

## Early Life Experiences Come With Us: ACEs and the Workplace



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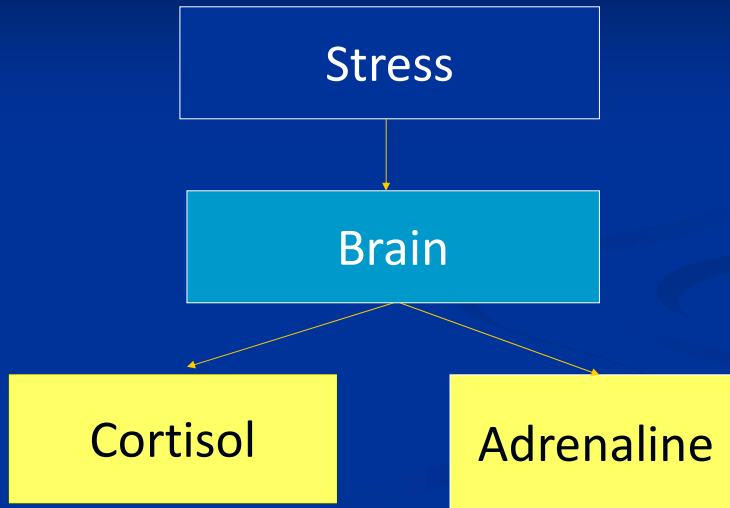
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## Think of something that didn't go your way today

- What thoughts went through your mind?
- What emotion(s) did you experience?
- What did it feel like?
- Where did you feel it in your body?

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## Basic Stress Pathway

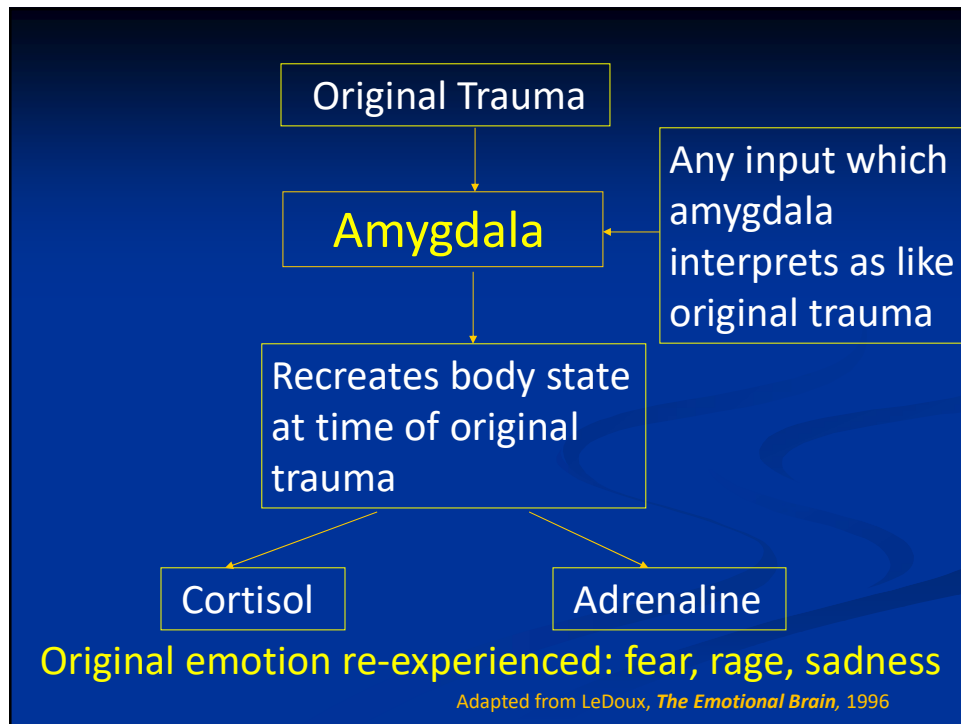


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## Stress and Trauma

- **Stress**: anything that requires a response, can be “good” or “bad”
- **Trauma**: anything that *overwhelms* our ability to respond, especially if we perceive that our life or our connection to things that support us physically or emotionally is threatened

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## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Family Substance Abuse
- Family Mental Illness
- Incarcerated Family Member
- Parental Separation/Divorce
- Seeing Mother Physically Abused
- Physical Neglect
- Emotional Neglect
- Additional “ACEs”
  - Housing Quality & Homelessness
  - Loss of a Parent
  - Poverty
  - Racism/Discrimination
  - Neighborhood quality
  - Community Violence
  - Toxic Exposures/Pollution

• **ACE “score” = number of *categories* experienced before age 18 years**

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## ACES can have lasting effects on....



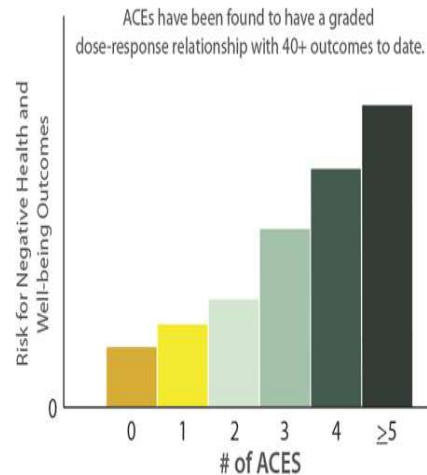
Health (obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones)



Behaviors (smoking, alcoholism, drug use)



Life Potential (graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time from work)



\*This pattern holds for the 40+ outcomes, but the exact risk values vary depending on the outcome.

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## What is the average ACE score of:

- The people in your community?
- Your fellow managers/supervisors?
- Your employees?
  
- What is your ACE score?
- How has that affected you in your life and in your work role?

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## Some Behaviors/Beliefs We Can Have as the Result of Trauma

- Distrust—of the government, institutions, our own leaders, supervisors, etc. even to our own detriment: “they” are out to get us
- Sense of never having “enough”
- Spend/eat/use what you have now as it may be taken from you
- We will not live to be old, so it doesn’t matter what we do now
- “Love” is not to be trusted

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## Behaviors we can see in workplace

Workplaces have structures not very different from families—we often bring our old family dynamics to work

- Anger “out of proportion” to situation
- “Us” and “Them”
- Recreation of “family hero” dynamic
- Distrust of supervisor
- Overly dependent on supervisor
- Supervisors may supervise like they were parented
- Dissociation: can look like disinterest, “spaciness”
- Employees say they are doing something that they aren’t
- Employees deny doing something that they are

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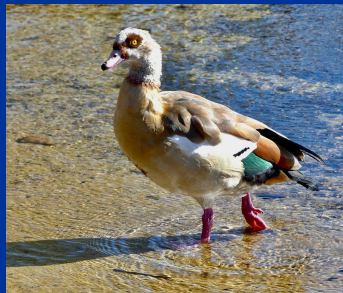
## When working with employees

- Recognize that their behaviors are often coming from stress and trauma
  - What's going on at home, health issues, sleep, financial problems
  - Different situations will cause different people to feel stressed/respond from traumatic associations, such as:
    - Talking to authority figures (like supervisors)
    - Unfamiliar or challenging situations
    - Conflict with coworkers
    - Even hunger, fatigue can trigger trauma responses
- Be aware of your own responses
  - Including our tendency to *judge* employees
- Compassion and Connection are powerful tools

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# Thank you

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