



Editorial: Appeared in The Daily Oklahoman
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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

To the Editor:

I've just watched the magnificent Centennial Parade celebrating the rich and robust culture of Oklahoma. It puzzles me that, with so much to be proud of, Oklahoma still lags behind in the most basic essential: good health!

I was pleased to find the October 7th supplement to the *Sunday Oklahoman* regarding White Fields home for boys that highlighted the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study, and the link between childhood trauma and future poor health. When Oklahoma became a state 100 years ago, the leading causes of death and disability were pneumonia and tuberculosis. Modern diseases are mostly caused, not by germs, but by our own behaviors.

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy has been working to raise awareness about the impact of the ACEs study and its implications for our state. The study indicates that when a child experiences trauma – whether from child abuse or a tornado ripping her home apart – the stress changes her brain, and may lead her to adopt a health-risk behavior, such as smoking or overeating, to cope with the pain. It is these behaviors that are responsible for most of the physical ailments so prevalent today – heart disease, diabetes and depression.

Unfortunately, Oklahomans are well-acquainted with trauma. Consider our recent history:

Man-made disasters. The Oklahoma City bombing killed 168 people, and wounded almost 900 others. Our Department of Mental Health served over 5,000 children through their disaster services in the six years following the bombing.

Natural disasters. FEMA ranks Oklahoma first per capita in disaster declarations. So Oklahoma children are more likely to be affected by tornadoes, fires, floods, and winter storms than children in other states.

Trauma upon children. DHS receives 250 reports of suspected child abuse every day. That's one call every 6 minutes.

Trauma around children. There was a 13-week period this year in which a domestic violence murder occurred each week – meaning not only did children witness horrific violence, they also lost their parents!

Impact of war. There are currently over 3,200 Oklahoma soldiers deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Almost 19,000 have served since the wars began. Think of what the children and families of these brave G.I.'s are going through.

This all adds up to a mountain of stress that can result in mental, emotional and behavioral problems that are real, painful and costly.

Fortunately, child and family advocates throughout Oklahoma are responding with renewed vigor to reduce the impact of stress on our vulnerable neighbors. I urge all Oklahomans to join this effort by talking about the ACEs study with your schools, faith communities, civic clubs and elected officials. The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy has placed five issues briefs about the study on our website at www.OICA.org.

Oklahomans love our children. Now we have the tools to ensure that we can create a safer and healthier environment as we enter our next hundred years!

Submitted by Anne Roberts, Executive Director
Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy