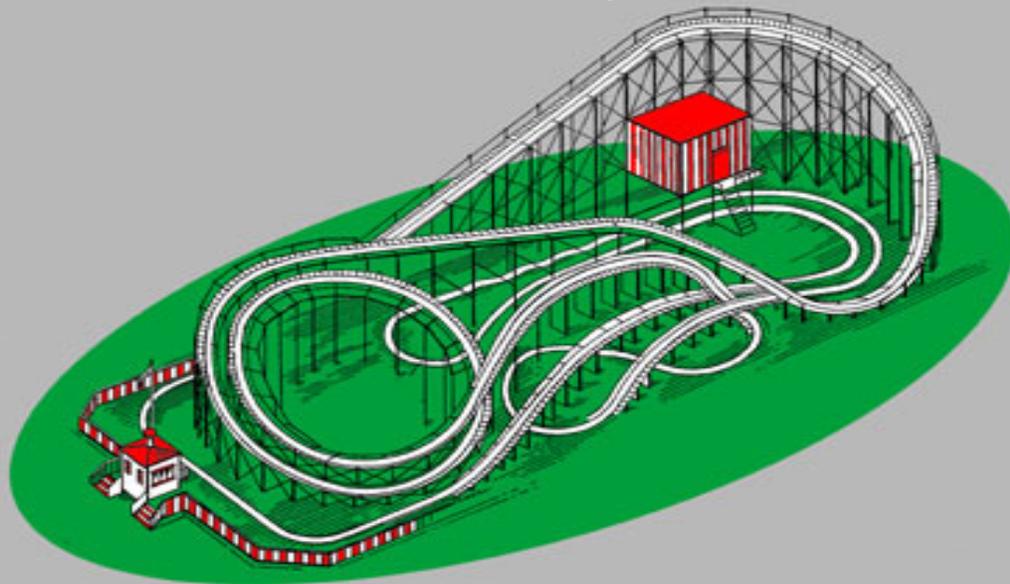
Best explained by Genes x Environment



- Is a lifelong process
 - Understand old age better when understand experiences leading up to it
- Has many dimensions (physical, emotional, etc.)
- Involves gains and losses (and gains and losses)
- Includes the potential for change
- Is shaped by world around it
 - Historical/cultural context - wars, family norms, nutrition, pop culture

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Course of Human Development



Source: M. O'Connor

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What is successful aging?



- Earliest definition had 3 components (Rowe & Kahn, 1987):
 - Low risk of disease; good cognitive, physical functionality; being actively engaged with life
- But, pathology (and eventual death) is not a failure to age successfully!
 - Psychosocial factors (attitude, engagement) over disease and disability
 - Adaptive coping strategies
- → DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

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Resilience...

- Negotiating, managing, and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma.
- Reflects protective factors and risk factors
- Is a skill that can be learned and honed like any other skill, regardless of our histories of adversity, challenges, or trauma
- Assets and resources within the individual, their life, and environment facilitate capacity for “bouncing back” from adversity. → WELLNESS

Sources: Windle, G. (2012). The contribution of resilience to healthy ageing. Sage Perspectives in Public Health 132 (4) : 159-160; Dr. Martin Seligmann.

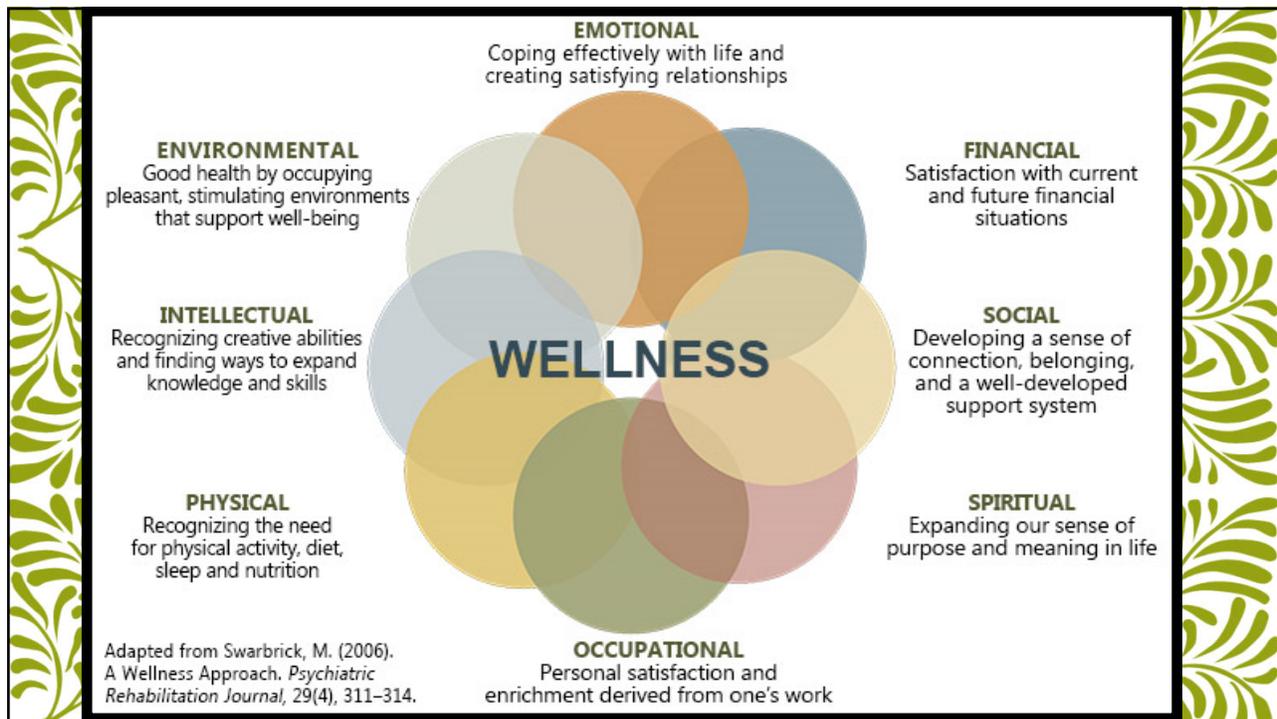
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ACEs research point to the long-term impact of childhood chronic stress and trauma.

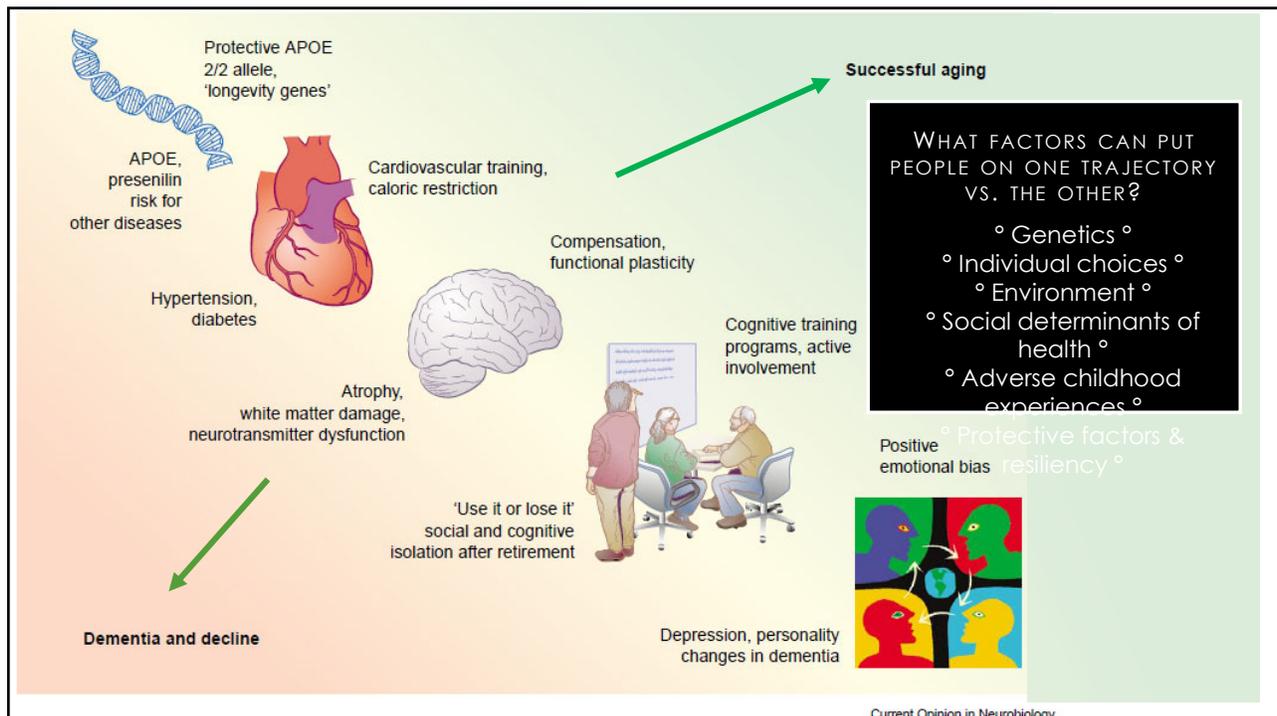
Aging can be a significant source of new trauma and stress:

- Cognitive and memory changes
- Physiological limitations, disability
- Transitions
- Loss of spouse, peers
- Financial adjustments
- Potential elder abuse

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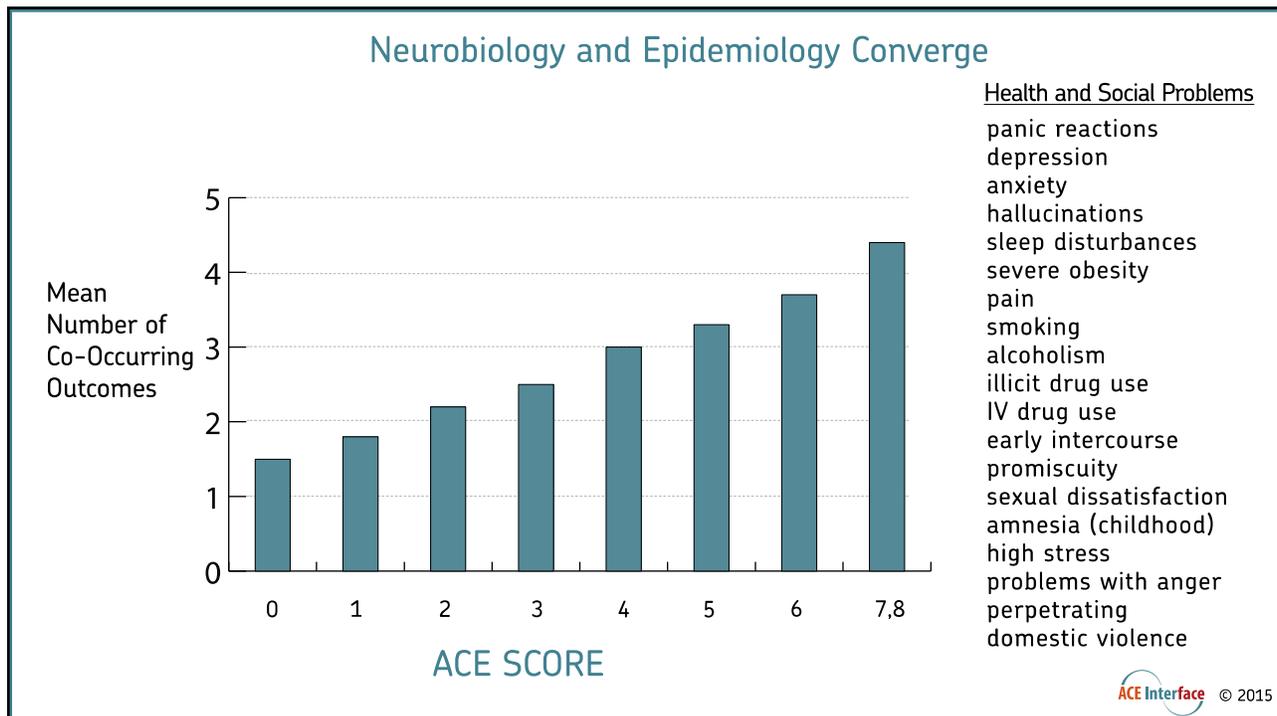
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An individual who records 4 or more ACEs is more at risk for the following long-term health complications:

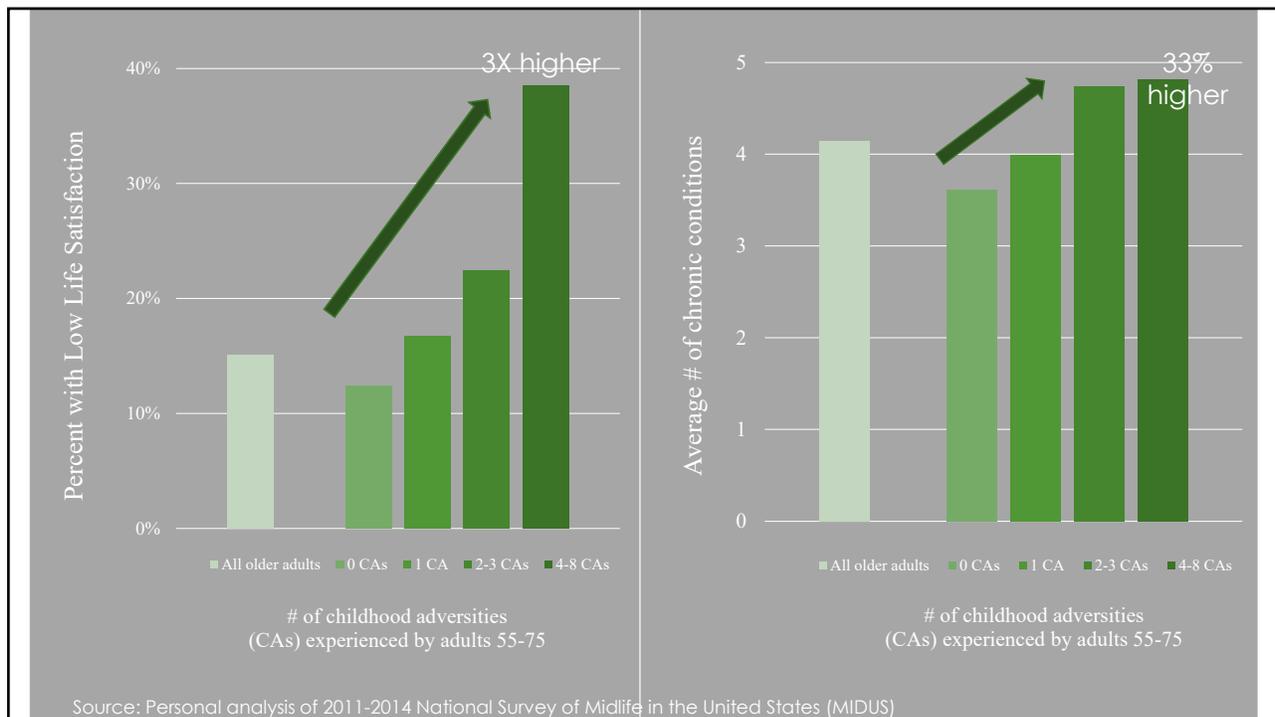
- Severe obesity (1.6x)
- Depression (4.6x)
- Alcoholism (7.4x)
- Heart disease (2.2x)
- Any cancer (1.9x)
- Stroke (2.4x)
- COPD (3.9x)
- Diabetes (1.6x)

(Felitti, et. al., 1998)

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Childhood adversity and **dimensions of wellness** as an older adult

- Decades later, childhood adversity was associated with lower levels in 6 of the 8 wellness areas:
 - Emotional
 - Environmental
 - Financial
 - Physical
 - Social
 - Spiritual
- No impact seen for these individually:
 - Intellectual
 - Occupational

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Cumulative wellness

- When you consider all 8 dimensions together as a “dose of wellness,” higher wellness is associated with better life satisfaction
- The intellectual and occupational dimensions contribute to the big picture → higher childhood adversity scores associated with lower overall wellness

EMOTIONAL
Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships

ENVIRONMENTAL
Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being

FINANCIAL
Satisfaction with current and future financial situations

SOCIAL
Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system

WELLNESS

INTELLECTUAL
Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills

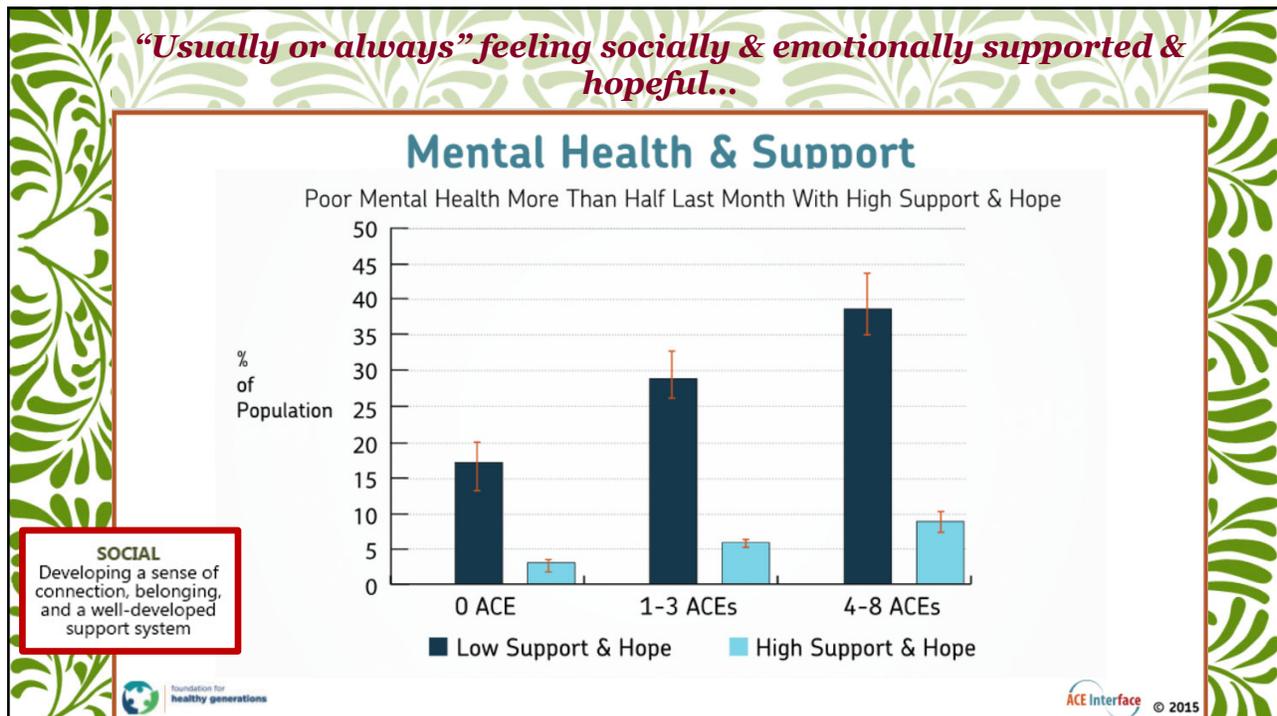
PHYSICAL
Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep and nutrition

SPIRITUAL
Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life

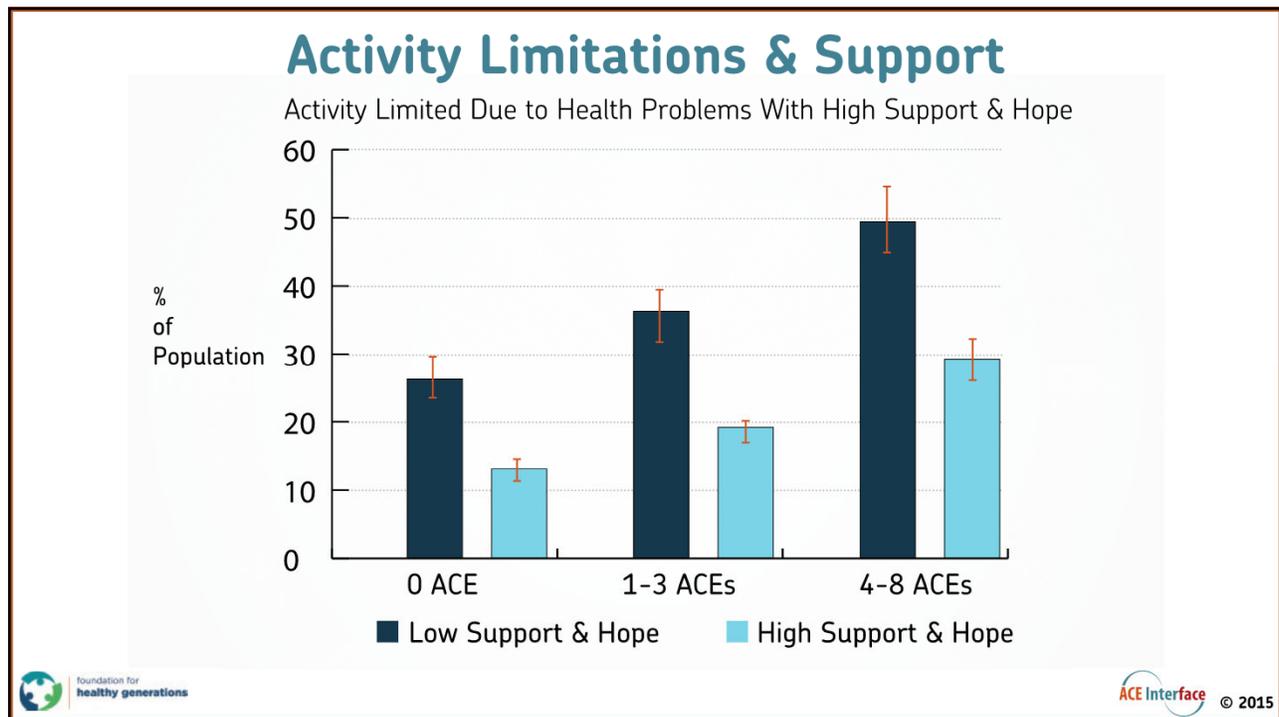
OCCUPATIONAL
Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one's work

Adapted from Swarbrick, M. (2006). A Wellness Approach. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 29(4), 311-314.

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How to make successful aging accessible to everyone?

- Encourage holistic view of successful aging (wellness)
- Combat ageism
- Help reframe loss and change
- Create and seek out trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive systems

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What stereotypes you can think of?

NO GRANDMA, ONE HAND, LIKE THIS.

WHOOOPS I MADE A SCARF.

AGEISM = AGAINST ONE'S FUTURE SELF

- May not see older adults as they actually are
- Isolates the older generation socially
- Spreads fear of aging
- Human cost!

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“WHEN YOU CAN NO LONGER DO WHAT YOU DO, WHETHER BY CHOICE OR NOT, YOU WILL STILL BE YOU.”

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Use Trauma Informed Approaches

- *Realize* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- *Recognize* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- *Respond* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and

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Potential Trauma-Related Triggers

Sights
 Feeling Invalidated
 Receiving Results
 Sanctuary
 Trauma
 Sounds
 Lack of Power
 Communication Barriers
 Medical Procedures

“We’re here to help, and we work really hard at helping ... how can helping environments trigger arousal in, or even re-traumatize, some of our patients?”

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Core Principles of Trauma-Informed Systems of Care

Safety

Trustworthiness

Choice - prioritizing choice and control
(people want choices and options; for people who have had control taken away, having choices makes a big difference)

Collaboration

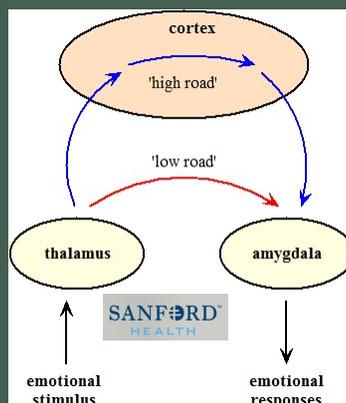
Empowerment - prioritizing empowerment and skill-building



ACE Interface © 2015

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Impact of Trauma, Toxic Stress on the Brain



- *Perceptions*
- *Appraisals*
- *Emotional Reactivity*
- *Behavioral Reactivity*
- *Decision Making*
- *Difficulty with Social Cues*
- *Poor Long-Term Memory*
- *Difficulty Paying Attention*

Ask yourself: How would these negatively affect the daily lives of older adults?
What kinds of accommodations might help? How can we teach and practice skills?

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Strategies to Address Executive Skill Challenges

5. **Challenge: Person lacks or has difficulty with self-skills.** Self skills are: putting things into perspective, being flexible, calming, generating strategies or plans, looking at things through another's perspective without losing their own point of view or interest.

Responses:

- **Model self-skills.** (See above).
- **Teach self-skills** to younger children and teens/adults who are open to them.
- **Enroll children, teens, and adults in skills groups and/or obtain individual therapy.**
- **Help the person calm with you,** using your well-regulated brain to teach them the pattern of calming
- **Attune, with empathy, to the stressed person.** Get on the same wavelength. Over time people learn how to keep up their end of the relationship.
- **Give stressed people the chance to use their perspective taking with you or others.** Help them to generate ideas for others.
- **Make plans and develop strategies for difficult or stressful situations.**

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(Used with permission.)

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Move from "What's wrong with you?" to "What's happened to you?"

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "He isn't fitting in well here, he has limited social skills and isn't making friends." | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Has he experienced a significant loss or transition recently? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "She doesn't remember anything, she's like a sieve." | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider: is there a medical condition? Is there a trauma history? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "I don't understand why he's suddenly making things up. He's lying or he doesn't make sense." | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there a medical condition or a trauma history? |

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Examples of trauma-informed approach

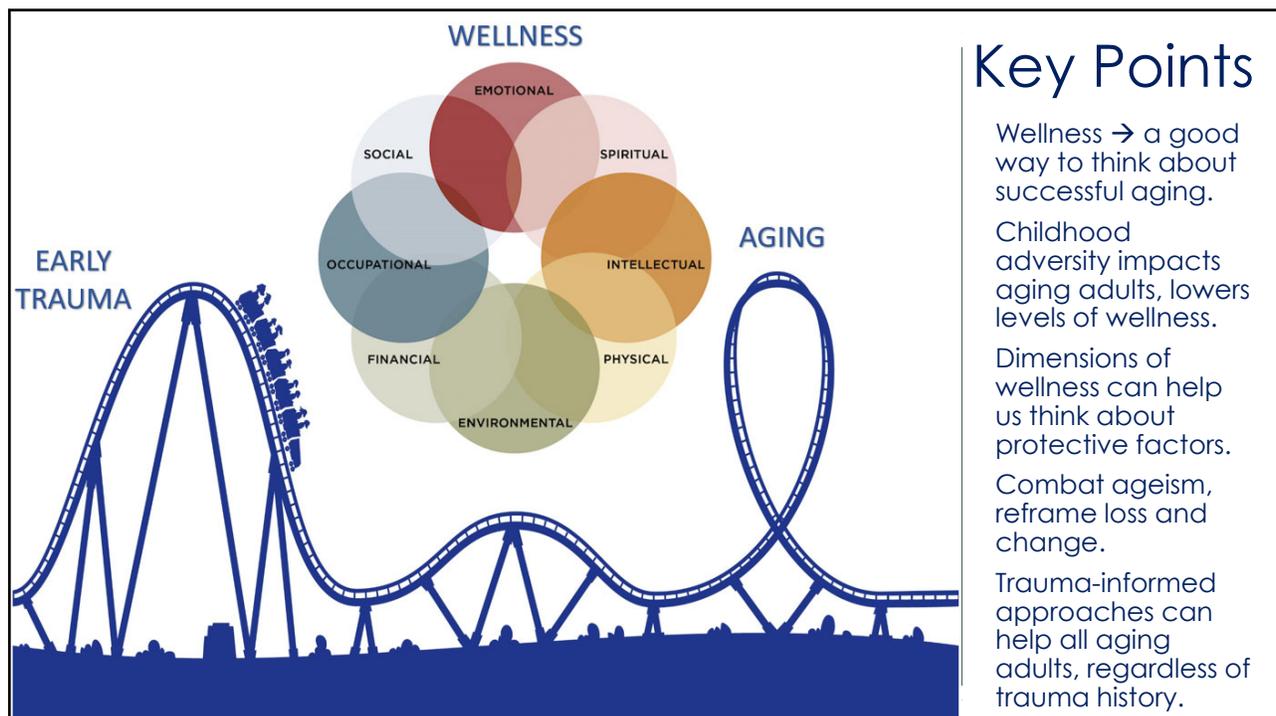
What's wrong approach:

- He's having trouble making friends
 - Poor social skills, not adjusting well
- She forgets everything lately, it's like she's not listening.
 - Forgetful, not paying attention

Trauma-informed approach:

- What happened that is affecting his ability to make friends?
 - Understand that adversity can negatively impact a person's ability to form relationships (trust)
- What happened to affect her memory or her attention?
 - Understand that under stress we pay attention to perceived "threats" (survival)
 - Consider underlying medical condition

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Key Points

Wellness → a good way to think about successful aging.

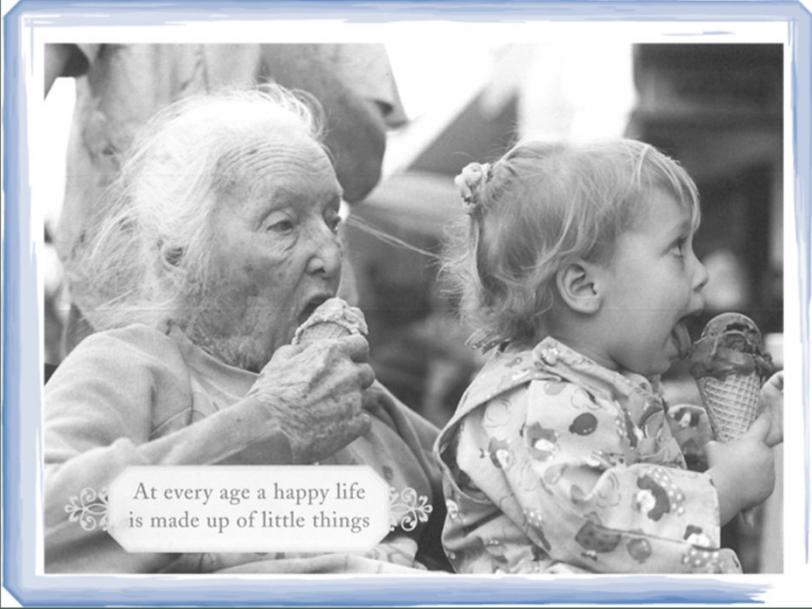
Childhood adversity impacts aging adults, lowers levels of wellness.

Dimensions of wellness can help us think about protective factors.

Combat ageism, reframe loss and change.

Trauma-informed approaches can help all aging adults, regardless of trauma history.

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At every age a happy life
is made up of little things

Questions?

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