



# *Early Childhood Mental Health What, Why and How.....*

# *What is early childhood mental health?*

“.....Early childhood mental health (ECMH) is the optimal growth and social-emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development of the young child in the context of the unfolding relationship between child and parent.”

*(Source: Early Childhood Mental Health:  
A Report to Nebraska March 2002)*



[www.youtube.com/watch?v=L41k2p-YRCs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L41k2p-YRCs)

# *What it's not...*

ECMH is not about pathologizing child behavior; but rather promoting the healthy alternative of social and emotional development.



# *What is social-emotional development?*

Social-emotional development is defined as the developing capacity of the young child to:

- Experience, regulate, and express emotions
- Form close & secure relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

All occur in the context of a caregiving environment that includes family, community, and cultural expectations.

# *How is social-emotional competence achieved?*

*“The active ingredient in the environment that's having an influence on development is the quality of the relationships that children have with the important people in their lives. That's what it's all about.”*

Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.

*Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University*

# *The Cost of Doing Nothing.....*

- Prevalence rate of **challenging behaviors** among young children in the classroom is approximately 10% or 1 out of every 10 children
- **Expulsions** from early childhood programs-perpetuates the cycle
- Around 40% of children enter kindergarten **lacking social-emotional skills**
- Over 65% of students identified with emotional and behavioral disorders **drop out of school**



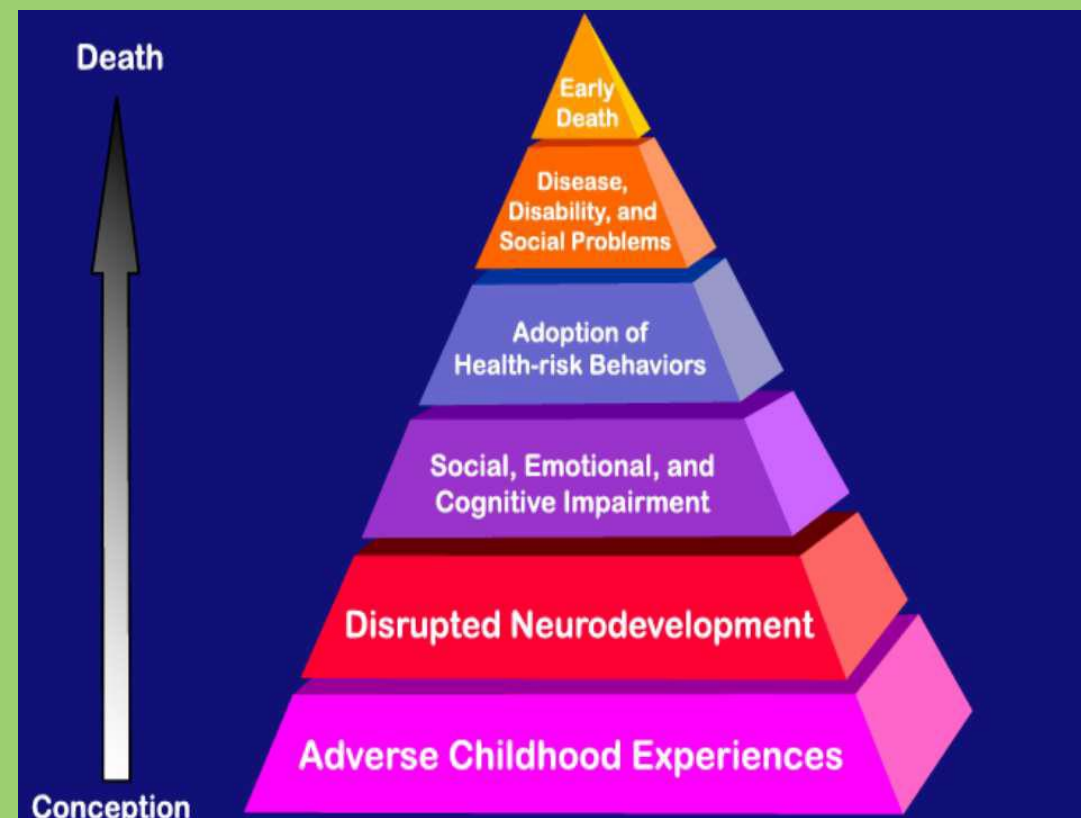
# *The Cost of Doing Nothing.....*

- School dropout ultimately leads to poor job outcomes, limited income, and **patterns of unhealthy behaviors** that may persist into adulthood including unplanned pregnancies & criminal activity
- **Impaired ability** to sustain healthy relationships
- **Systems stress:** child abuse/neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health, staff burnout, compromising resources for early care and education system

# *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*

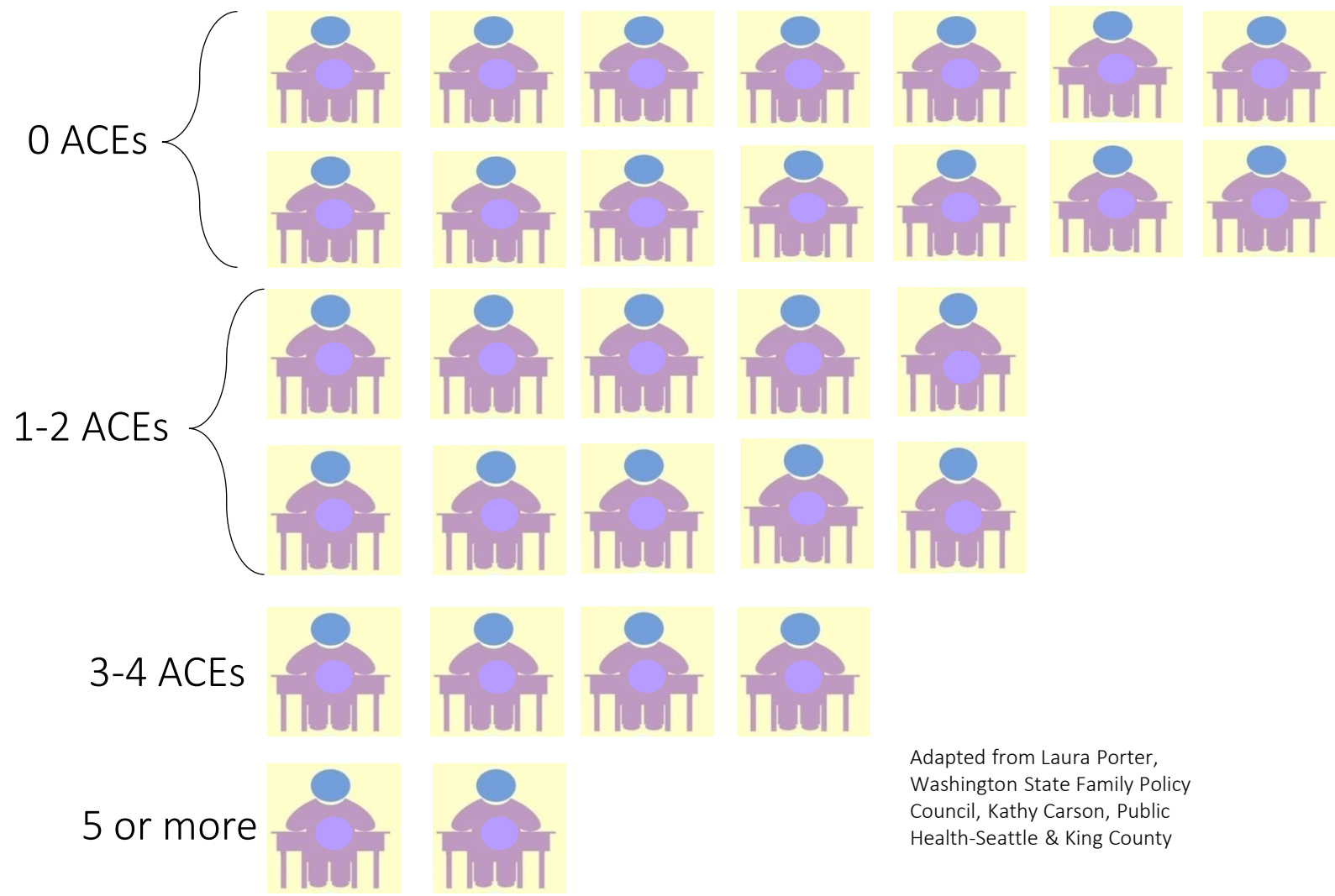
The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood exposure to traumatic stressors and later-life health and well-being

The greater the number of adverse experiences in early childhood, the greater the likelihood of health problems later in life





# ACE Prevalence in a Nebraska Classroom

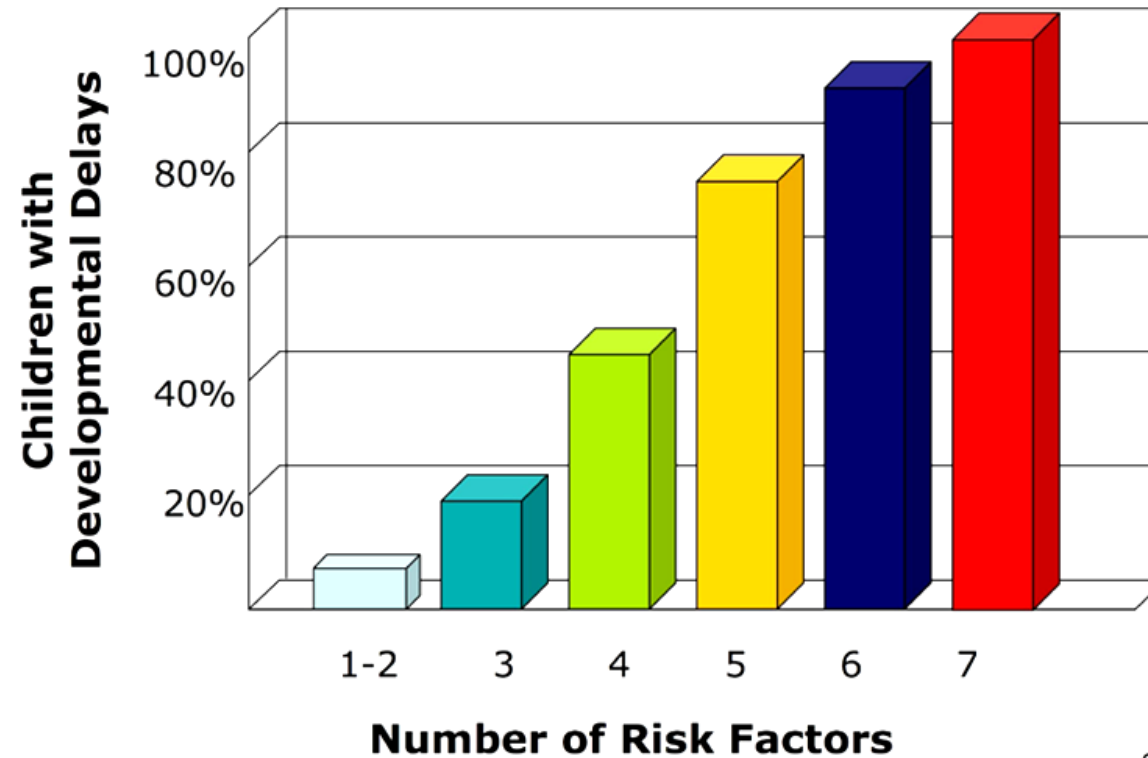


Adapted from Laura Porter,  
Washington State Family Policy  
Council, Kathy Carson, Public  
Health-Seattle & King County



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## Significant Adversity Impairs Development in the First Three Years



Source: Barth et al. (2008)

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