

The Impact of Bullying on Mental Health in the ASD/ IDD Population

NM START Program Learning Forum

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START Model

The START (Systemic-Therapeutic-Assessment-Resources-Treatment) model is an evidence-informed model of integrated community crisis prevention & intervention services for individuals ages 6 and older with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health needs.

START was first developed in 1988 by Dr. Joan B. Beasley and was cited as a best practice in the 2002 US Surgeon General's report and by the National Academy of Sciences in 2016.

The **National Center for START Services** at the UNH Institute on Disability oversees the development, measurement and quality of START programs across the country.

Objectives

1. Define bullying and the various types that can occur
2. Discuss the impact of bullying on mental health including suicide risk
3. Describe ways of supporting individuals and families to understand and address bullying effectively



What is Bullying?

- ❑ Unwanted or aggressive behavior among school-aged children
- ❑ Involves
 - ❑ An intent to harm
 - ❑ An imbalance of power
 - ❑ Repetition

(Young, 2013, Gafney et al., 2021)



Types of Bullying



Verbal
Bullying



Social
Bullying

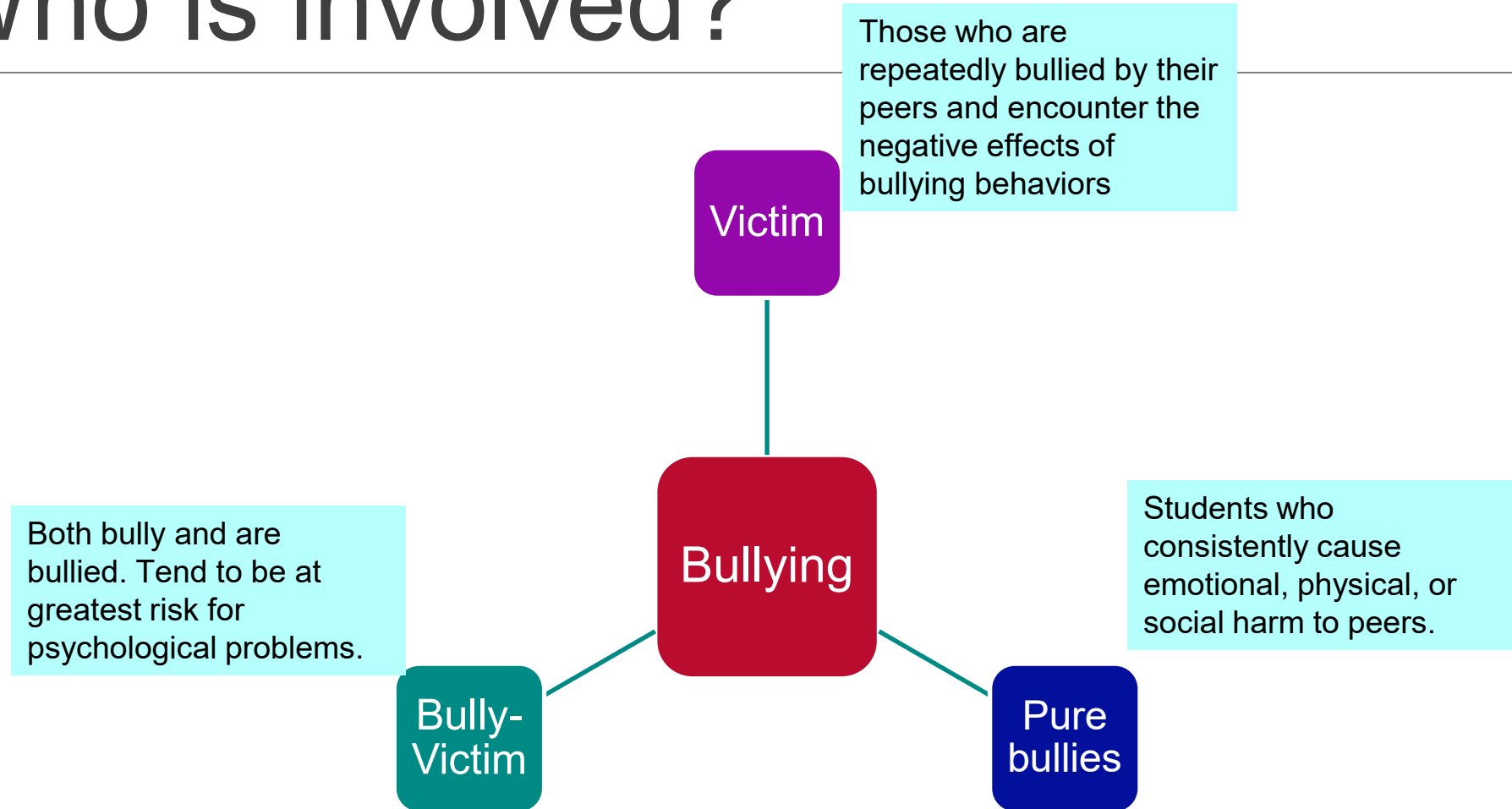


Physical
Bullying

Types of Bullying, cont.

- physical (e.g. pushing, kicking, hitting, stealing or damaging property)
- verbal (e.g. name calling, threatening)
- relational forms (e.g. purposely excluding, gossiping)
- sexual bullying (also sometimes referred to as sexual harassment)
- Cyber bullying is bullying in a digital context such as social media platforms or with the use of technology such as a cell phone, computer, tablet, or other devices with internet or interpersonal communication capabilities (Young et al., 2013).

Who is involved?



(Houchins, et al, 2016)



Frequency of Bullying

- 2022 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey
 - 19.2% of respondents ages 12-18 years of age report being bullied.
 - Highest rates of bullying occur in grades 6-8
 - Children educated in public sector (20.0%) report higher rates of bullying than those in private sector (14.5%)
 - Most report being bullied on school property.
- Students with disabilities
 - Experience increased peer victimization, up to 2-4 times greater odds of being bullied ([Rose & Espelage, 2012](#); [Hartley, Bauman, Nixon, & Davis, 2015](#)).
 - Students with externalizing behavioral challenges are more likely to be bully-victims
 - Students with more obvious intellectual or physical disabilities are more prone to victimization ([Farmer, Wike, Alexander, Rodkin, & Mehtaji, 2015](#); [O'Brennan, Waasdorp, Pas, & Bradshaw, 2015](#)).



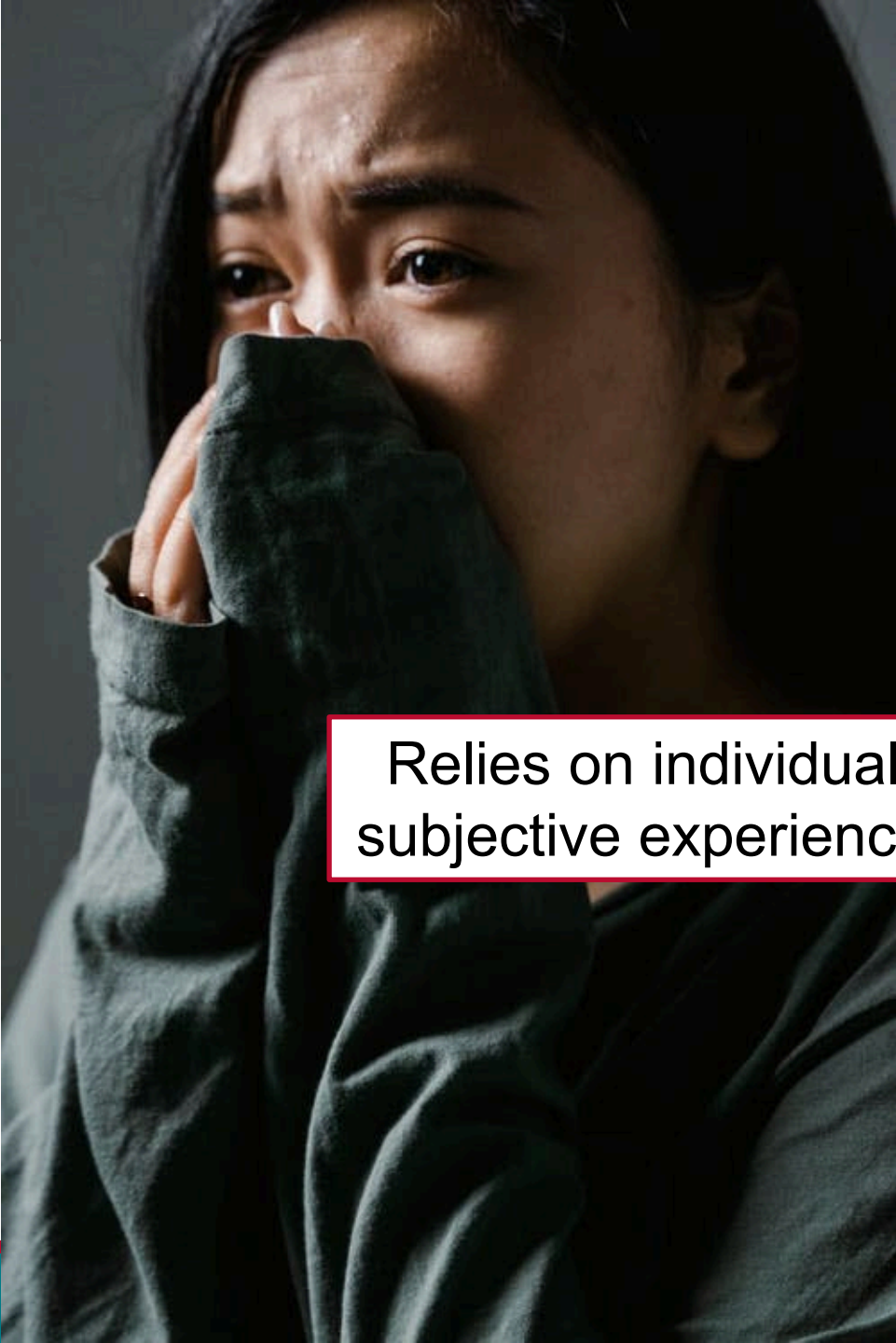
Mental Health Impact of Bullying

- Potential long-term implications of childhood bullying include greater levels of depression, anxiety, and aggressive behaviors over the life span ([Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006](#); [Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010](#)).
- Often considered a “traumatic event” (Sheng, et al., 2024)
 - Results in internalized expressions such as sadness and shame, and therefore the capacity to deal with other stressors.
- Relational bullying behaviors directly damage the interpersonal relationships of victims and can cause isolation, exclusion, loneliness, and helplessness(Sheng et al., 2024).

Suicidality and Bullying

- The association between suicidal ideation and bullying victimization shows as the frequency of victimization increased, the risk for suicidal ideation increased.
- Physical victimization was the strongest association, followed by relational and sexual bullying victimization.
- Among poly-victimization, experiencing three or more types of bullying had a stronger association with high suicidal ideation than any single type of bullying victimization (Sheng et al., 2024).

What is a traumatic event?



Relies on individual subjective experience

Single event or series of events

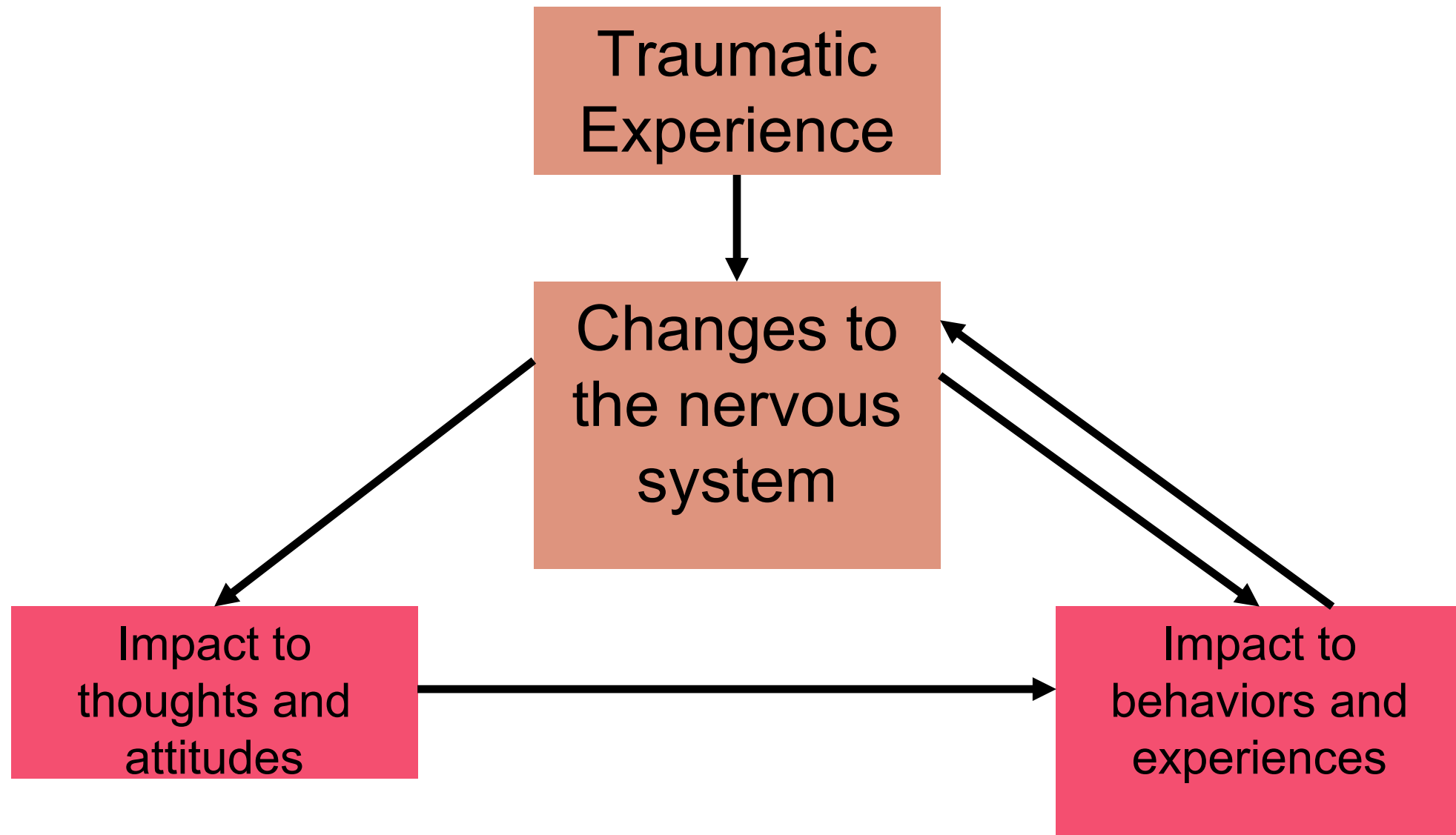
Horror

Helplessness

Serious injury

Threat of serious injury or death

CDC, 2022





Bullying and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Is there a relationship?

ACEs are potentially traumatic events before age 17.

Operationally defined; not subjective












Counted by “YES” or “NO” regardless of chronic or isolated exposure.



(Felitti, et al, 1998; Felitti, et al, 2019)



10 ACEs, as identified by the CDC-Kaiser study:

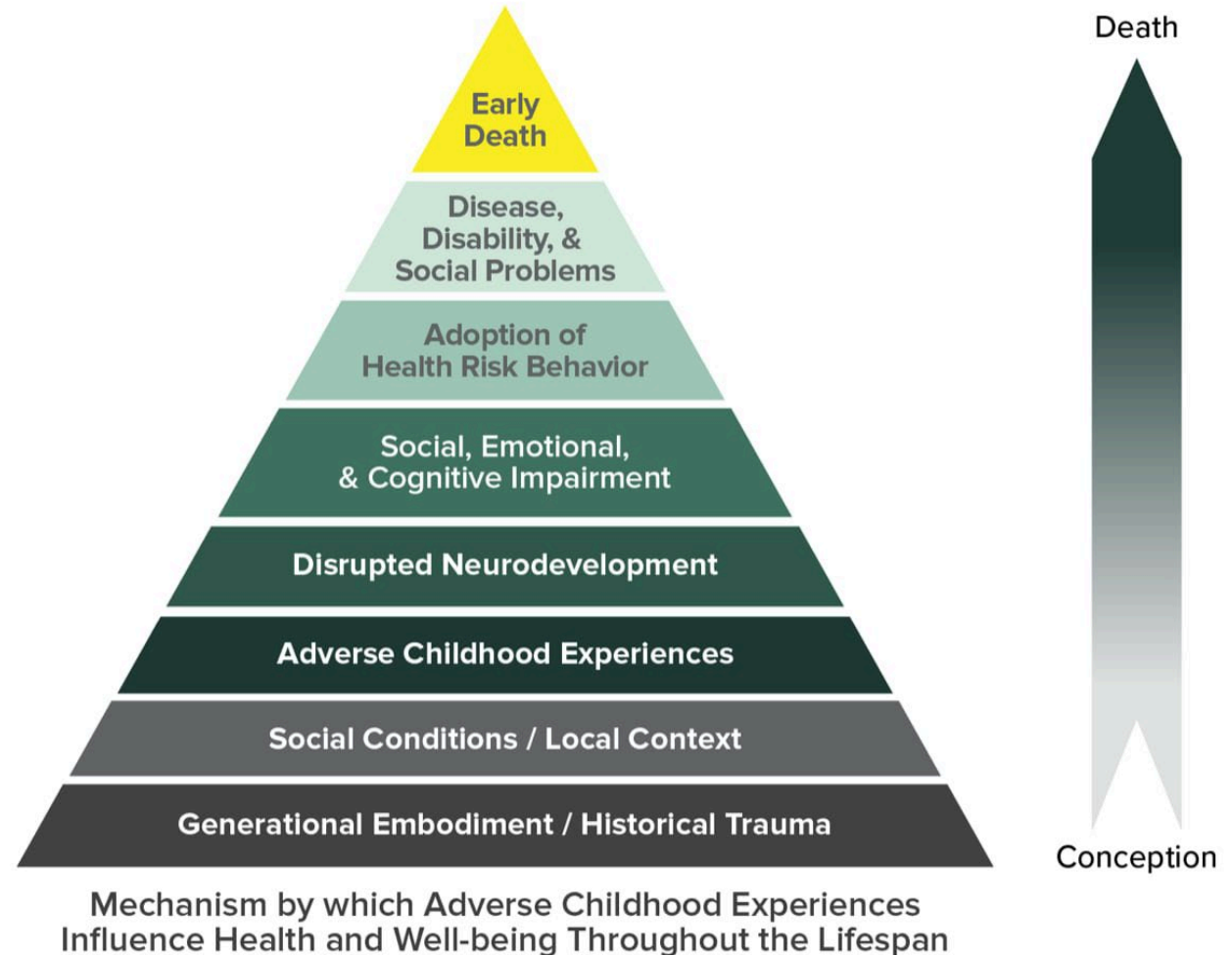
ABUSE	NEGLECT	HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION	
 <i>Physical</i>	 <i>Physical</i>	 <i>Mental Illness</i>	 <i>Incarcerated Relative</i>
 <i>Emotional</i>	 <i>Emotional</i>	 <i>Mother Treated Violently</i>	 <i>Substance Abuse</i>
 <i>Sexual</i>		 <i>Divorce</i>	

Graphic used with permission from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. [See it here.](#)

There are other types of adverse childhood experiences not included in the list of 10 ACEs above, including community and environmental ACEs such as racism, bullying and community violence. **Researchers have begun to include these experiences as ACEs, too, because they create the same biologic changes as the original 10 ACEs.**

The ACE Pyramid

ABCD Study found no interaction between bullying and ACES, but align with cumulative risk model of adversity.



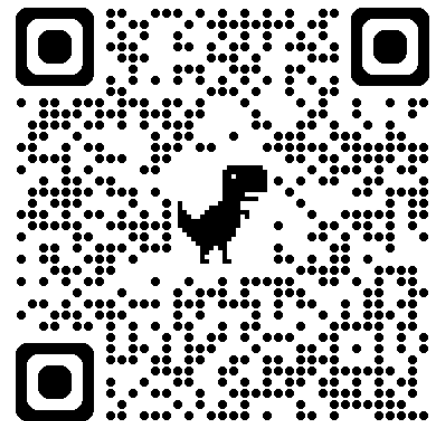
Large-Scale Programs

International examination of Anti-Bullying Interventions found that victim-centered interventions that aim to decrease the impacts of bullying-related trauma are successful.

- **Social support** is a program to reduce the impact of bullying by forming peer tutors.
- **Social skills supports** are an intervention to build abilities in adolescents in order to lessen the impact of bullying. The activities conducted are beneficial in building resilience and coping abilities in dealing with stressors caused by bullying.
- **School-based programs** are activities that collaborate with schools to reduce the impact of bullying and reduce its occurrence. Most school-based antibullying programs are effective in reducing bullying perpetration and bullying victimization, although effect sizes are modest. (Hikmat, et al, 2024)

Tips and Strategies

- Provide a social network. Peer support is one of the factors protecting bullying victims from suicidal ideation (Sheng et al., 2024).
- Intervene immediately. Model respectful behavior.
- Do not question children in front of one another.
- If immediate change is not feasible, add adult support or support the child with speaking up and preparing for a repeated event.
- Provide guidance on what bullying is or isn't.



Questions for Discussion

- What is the impact of bullying on J's mental health and well-being?
- Could bullying be a source of trauma for J?
- What are the most effective strategies and support for someone experiencing bullying in their educational setting?

Selected References

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