

# Trauma-Informed Responses to Families, Crime and Justice

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Sussex Prisoners' Families

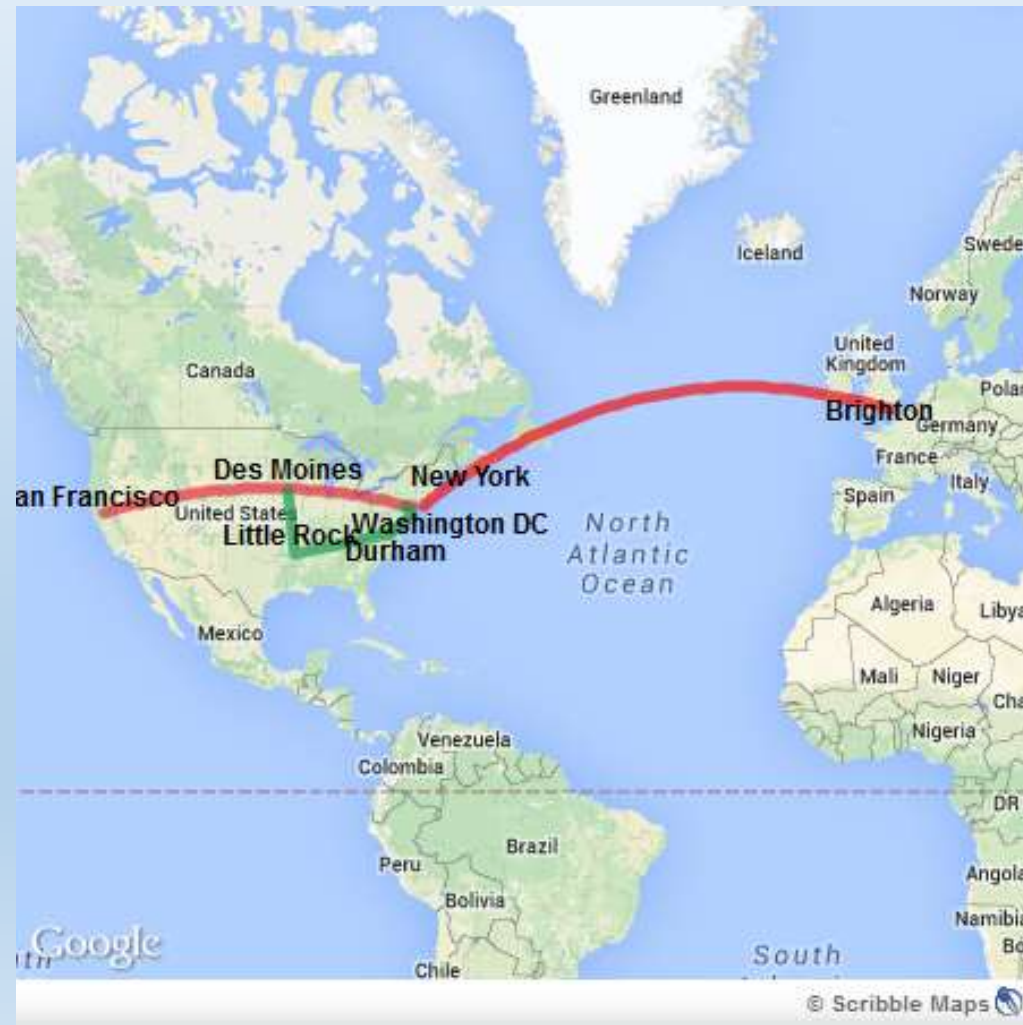
# Sussex Prisoners' Families



# Today I am going to talk about....

- The difficulties families face when someone goes to prison
- How these difficulties are approached in the US through a trauma-informed lens
- How this ties in with a resilience approach

# Winston Churchill Memorial Trust



# Chose US because of cultural similarities

- A rate of 707/100,000 population - dramatically exceeding all other nations
- High incarceration rates
- Similar attitudes to crime and punishment

# What Issues Do Families Face?



# Court

- Shocked
- Confusion
- Exposure
- Loss



“He just went. I thought I’d get a chance to say goodbye...to sort things out but he went.”

“I don’t know what’s happening. I haven’t heard from him. What do I do?”

# Prison

- Separation
- Visiting
- Travel
- Anxiety



From the Argus....

**“Lewes Prisoner dies after Being Attacked by a Cellmate”**

**“Growing Fears Over Conditions at Lewes Prison”**

**“Violence Rising Across Prison Estate – Prisoner injured at Lewes”**

“I am worried sick about him. Is he eating? Is he taking his medication? Is he in danger? I am not sleeping. I can't eat.”

“No-one at the prison will talk to me. I could help – I wish they'd listen.”

“I’ve told the kids he is at work. Not sure they believe me but can’t face telling them the truth.”

“I am not allowed to tell anyone in my class,” 6-year-old girl.

# Release

“We’ve got the same problems only now he’s a bit more institutionalised and we’ve grown that bit further apart.”

“At least when he was inside, I knew where he was. Now I’ve gone back to the sleepless nights – worrying where he is, who he’s with, will he come home?”

# Collateral Damage?

- Thwarted, ignored and marginalised at every stage of the CJS
- Without voice, without power
- Prisoners' children 2-3 times more likely to experience mental health problems than their peers.
- Nearly half of prisoners lose contact with their families during a sentence.

# Tactical error?

- Families are a rich source of expertise and information
- Vital to crime reduction and rehabilitation.
- Prisoners with families are significantly less likely to re-offend
- They 'surround' a prison sentence.

# Challenges in the USA

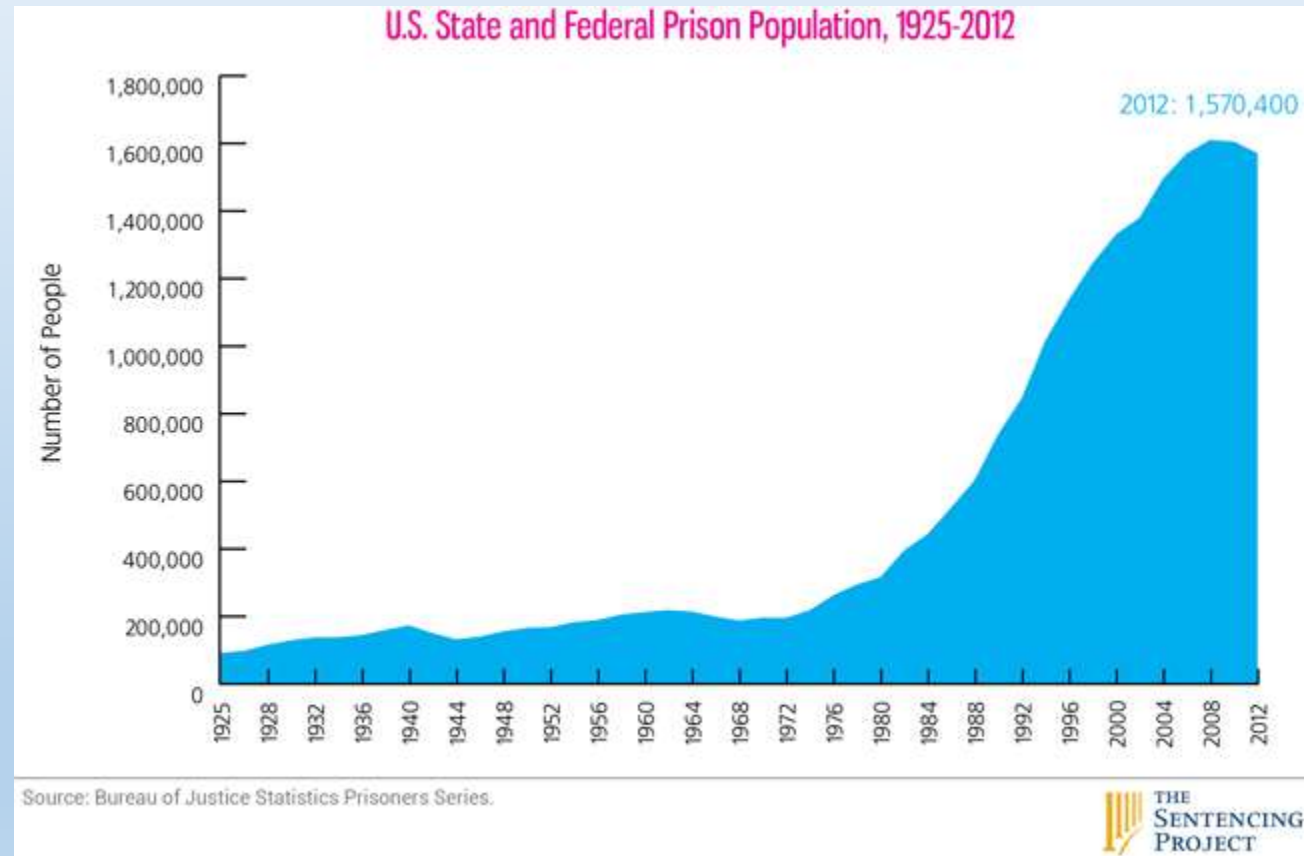
- Distances
- Attitudes of staff
- Denial of food stamps for drug-related offences
- Mass incarceration (2.7 million children affected)
- BAME groups adversely affected

(photos by Jacobia Dahm – (In Transit – the Prison Buses

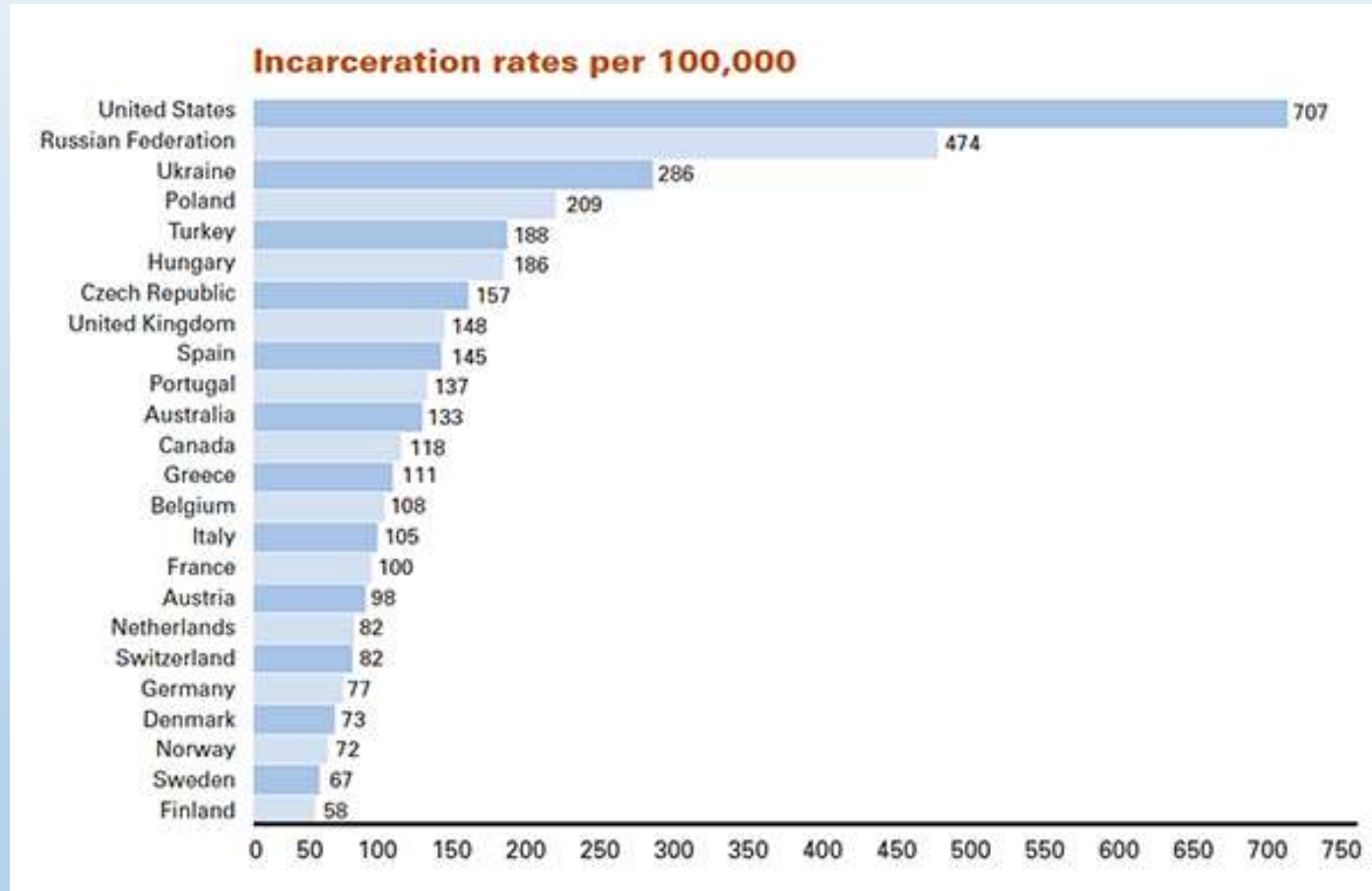
<http://www.jacobiadahm.com/removed-the-prison-buses/rbozryt2lcyot070te97c93cjb2tk5> )



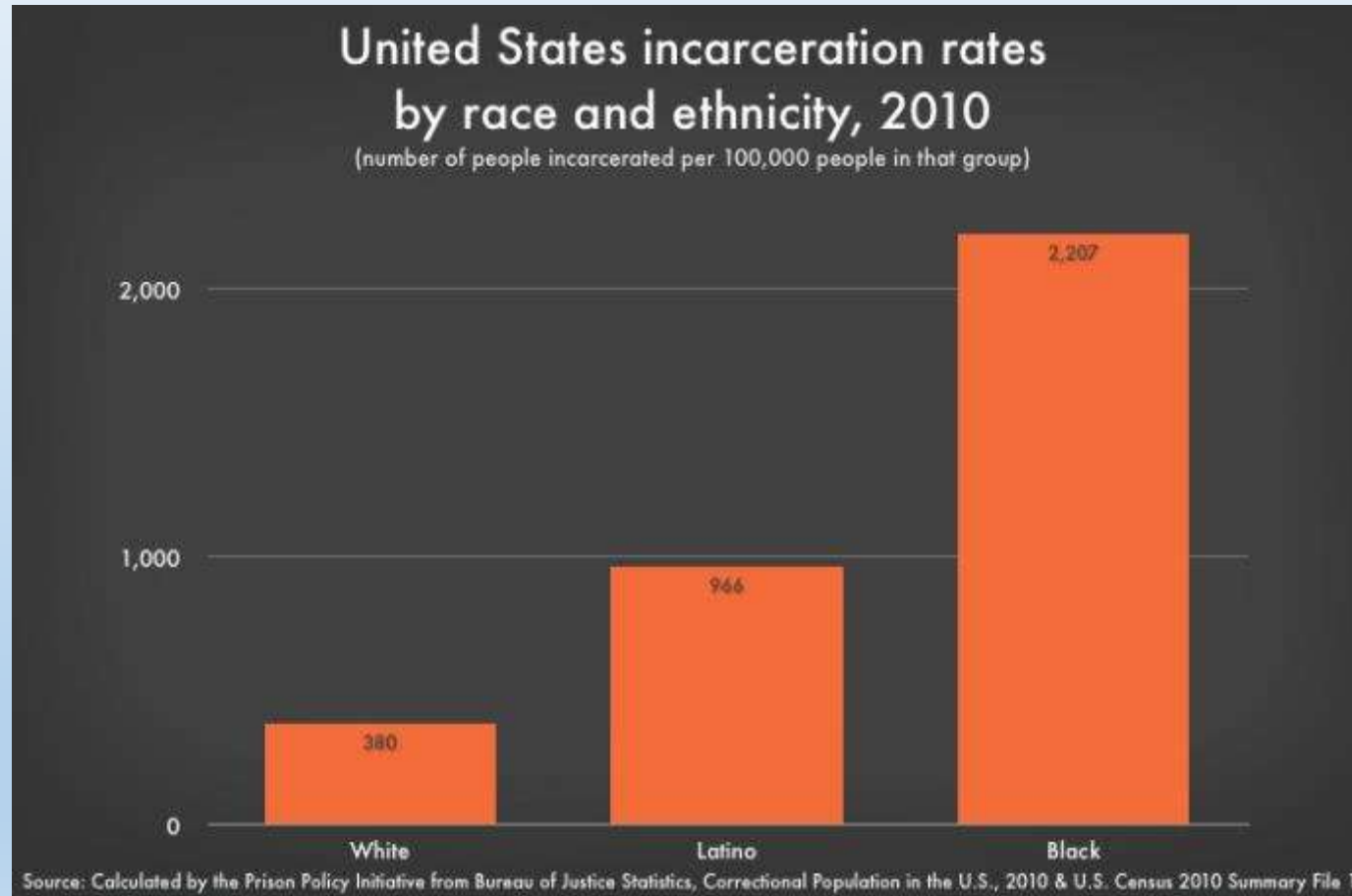
# Scale of Incarceration



# US Compared to the Rest of the World



# Racial Profile



# Trauma-informed Approach

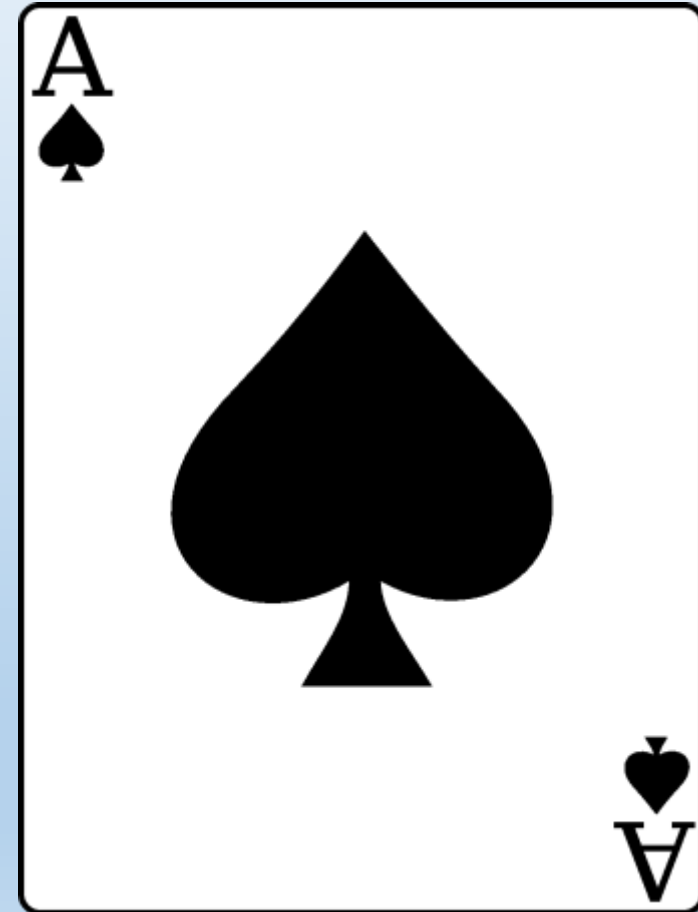
## What's Trauma?

- The word “trauma” is used to describe experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people’s ability to cope, leaving them powerless.
- It is the response not the event itself that makes it traumatic

(National Center for Non-Violence and Justice)

# Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Felitti and Anda 2007 surveyed 17,000 people
- Exposure to trauma, especially early in life, is an important determinant of health status
- Powerful correlation between the number of ACEs and ill health and early death.



# Imprisonment of Parent – Officially Traumatic Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (1997)

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Incarceration of a parent
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance misuse
- Emotional or physical neglect
- Household mental illness
- Divorce or separation

# Build up of Toxic Stress

- Chronic, unrelieved stress which can have serious health implications

Positive stress



Tolerable stress



Toxic stress

# Effects on the brain

## The Human Brain Under Stress

Three of the Key Brain Areas Under Investigation

### Medial prefrontal cortex

Decision making, working memory,  
self regulatory behaviors: mood, impulses

Helps shut off the stress response

Shrinkage of dendrites; loss of synapses

### Hippocampus

Memory of daily events; spatial  
memory; mood regulation

Helps shut off stress response

Shrinkage of neurons; synapse loss

Reduced neurogenesis

### Amygdala

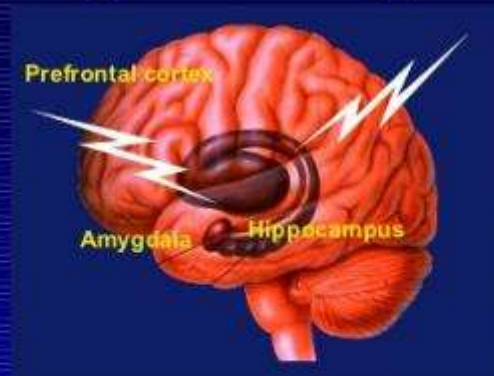
Anxiety, fear; aggression

Turns on stress hormones  
and

increases heart rate

Increased volume and activity

Hypertrophy of neurons;  
increased synapses



# Toxic Stress

- Fight or Flight Permanently Activated

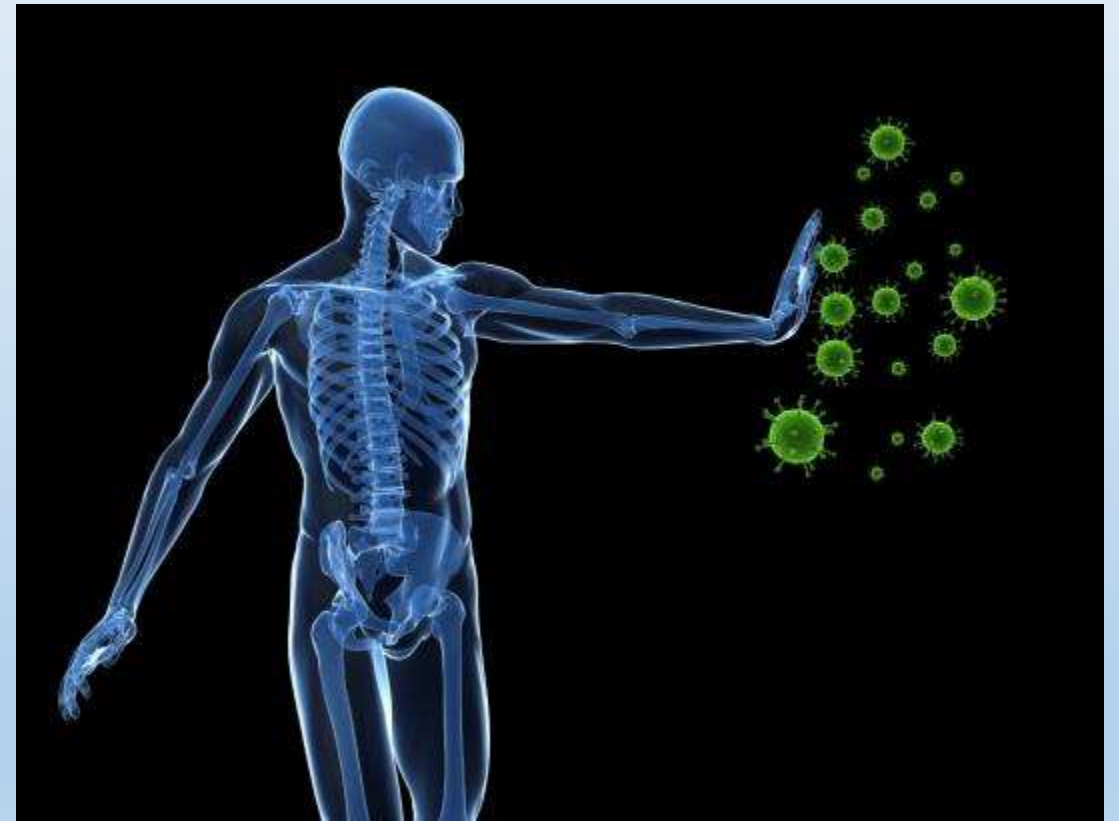


# This can result in....

- Working memory – difficulties in retaining information
- Difficulties in learning
- Poorly regulated emotional responses

# Immune System

- The endocrine and immune systems are also affected.
- Increased levels of stress hormones (glucocorticoids).
- The overexposure of these hormones in the body can interfere with their effects.
- Can cause serious health conditions like autoimmune illnesses (arthritis, allergies, asthma, etc.)



# Also leads to risky behaviours

- Problem drinking
- Self-harm
- Substance misuse
- Unsafe sex

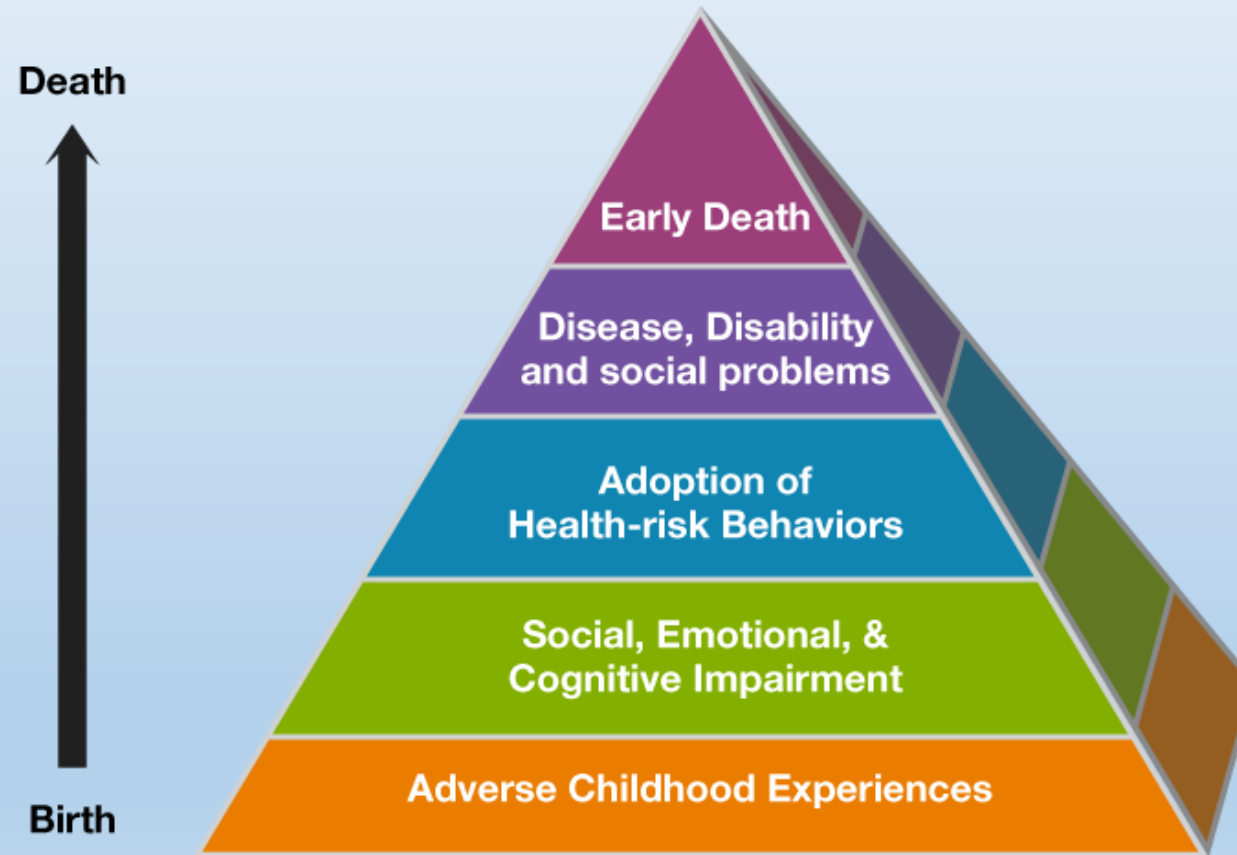
# Aces Study

- The higher the number of ACEs, the greater the risk of heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, liver disease, suicide, HIV and STDs, and other risks for the leading causes of death.
- Those with six or more ACEs died nearly 20 years earlier on average than those without ACEs
- Massive public health concern

# ACEs

- A recent ACE study in Wales concluded that a child experiencing four or more ACEs compared to a child experiencing none was:
- 2 x more likely to binge drink
- 3 x more likely to be a current smoker
- 5 x more likely to have sex under 16 years
- 7 x times more likely to be involved in recent violence
- 11 x times more likely to have used heroin or crack cocaine
- 11 x more likely to have been incarcerated

# ACEs Pyramid



# Not inevitable (protective factors)

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Existing attachment

# Nadine Burke Harris

- [https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en)



# A Public Health Epidemic

- C.f. 19<sup>th</sup> century infectious diseases
- Calls for a similar organised public health response
- USA 36<sup>th</sup> out of 194 countries in life expectancy, dropping from 28<sup>th</sup> in 1990 (38<sup>th</sup> if life-limiting disabilities are taken into account)

## Concerns about the economy

- “U.S. health and well being lags behind much of the world. Our international competitiveness is being undermined by these problems in human capital,”



# Trauma informed responses

- Reverse the risk

# Trauma-informed approach



“People may have meant well, but they acted like there was **something wrong with me**. They wanted to **remould me and reshape** me. But there was nothing wrong with me. **Something happened to me**. They should have asked me about that,” Gerardo Perez, Echoes of Incarceration

# Trauma-informed Approach asks:

**Not** “What’s wrong with you” **but** “What Happened to you?”

“Not sick or bad but injured,” Sanctuary Model

# Trauma-informed response

- Not what's wrong with you – what happened to you?
- Not sick, not bad but injured
- Not a therapy but a systemic approach
- Broad approach
- *Realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- *Recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- *Responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
- Seeks to actively resist *re-traumatization*."

# Trauma-Informed Environment?



# Principles of a Trauma-Informed Response

- Empowerment
- Collaboration
- Peer support
- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Cultural Awareness

# Trauma-informed communities

## Tarpon Springs



# Chicago – trauma-informed City?



# Iowa – a Trauma-Informed State?



# Trauma-informed Rocking Chairs



# Root and Branch Reform



- Sanctuary Model, Sandra Bloom
- Vicarious trauma
- We need healthy organisations to support traumatised individuals
- A whole-organisation approach
- Commitment to:
  - ❖ Democracy
  - ❖ Open communication
  - ❖ Non-violence
  - ❖ Social learning

# Project What San Francisco Empowerment



- Campaigning group
- Interview process
- Paid work as youth advocates (**empowerment and voice/ trust**)
- Course in the criminal justice system (**transparency**)
- Tell their stories (**empowerment and voice**)
- Public speaking courses (**empowerment and voice**)
- Commitment to leading training (over 5,000 people across seven states)
- Regular meetings and lobbying to change the political situation (**collaboration and mutuality**)
- Surveyed CJS, families and prisoners to draw up policy recommendations

# To do list....

- Free phone calls
- Restorative justice conferences for children whose parents have been locked up for more than a year
- Free therapy
- Funding to cover six visits a year
- Teachers to be trained in trauma-informed practices in supporting children
- Re-entry support services for all

# Ten Points for Change (four achieved)

- Children should be able to find their parents online using the 'inmate locator'
- Goodbye visits when parents are transferred out of county
- 16-year-olds should be able to visit on their own
- SFPD should be trained in and carry out 'trauma-informed' arrests

# Trauma-Informed Arrests



- Chief Gregory Suhr and Sergeant Rachael Kilshaw:
- Heard the stories of [Cheyenne McKenzie and Luna Garcia](#) - Project What advocates
- Changed practice

# Principles of Trauma-Informed Arrests

- Officers trained in child development
- Give teenagers face-saving time
- Try to arrest when no children present
- Look out for signs of children being present
- Carry out the arrest out of sight of the children
- Ask if care givers available to come over and wait until they do
- Give parents the chance to explain what is happening
- Give the parents the chance to say goodbye
- Teddies

# Other initiatives

- International Association of Chief Police Officers have provided a model policy.
- Philadelphia, Albany, Sacramento
- Difficulties: timing, money, practicalities
- Staff buy-in?
- No evaluation

“It’s free. And if takes a little longer than usual, so what? No police officer intentionally wants to damage a child. If you can make things less traumatic for a little kid – why wouldn’t you? Why not?” Chief Suhr.



# Match

- <http://mothersandtheirchildren.org/about-us/our-history/>



# My Mother's House

- <http://hourchildren.org/#/1>



# Other practices

## Children of Promise

- Trauma screening
- A place of safety to visit 365 days a year
- Mentoring projects
- Summer camps
- Days out
- Art projects
- After-school programmes
- Scholarships
- Education programmes
- Counselling
- Peer support
- Help to stay in touch



# Echoes of Incarceration

(Empowerment and Voice  
Collaboration and Mutuality)



# Watch This

- <http://echoesofincarceration.org/Watch.html>

# Problematic

- Buzzword “Trauma-informed this and that..”
- Perceived as a deficit Model (opposite of resilience?) “I can’t see the benefit of telling people they are going to die young.”
- Focus on negative language unhelpful /harmful?

# However...

- Knowledge is power?
- Families should know the effect of trauma so they can work to mitigate it
- Does it provide the evidence that some professionals need to change practice?
- TI approach is a strengths-based model

# Applying the Principles

- Recognise that incarceration of a family member could be traumatic and change systems to mitigate the effects of trauma – support at court, trauma-informed arrests, family-friendly visiting processes.
- Information and voice – families need information at each stage of the criminal justice system and a platform to say how they are affected by it
- Empowerment – families could be supported to tell children the truth about imprisonment and given information about the potential trauma
- Peer Support – opportunities for families and especially young people to support each other (The States has the advantage here)
- Collaboration – families seen as partners not adversaries so channels of communication should be opened between prison and families

# Contact Information

- [www.wcmt.org.uk](http://www.wcmt.org.uk)
- [www.sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk](http://www.sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk)
- [sam@sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk](mailto:sam@sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk)