

Joint Committee on Child Welfare System Oversight
March 31, 2025

Thank you, Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Howerton, and Members of the Committee for providing me this opportunity to share information about the Kansas Children's Service League (KCSL), a private, non-profit, 501(c)3 operating in Kansas since 1893. We are the Kansas Chapter for Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA). KCSL works every day to create, repair and restore healthy parent-child relationships which are the foundation of a strong family. As the state chapter for PCAA our charge is to prevent child abuse. We know the best way to prevent child abuse is to teach parents and support parents right from the start. KCSL achieves this through a wide array of family services and support.

Recent research in the field of child abuse and neglect prevention focuses on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). **ACEs include abuse and neglect as well as other household dysfunctions or circumstances which affect children adversely, including substance abuse, mental illness of a parent, domestic violence, and criminal behavior-all of which place a child at higher risk of entering the foster care system.** The childhood trauma stemming from adversity has a profound impact on social connections, school readiness, and the increased likelihood of developing negative coping mechanisms. These maladaptive coping skills have an impact on our larger society in terms of health-related costs, worker productivity costs, and criminal justice costs as these children become adults. This is compounded when a child has adverse experiences in 4 or more of the 10 primary categories.

Although Adverse Childhood Experiences are damaging, **science also shows providing stable, responsive, nurturing relationships in the earliest years of life can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior, and health.** We know for every \$1 spent on prevention you can save \$5 in other more expensive costs such as foster care, juvenile justice, and special education.

April is designated as a month to increase awareness about the importance of child abuse prevention. This year the theme is **"Powered by Hope, Strengthened by Prevention"**. Preventing child abuse isn't just about avoiding harm, it is about creating opportunities for families and children to thrive. Prevention is a shared responsibility between families, community, policymakers and organizations working together. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are fundamental in a child's ability to succeed and meet their full potential. We hope you will join us in showing your support for child abuse prevention efforts on Friday April 4 by wearing blue. If you want to join other efforts, please go to our website to learn more. kcsl.org/resources/cap-month/

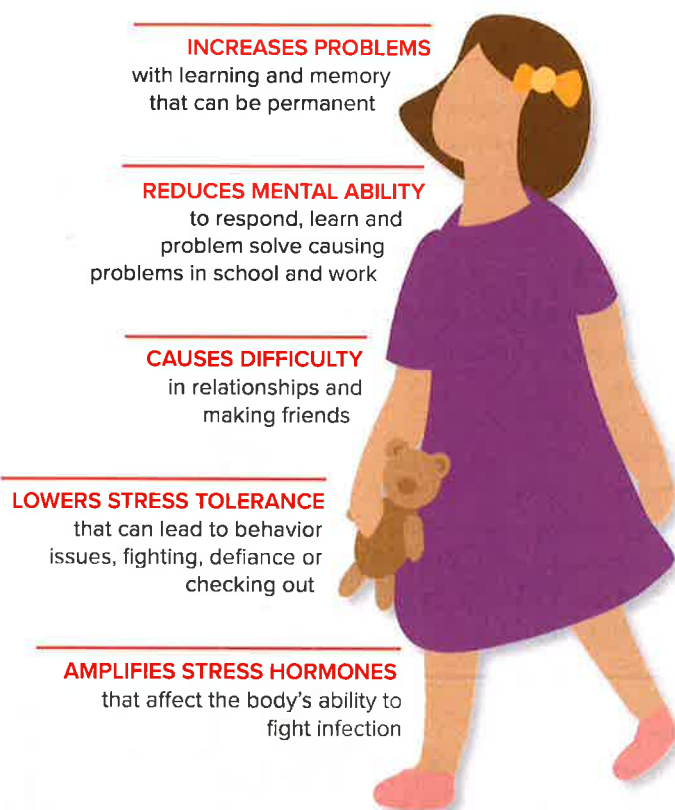
Thank you for your time today and for supporting children and their families in Kansas.
Gail Cozadd, CEO
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What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include abuse and neglect as well as other household dysfunctions or circumstances that affect children adversely. The childhood trauma stemming from early adversity has a profound impact on social connections, school readiness and long-term health problems.

HOW DO ACEs AFFECT HEALTH?



ACEs CAN INCLUDE:

- Emotional, physical and sexual abuse
- Emotional and physical neglect
- Violence in the household
- Household substance use
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Loss of a loved one
- Incarcerated household member
- Bullying (by children or adults)
- Witnessing violence
- Witnessing sibling abuse
- Racism, sexism, or discrimination
- Homelessness and extreme poverty
- Natural disasters and war

Exposure to ACEs can cause health problems such as depression, adolescent pregnancy, substance and alcohol use disorder, heart and liver disease, intimate partner violence, STDs, smoking, suicide and more.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Although ACEs are damaging, science also shows that providing stable, responsive, nurturing relationships can prevent or even reverse the damaging effects of early life stress with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior and health.



How Can We Build Healthy, Positive Experiences?

Research has shown that Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) can help protect against and even reverse the poor health outcomes and damaging effects associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Parents, teacher, and caregivers can help children build resilience by acquiring expertise in creating positive experiences. *Children and adults need our help to promote healthy, positive experiences.*

Promote the positive to reverse and repair the damages of ACEs!



1. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Parents and caregivers should model healthy, nurturing relationships for children. Children need supportive relationships in order to develop into healthy and resilient adults. Connection with parents, caregivers, teachers, coaches and mentors will help children feel supported in their growth and development.



2. SAFE AND STABLE ENVIRONMENTS

Children need safe, equitable and stable environments for living, playing and learning. Children are at their best when they are in an environment where their basic needs are met; they feel physically and emotionally secure; and they feel valued.



3. SOCIAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Community connection and engagement help children learn to feel loved and appreciated. Then, they are able to spread positivity to those they interact with. Community connection can include interest groups, activities, cultural or religious groups and more. Community connections have a positive impact on children's resilience.



4. EMOTIONAL GROWTH

Children need guidance and opportunities to develop self-awareness and social cognition along with emotional regulation and healthy behaviors. Working with children to understand and name their emotions will help them grow into emotionally healthy and resilient adults.



You can help Kansas families and children by supporting evidence-based programs that put families first, strengthen families and provide a foundation for healthy child development.