

# WEB Talks: Women's Educational Briefings

Becky Haas, Presenter

# Understanding ACEs and Trauma

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study conducted in the late 1990's taught us that childhood trauma without having a healthy support system can be a significant risk factor to addiction and other life/health disparities.
- Data collected from over 17,000 adults in the Kaiser Permanente Health Plan revealed a high percentage of people have experienced some form of trauma in their life.
- The study showed, the higher someone's ACEs score, without having a healthy support system, the greater the likelihood someone will choose risky behaviors to cope.
- Advocating for ACE awareness is one of the platforms for the work of the Women's Fund.

# ACEs Insights

- Growing up with household dysfunction can derail a child's brain development.
- Typical brain development results in a strong upper part of the brain called the "cortex" (center for learning, conflict resolution and emotional regulation)
- Trauma survivors often have a highly developed downstairs brain called the "amygdala" (survival center that can only produce three responses...fight, flight or freeze).
- Calm behavior is upstairs brain, while anxious, fearful, tumultuous behavior is downstairs brain.



# The Good News About ACEs

- ACEs taught us, “what is predictable is preventable.”
- ACEs may be fact but they don’t have to be our fate.
- We can strengthen our personal support system
- We can learn skills to move from downstairs brain to upstairs.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

# Reducing Trauma During the Holidays

- During the holiday season, the need for a trauma-informed approach is critical, even more so while navigating COVID-19.
- During the holiday season, often we see reminders that it is supposed to be “the most wonderful time of the year.”
- While for some that may be true, yet for others the holiday season is filled with triggers such as songs, scents, missing loved ones and rituals.
- Adding to holiday pressures, expectations are heightened, and holidays can feel like a test of how happy and successful your family is.
- For those experiencing loss, illness or unexpected change, the holidays may also serve as a reminder of what does not exist—a home in which to celebrate, cook, decorate, and rejoice. Loss, loneliness, and shame are powerful triggers.

# Be Opened to Change



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

- Create meaningful rituals. During COVID-19 some of your favorite holiday traditions might not be possible this year (i.e. attending theater, parades, etc.)
- Involve family members and discuss what ways can we celebrate but be mindful of COVID-19 precautions.
- The greatest gift we can give our loved ones is helping each other to stay well!

# Planning

- As you are planning, ask yourself, “What helps and what hurts?”
- Have people I plan to interact with experienced change this year? Divorce, loss of employment, illness, marriage, birth of a child, job promotion, death of a loved one...
- In relationships, we have a tendency to try and give other people what we need, instead of giving them what they need.
- Often we make the mistake of not being intentional to discover individual needs but if you closely listen and observe, people will let you know what is important to them.

# Strengthening Relationships

- Having a strong personal support system is the key to mitigating the effects of ACEs.
- Holidays provide additional time to be with loved ones and close friends.
- Due to COVID-19 gatherings might be limited but you can still connect.
- Use technology like Facetime, Facebook messenger, Skype, Google Hangouts to spend quality time together.
- These are such effective ways to connect, COVID-19 has launched many new tele-health services.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)



## Gifts That Say “Thank You”

Electronic frames – gift idea for strengthening connection when family members live away and cannot visit.

Distribute the link to family and friends and encourage them to share photos to keep this loved on connected.



- Consider gifts that let your “support system” know how much they matter.
- Write a letter, homemade card, ornament or art that reflect their valuable place in your life.
- Fix a casserole, loaf of bread, etc. to deliver with a message – “A small way to return to you the warmth I receive from your support!”

# Make Room for Mindfulness

- Contrary to common belief, one effective way to cope with the holiday madness is to SLOW DOWN and take a little time each day to cultivate and practice mindfulness.
- Mindful activities help us to stay in the upstairs (calm) part of our brain.
- Many mindful activities can be simple, quick and free.
- Find a quiet place where you can be alone a few minutes.

# Mindful Moments

- Spend 15 minutes reading aloud from your favorite book of poems, Bible passages or an inspiring devotional. When you read aloud your mind will focus on listening to the words coming out of your mouth and result in a calming effect.
- Practice deep breathing by getting into a comfortable sitting position. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing only. Do this for a few minutes. Listen to the sound of your breath and notice how your body feels during this time. When thoughts of other moments come racing into your mind, acknowledge them and let them go by as if they are on a conveyor belt, and refocus your attention on your breath again. Do this over and over.
- When you are walking outside, focus on one of your senses. (i.e. for vision, notice the colors of objects around you or for hearing, listen to the sounds around you and label them.)

# Attitude of Gratitude

- Spend a few minutes writing down five things you are thankful for that day.
- Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.
- Be intentional to say “thank you” to family members and others for any help or kindness given...no matter how small.
- Consider leaving a basket on the porch with small bags of homemade baked goods for UPS, FedEx and Postal workers. Leave a note saying, “ take one and thank you.” During COVID-19 these tireless workers have helped many of us do our “Christmas shopping” 😊



# Don't Forget the Kids

- Get the kids or grandkids involved!
- Keep bubbles on hand. As weather permits go outside a few minutes and blow bubbles together. Make a game out of it and instruct them (and yourself) to silently watch the bubbles float around. Then switch it up and pop the bubbles.
- Keep a jigsaw puzzle going. Buy a puzzle, open it up and have all the pieces spread out on a table in a community area where people may gather. (Include hand sanitizer or wipes for people cleaning hands before play.)
- Have coloring books, crayons and colored pencils in an area where people gather. (Include hand sanitizer or wipes for keeping hands clean.)
- Purchase side-walk chalk. Weather permitting, go outside and turn your driveway or sidewalk into an art gallery.

# Nutrition



- Pay attention to nutrition and exercise.
- Cookies, pies, fudge and cake—oh my!
- Taking care of one's body is good self-care advice no matter the season, but with additional stress and temptation everywhere, be more mindful about eating and exercise habits.
- Be sure to drink plenty of water.
- Indulge in sweets, caffeine, and alcohol in moderation.
- Get outdoors (or on the treadmill) and go for a walk.

# Inspire Hope

*“The world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming.”*

*“No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an unchartered land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit.”*

*“We could never learn to be brave and patient, if there were only joy in the world.”*

*~ Helen Keller*

# Questions?

*Happy Holidays to the Women's  
Fund of East Tennessee and all it's  
friends!*





# Contact Information

- Becky Haas
- <https://beckyhaas.com>
- [Becky@beckyhaas.com](mailto:Becky@beckyhaas.com)

