



# Trauma Awareness Training

# Shifting our Lens...



*What stories do we tell ourselves to explain behavior?*

Trauma?

# Understanding Trauma

**Event** – Actual experience or threat of physical or psychological harm OR the lack/withholding/control of material or relational resources crucial to health and development. Can be a single event or repeated events.

**Experience** – How someone assigns meaning to the event, which depends on the perception of the individual.

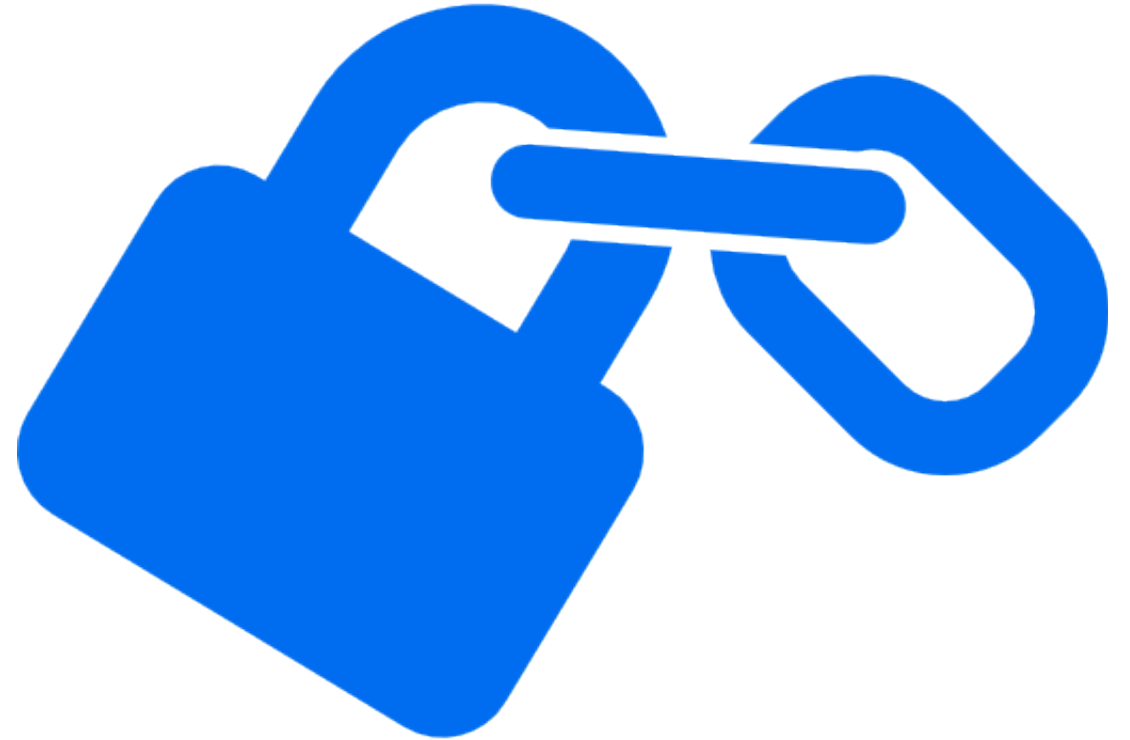
**Effects** – Results of the person's experience of the event. This can include neurological, physical, emotional, and cognitive effects.

+Working definition – SAMHSA, Trauma and Justice

# Private Event Trauma

## Characterized by:

- Secrecy
- Power imbalance
- Sense of hopelessness
- Sense of isolation
- Sense of irretrievable loss



# Public Event Trauma



## Characterized by:

- Shared experience
- Lack of judgment
- Sense of helplessness
- Forces beyond control
- Sense of irretrievable loss

# Community Trauma

A combination of experiences that negatively impact a community

OR

An event that impacts a few people but has structural and social consequences

# Stress-Response System

When we are faced with **stressful situations**, our mind and body **automatically respond** in one of three ways:

**Fight**  
**Flight**  
**Freeze**



# Chronic Trauma

Multiple instances of the same traumatic event

or

Multiple traumatic events happening to the same person

or

Environmental or community trauma

**Chronic Trauma**, regardless of the type, has a cumulative effect-impacting the brain, body, and **all areas** of functioning.

# Prevalence of Trauma

**More than 50%** of the general population have experienced at least **one traumatic event**.



What is the prevalence of trauma in your community?

# Prevalence of Trauma

- As adults, children who were placed in **foster care** have **PTSD** rates **TWICE** as high as **US War Veterans**.

(Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, Pecora, et al., 2005)

- **Nearly 40%** of adolescents have directly witnessed an **act of violence**.

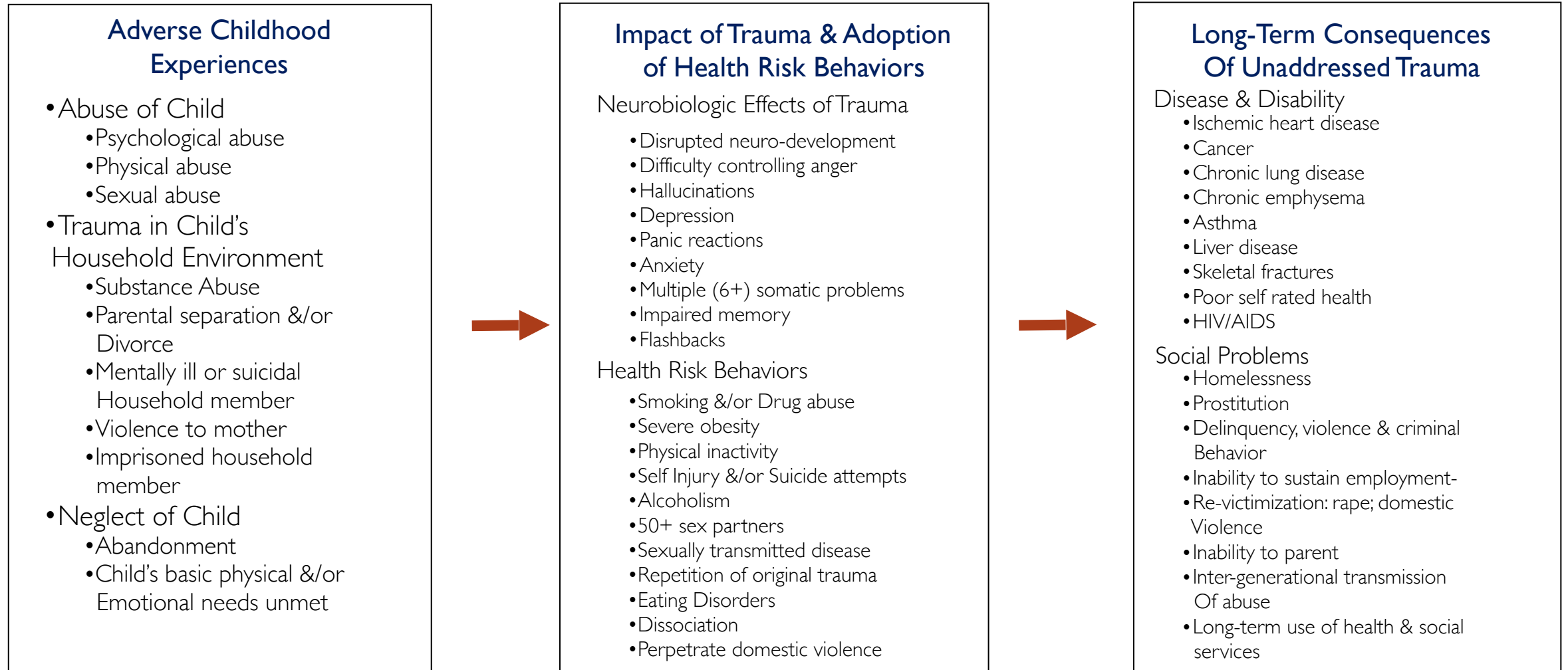
(Flannery, D., and Huff, C.R. Youth violence: Prevention, intervention, and social policy. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998)

- Despite the importance of epidemiologic information, obtaining precise estimates of the prevalence and incidence of different types of potentially traumatic events that can occur in childhood is actually problematic.

(Saunders, B. E., & Adams, Z. W. (2014). Epidemiology of Traumatic Experiences in Childhood. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 23(2), 167–184.)

# Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study

Without intervention, adverse childhood events (ACEs) may result in long-term disease, disability, chronic social problems and early death. Importantly, intergenerational transmission that perpetuates ACEs will continue without implementation of interventions to interrupt the cycle.



# Impact of Trauma

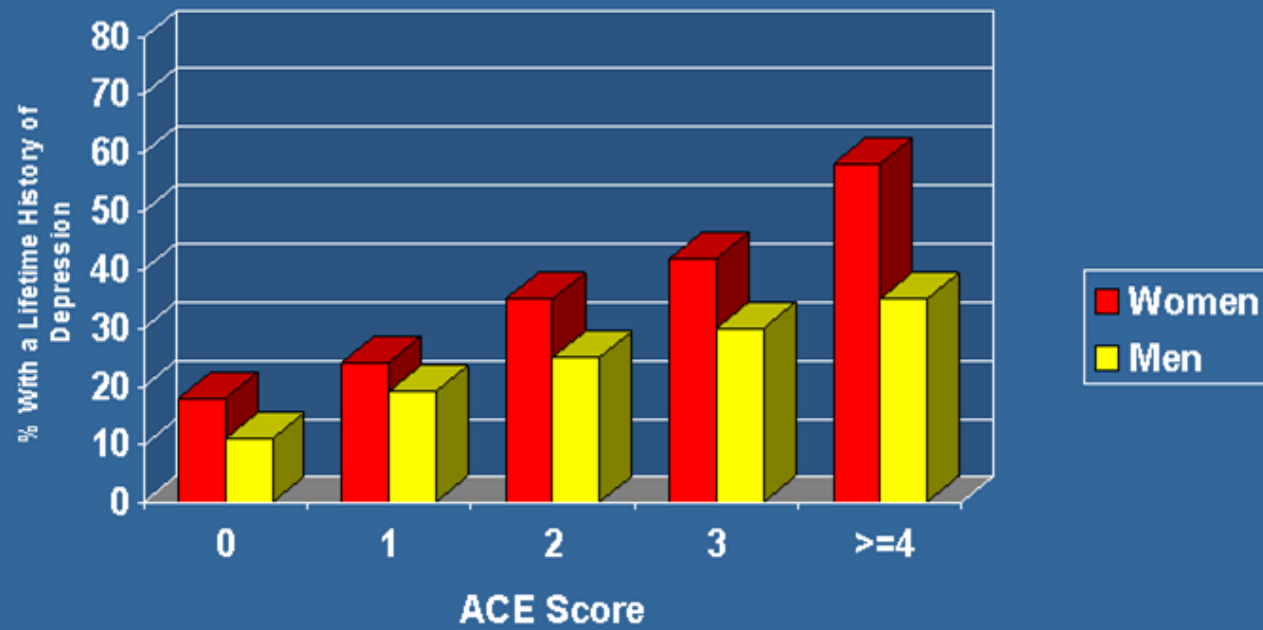
First published in 1998, the Adverse Childhood Experience Study showed that:

- 1) Traumatic experiences are **vastly more common** than recognized or acknowledged
- 2) There is a **powerful relationship** between emotional experiences as children and physical and mental health as adults
- 3) Traumatic events during childhood can be converted into **chronic disease** as adults
- 4) Adverse events and stress can lead to chronic diseases, such as **diabetes, heart disease** and some types of **cancer**, as well as **depression, alcoholism** and **drug abuse**



# Impact of Trauma

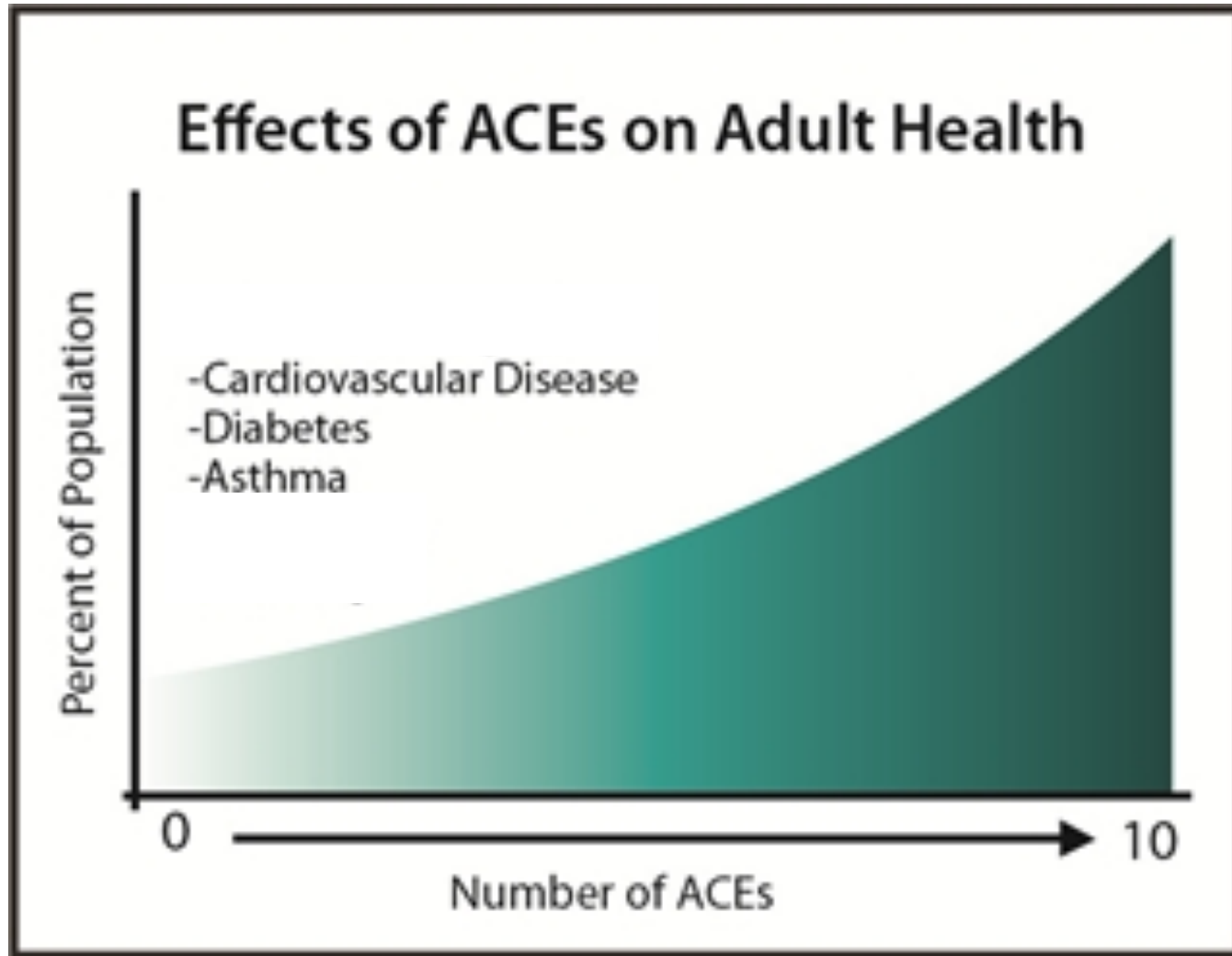
## Childhood Experiences Underlie Chronic Depression



# Impact of Trauma

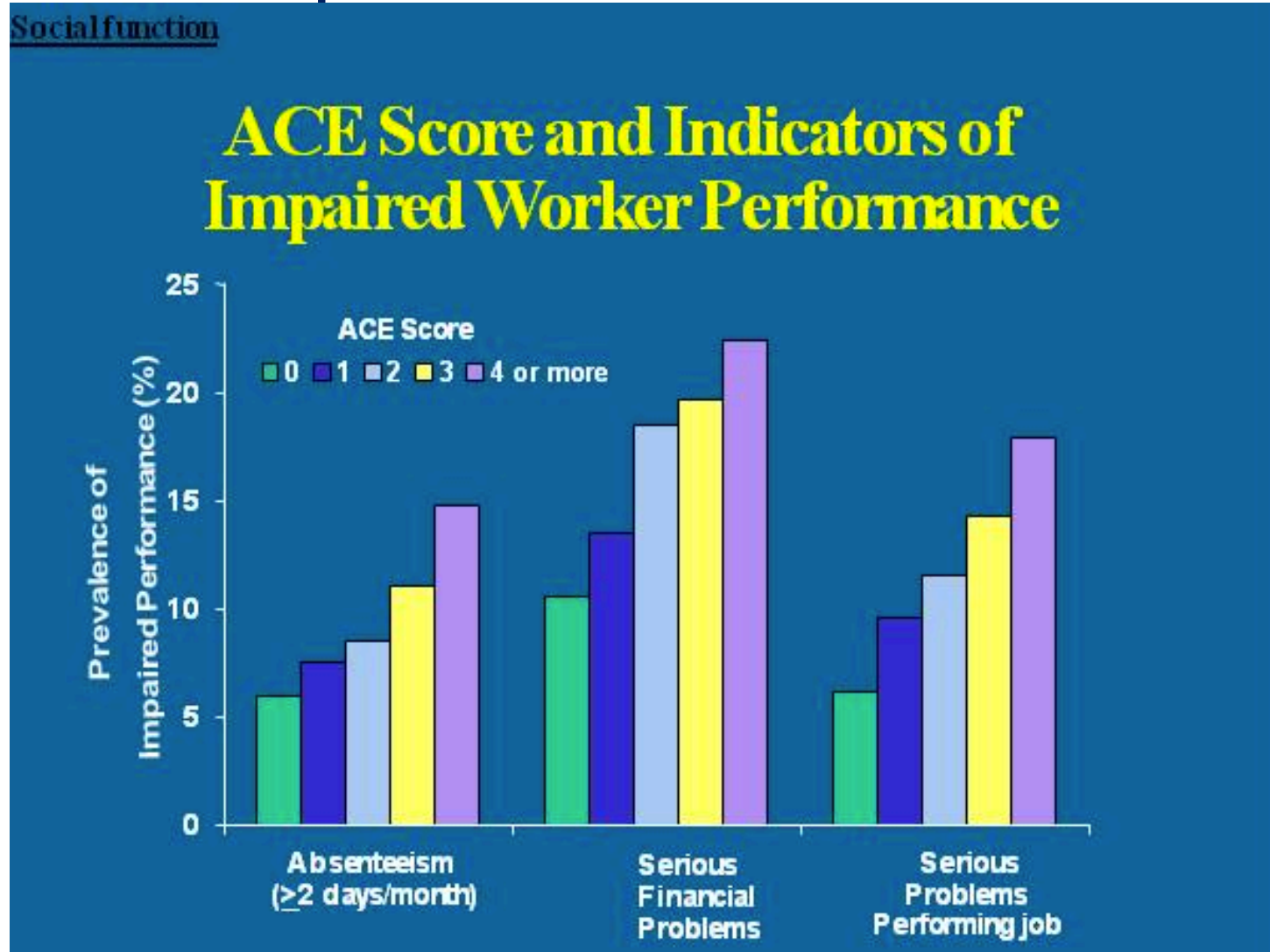


# Impact of Trauma



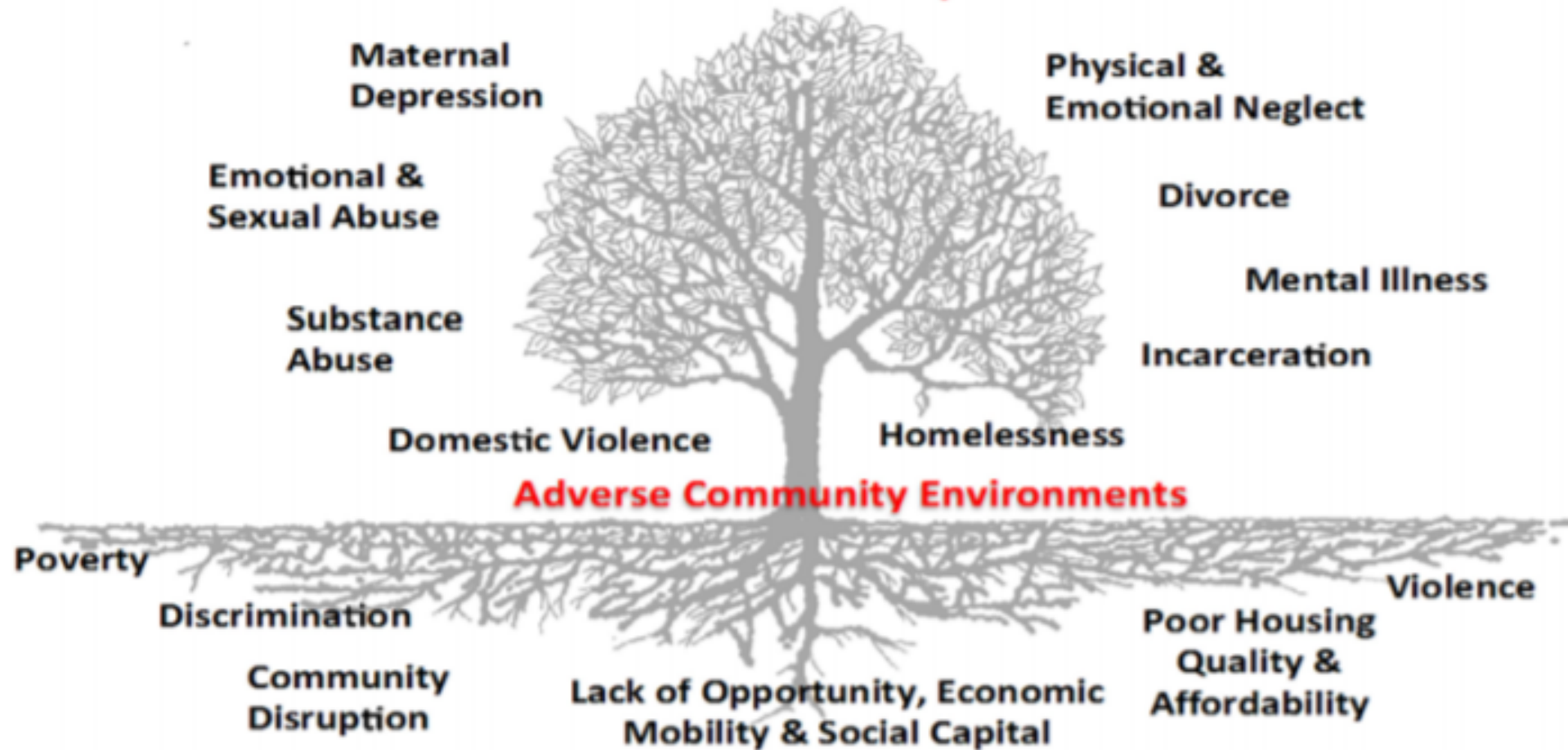


# Impact of Trauma



## The Pair of ACEs

### Adverse Childhood Experiences



Ellis, W., Dietz, W. (2017) A New Framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences: The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Model. *Academic Pediatrics*. 17 (2017) pp. S86-S93. DOI information: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.12.011

# Layers of Trauma

Poverty

Racism

Individual  
Trauma

Community  
Trauma

Gender  
Inequity

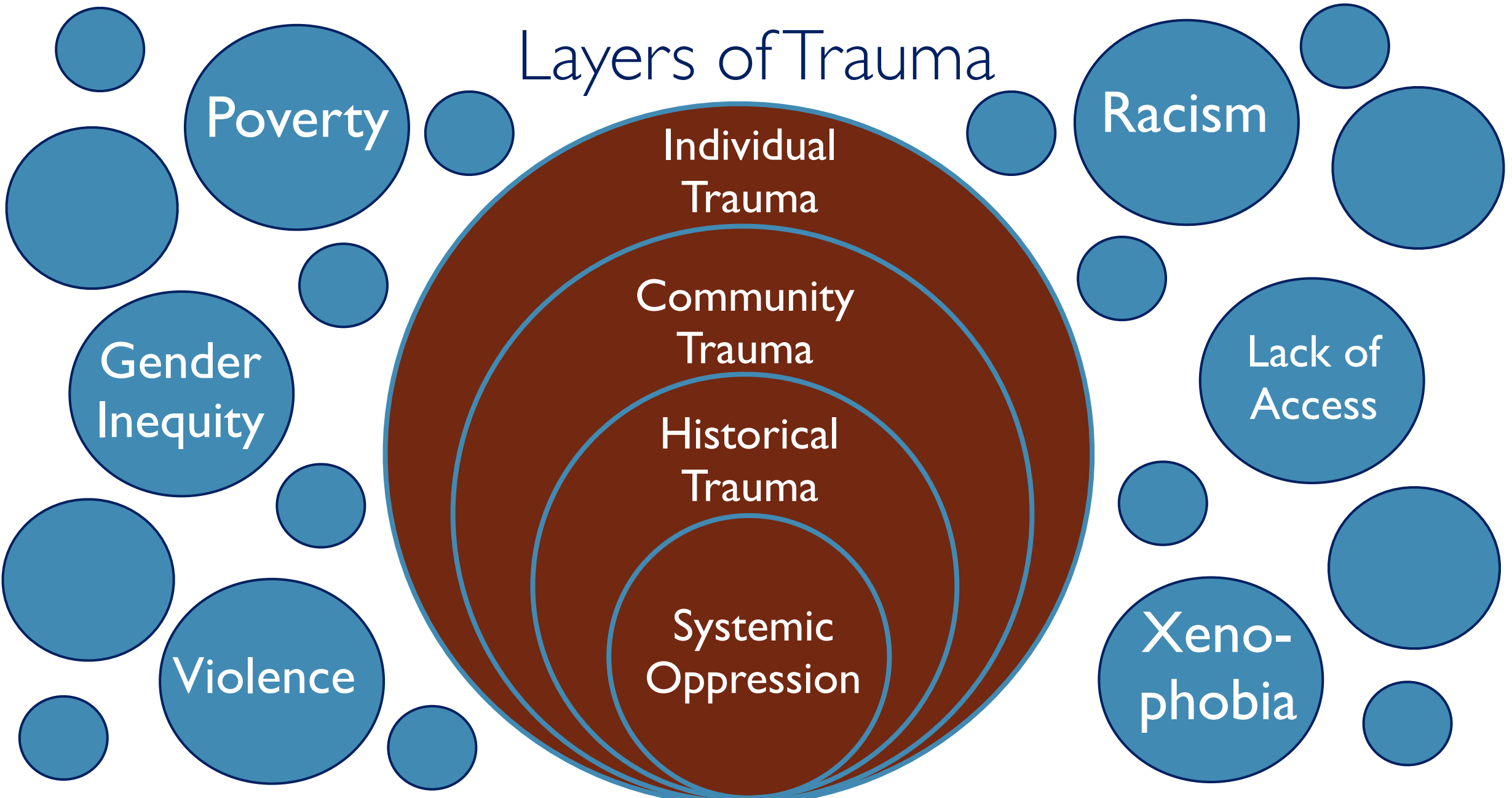
Lack of  
Access

Historical  
Trauma

Violence

Systemic  
Oppression

Xeno-  
phobia



# Brain Development

- At birth, the brain is about **25%** **the size** of the adult brain in weight and volume (less than 1 lb), but contains nearly the **same number of brain cells** or neurons (100 billion).
- The brain stem and lower brain are well developed, but the **higher regions are less developed**.



# Synaptic Density

**At Birth**

**6 Years Old**

**14 Years Old**



# Impact of Trauma on the Brain

**Trauma** can impact the developing brain by...

- Reducing the number of **connections** formed
- Reducing the **size of the cortex**
- Strengthening **survival** connections

**Resulting in...**

- Memory problems
- Attention difficulty
- Language development delays
- Emotional and behavioral regulation issues

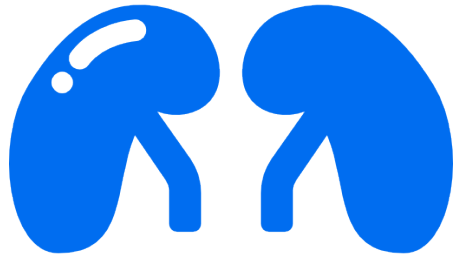
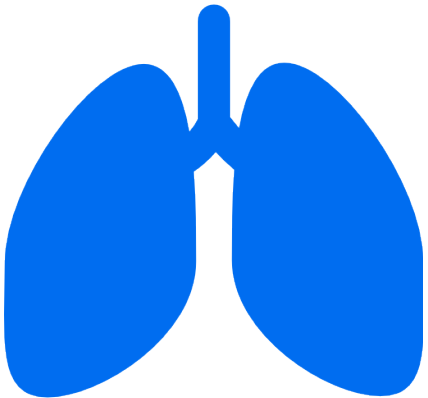


# Impact of Trauma on the Brain

- When the **stress response** is activated, the release of **cortisol** can lead to the creation of **flashbulb memories** of events associated with **intense emotional reactions**, both positive and negative.
- **Triggers** are formed that allow for intense **physiological recall** of these powerful memories.

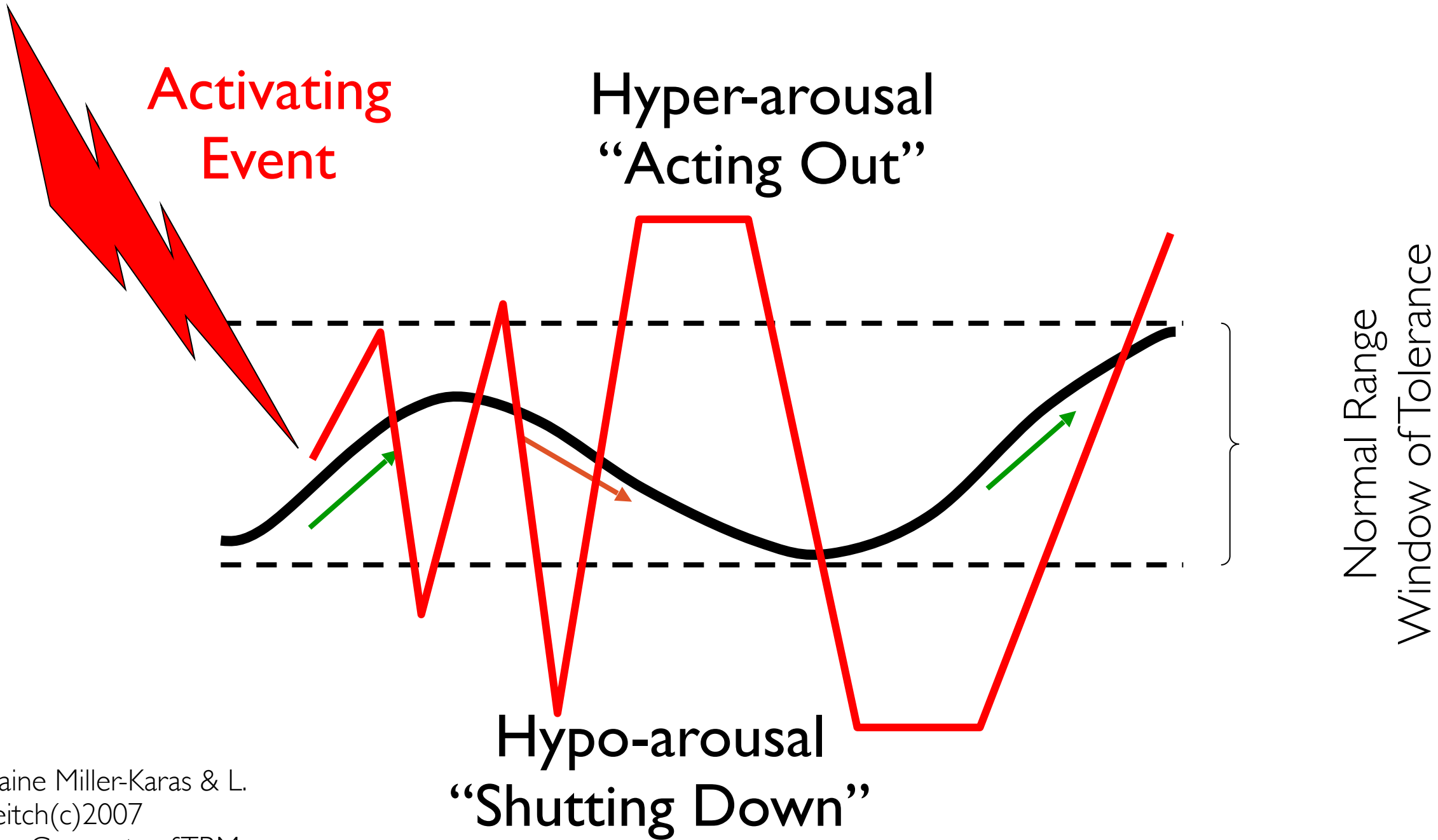


# Impact on the Body



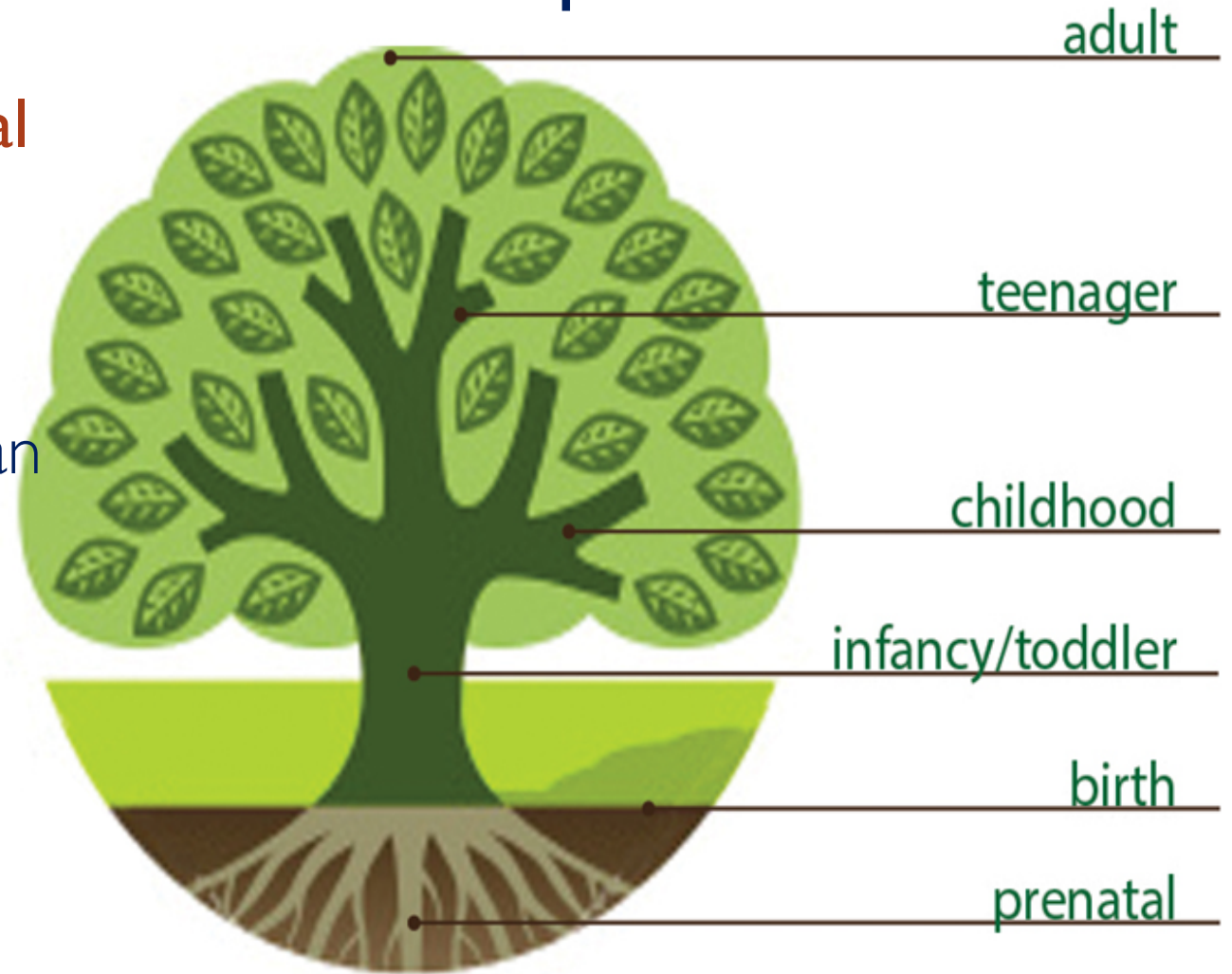
If an individual's body is responding to **acute stress** for a prolonged period, whether a child or adult, the **increased adrenaline** and other hormones can cause **increased blood sugars**, heart rates and changes in blood flow along with other often **harmful biological responses**.





# Trauma and Development

- How trauma is experienced is dependent on both **developmental** and **life stages**.
- **Change**, whether between major stages of **development** or within someone's life **circumstances**, can often result in the re-emergence of symptoms.
- Symptomology is not bound by stages-**all symptoms can be experienced throughout the lifespan**.



# Trauma and Early Childhood

- The trauma of not having a **healthy relationship** with a **primary caregiver** can result in difficulty in:
  - **Regulating** emotions
  - **Trusting** others
  - **Feeling** free to explore environments
  - **Developing** sense of self
- High risk due to **rapid development**
- Less able to anticipate **danger**
- Cannot always express **feelings** in words

# Trauma and Early Childhood

- Children often do not understand **cause and effect**, which can result in **blaming** themselves or caregivers
- Children have a profound **lack of control** over their environments
- Children are often going through **trauma** alongside their **primary caregiver**
- Parent/child shared trauma impacts **ability to parent**
- May **blame parents/caregivers** for not preventing stress and trauma

# Impact of Trauma on Young Children

## Trauma can result in:

- Delayed development of **verbal skills**
- **Memory** problems
- Regressive behaviors
- **Aggression**
- Excessive crying or screaming
- Problems with **focus/learning**
- Poor appetite, low weight, digestive problems
- **Irritability**, sadness, and anxiety
- Nightmares/sleep difficulties
- Compulsion to re-enact or **imitate traumatic event**
- Exaggerated startle response
- Difficulty **trusting** others
- Lack of self confidence
- **Somatic** complaints
- Bed wetting

# Impact of Trauma on Adolescents

## Trauma can result in:

- **Anxiety, fear, and worry** about safety of self and others
- Sudden changes in behavior
- Difficulty **trusting** others
- Repetitive thoughts and comments about **death or dying** (including suicidal thoughts, writing, art, or notebook covers about violent or morbid topics, internet searches)
- Heightened **difficulty with authority**, redirection, or criticism
- Re-experiencing the trauma through nightmares or disturbing memories
- **Sleep** difficulties
- Exaggerated startle response
- **Avoidance behaviors**
- Emotional numbing

# Impact of Trauma on Adults

Adults may experience the impact of compounded, unaddressed childhood trauma, but also experience new traumatic experiences throughout the life span. Resulting symptoms include:

- Depression
- Lack of **trust**, particularly of authority
- Impaired social/sexual relationships
- **Hypervigilance**
- Inertia
- **Substance use disorders**/self-medicating
- Mental illness
- Emotional **dysregulation**

# Applying the Lens of Trauma





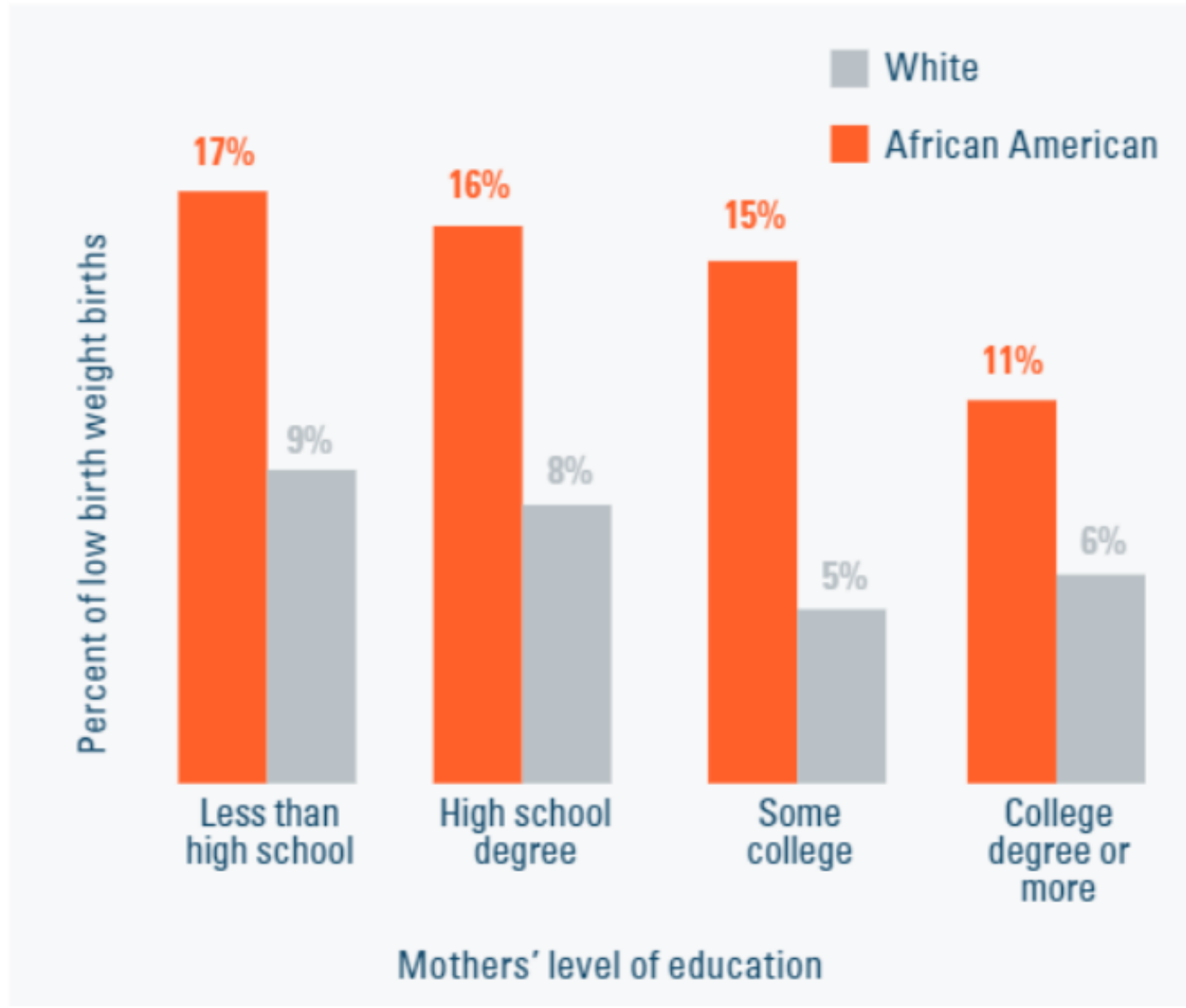
# Applying the Lens of Trauma

- Black children under the age of six are about **three times** more likely to live in poverty than their peers. Over the last four decades, at least **one-third** of Black children were living in poverty.<sup>1</sup>
- African Americans, Native Hawaiians and Latin Americans have been impacted greatly by hypertension and diabetes due to **chronic stress resulting** from discrimination.<sup>4</sup>
- Native Americans are sentenced to prison at **four times** the rate of white Americans.

# Applying the Lens of Trauma

Large bodies of literature in sociology, economics, anthropology, and public health document that US blacks are **more likely** to experience **stressful situations**, such as material hardship, interpersonal discrimination, **structural discrimination** in housing and employment, and multiple caregiving roles than whites.<sup>1</sup>

# Applying the Lens of Trauma

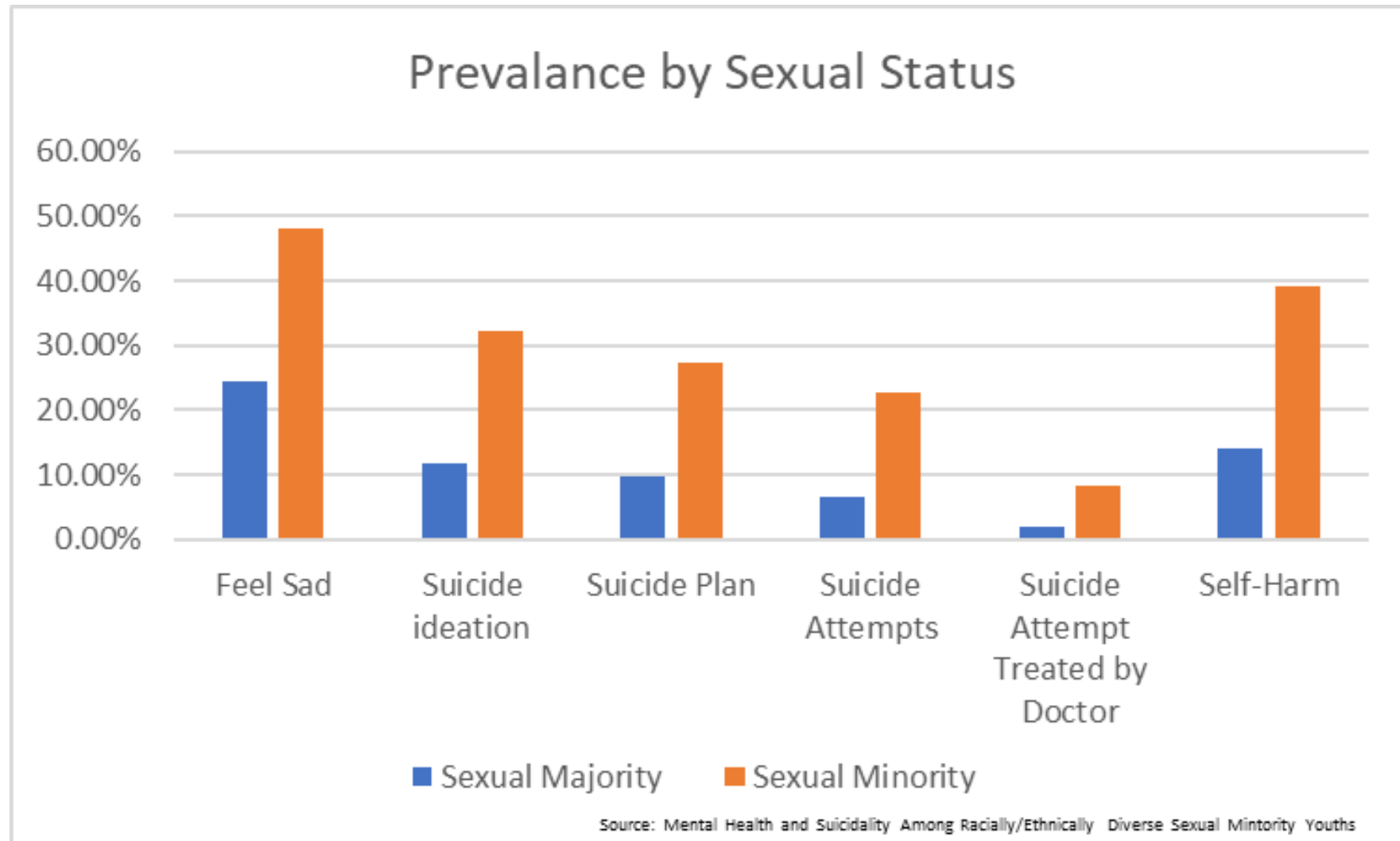


Source: MODHSS, Birth MICA  
Notes: Prenatal care adequacy (Missouri index)

# Applying the Lens of Trauma

- Suicide is the **second** leading cause of death for adolescents ages 10-19 in the US.<sup>1</sup>
- Youth who identify as sexual minorities have rates of suicide up to **3 times higher**.<sup>2</sup>
- 74% sexual minority youth reported experiencing **verbal harassment** because of their sexual orientation, 33% reported **physical harassment**<sup>3</sup>, and 72% **cyberbullying**.<sup>4</sup>
- Youth who identify as sexual minorities may **skip school** as a protective mechanism to avoid victimization.<sup>5</sup>
- Research indicates that increased risk of suicide for sexual minority youth is due to the various forms of **school-based victimization** experienced.<sup>5</sup>

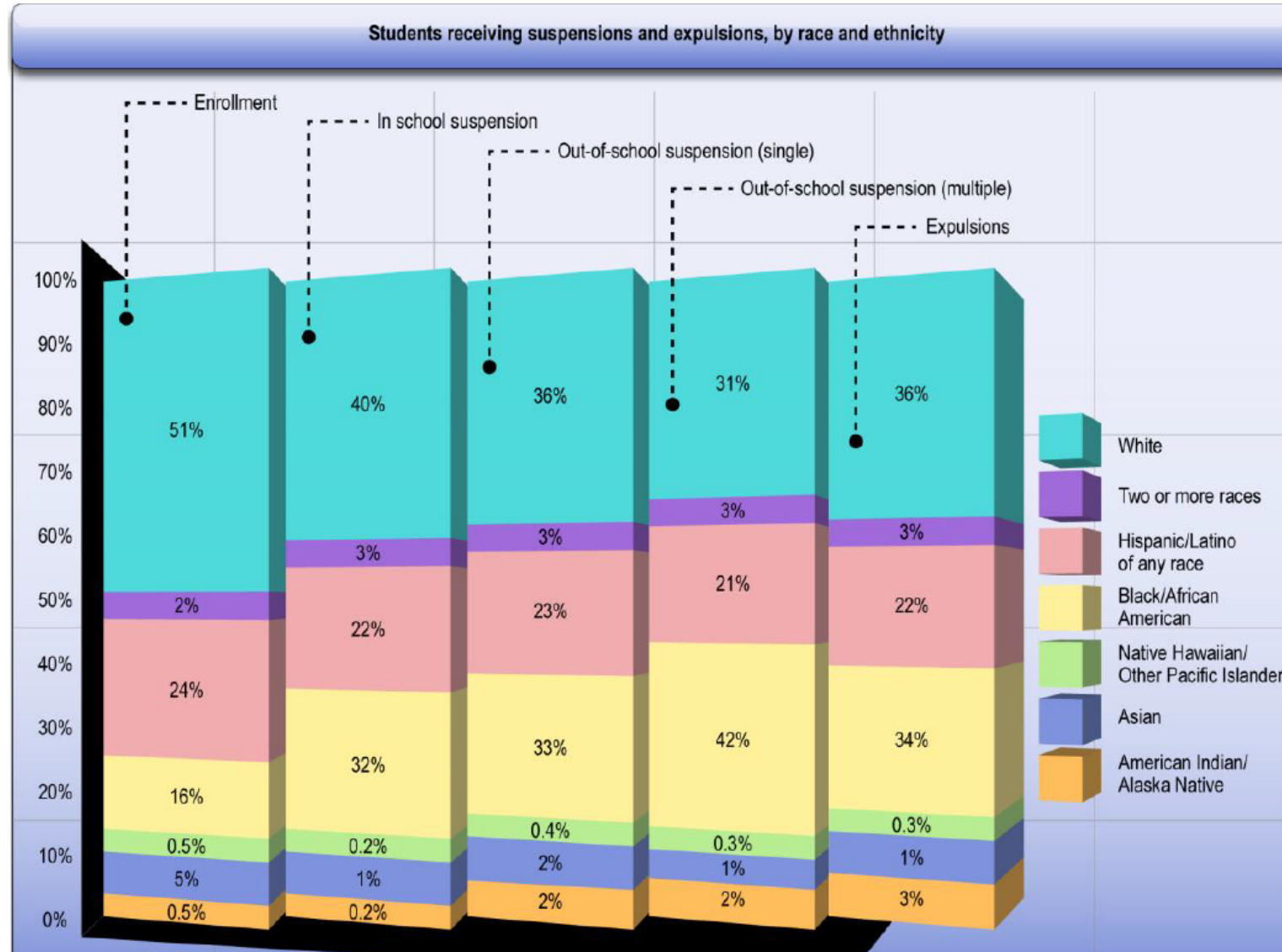
# Applying the Lens of Trauma



# Applying the Lens of Trauma

- **Black** and low-income students receive **longer suspension** than their peers for the **same types of infractions**.
- While Black students only account for **16% of enrollment**, they represent more than **30% of school-based arrests**.
- Research suggests Black students are frequently **disciplined** for minor infractions such as **defiance** or disrespect .
- Suspensions contribute to **chronic absenteeism**, which is associated with **lower academic performance** and **lower graduation rates**.

# Applying the Lens of Trauma



**SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12.**

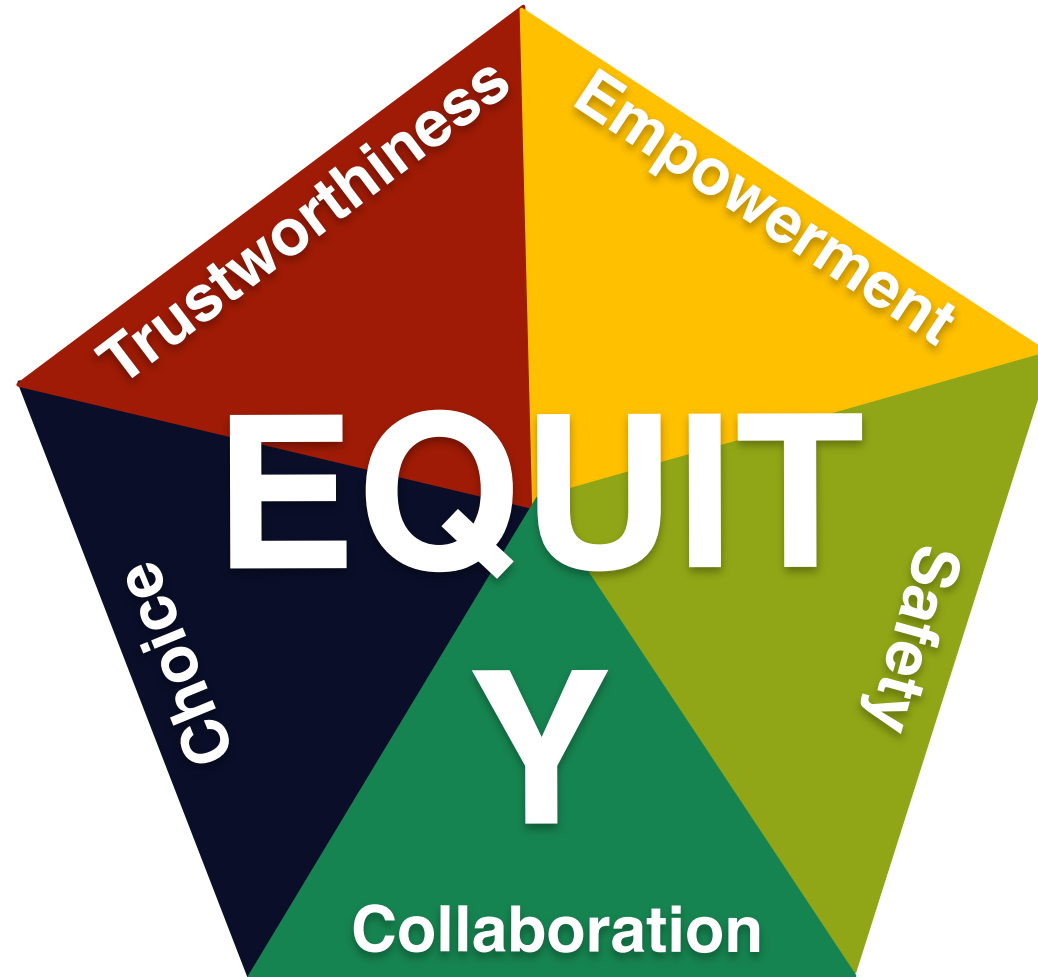
# Becoming Trauma-Informed

A program, organization, or system that is **trauma-informed**:

1. **Realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
2. **Recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff and others involved with the system;
3. **Responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices;
4. And seeks to actively **resist** re-traumatization.



# The Core Principles



# Intervention

- Many effective **therapeutic interventions** are available for individuals of **all ages** through various individual or group modalities.
- **Trauma is not “cured”** – therapeutic intervention is unable to erase the traumatic event(s) and individuals may require **additional intervention** at various points throughout the **lifespan**.
- You don't have to be a therapist to be **therapeutic**. One buffering, supportive individual can mitigate the trajectory of trauma.

# Responding to People with Trauma

## We must:

- **Acknowledge** that we may unintentionally trigger someone's **trauma response**.
- Work to see an individual's **responses and behaviors** as the result of **changes** in the **brain** and **body**.
- Strive to see the world through the **lens of trauma**.

# Changing the Question

To become alive and well, we need to change the question  
from...

What's wrong with you?

to

**What happened to you?**



[www.awcommunities.org](http://www.awcommunities.org)