

HOW ARE WE SERVING ALASKA'S CHILDREN?

2024 Update by the Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force



Josh Louwerse
Cathy Baldwin-Johnson MD

Key Points



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

- Who we are & what we do
- ACEs: Why we do what we do
- Child abuse and neglect in Alaska
- Recommendations

Introduction to the Alaska CJATF



- Federally mandated and funded
- **Mission:** *Identify areas where improvement is needed in the statewide response to child maltreatment, make recommendations and take action to improve the system.*
- Statewide, multidisciplinary membership that includes volunteers
- Legislation to improve protection & justice for children (starvation, serious physical abuse, privacy)
- Focus on education: child abuse in Alaska, mandatory reporting, & best practices for the multidisciplinary response to child abuse



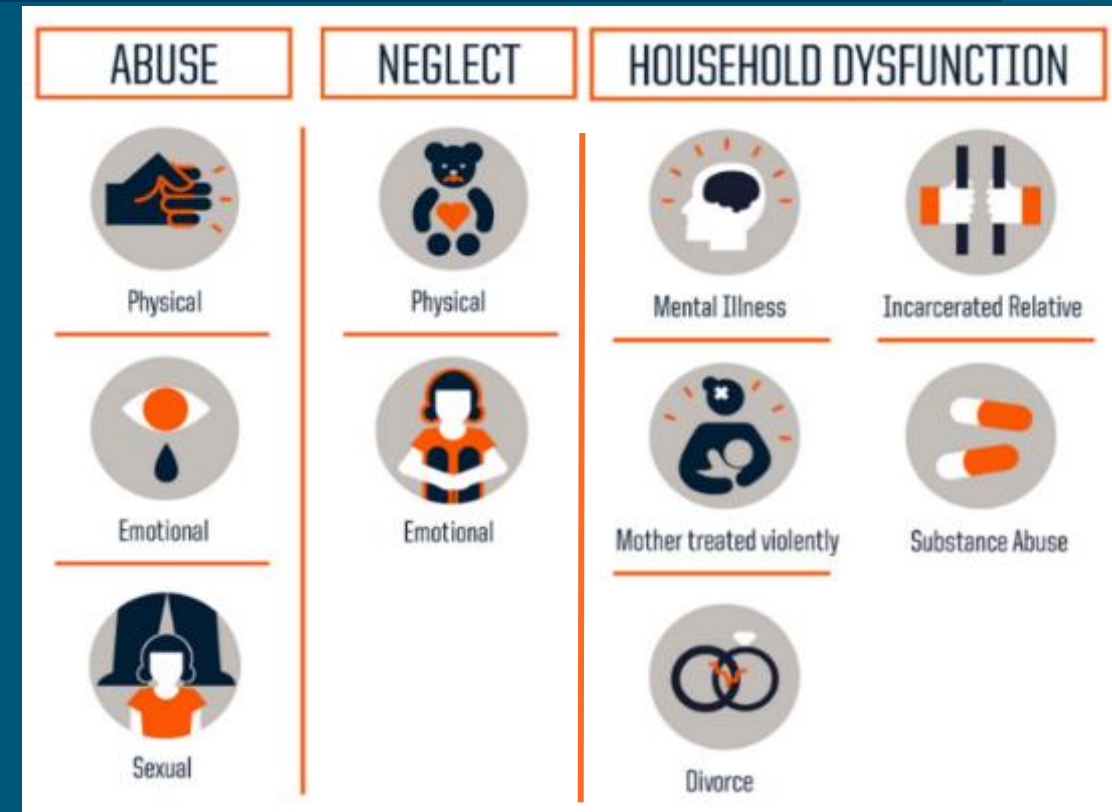
Why this is important:
ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences



CDC researchers and Kaiser Permanente¹

- Asked about adverse events before age 18
- 75% White
- Mean age: 57 years old
- 75% at least some college



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

1) Felitti, Vincent J., et al. "Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study." *American journal of preventive medicine* 14.4 (1998): 245-258.

ACES



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

Are common

And it is rarely just one bad thing for children:

- *There was an 87% chance at least one other category of ACE was present*
- *A 50% chance of 3 or more*

ACEs have consequences:



The more ACEs documented, the higher the risk for developing later health and social problems

Accumulation
of ACEs



Trauma modifies
development &
genetics

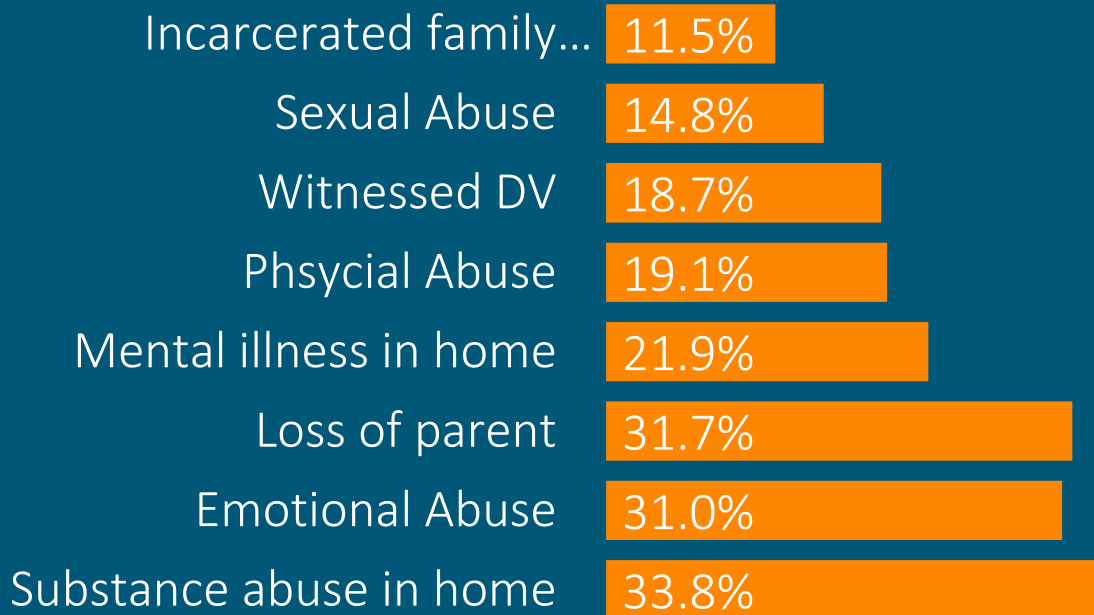


Child Abuse & Neglect in Alaska: Consequences



ACEs in Alaskan Adults

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/abada/ace-ak/Pages/default.aspx>



Reporting 4+



- 49% more likely to be unemployed
- 274% more likely to be unable to work
- 92% more likely to earn < \$20k annually
- Significantly more likely to report poor physical & mental health
- It's never just one bad thing...

Child maltreatment is expensive



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

*Recent study: economic burden for **2019** non-fatal child abuse cases in Alaska*

\$710 million “human capital” costs to state (health, child welfare, criminal justice, special education, productivity loss)

\$2.3 billion including mortality & quality of life reduction (like pain and suffering)

“Economic Costs of Child Abuse and Neglect in Alaska in 2019” – Nolan Klouda MPA, CEcD

Introduction to Patricia

Patricia is a now 10-year-old who lives with her mother Alicia, step-father Jason, and 6-year-old brother William

Alicia is a nurse who works nights

Jason is a fire fighter



Birth

Patricia was born 5 weeks early because her biological father Patrick strangled her mother then kicked her in the abdomen

Patrick was arrested

Alicia filed for a restraining order & divorced Patrick while Alicia was still an infant



Family changes



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

Alicia met Jason through work

He swept her off her feet and was eager to adopt Patricia

They moved in together into Jason's house when Patricia was 4

Alicia had baby boy William shortly after

Disclosure

When she was in 4th grade Patricia heard a presentation at school about personal safety

After the presentation Patricia went up to her teacher and said “Something like that has been happening to me”

Disclosures of abuse are very common after these presentations



Mandated reporting

Patricia's teacher made a report to both OCS & law enforcement as required by Alaska law

The OCS social worker talked to Patricia briefly at school and determined her mother was not aware of the abuse

OCS & law enforcement worked with their local Child Advocacy Center for Patricia to be evaluated



Child Advocacy Center Process



Patricia and her mom were greeted by their CAC family advocate who took them on a tour and explained the process

Their multidisciplinary team:

- *CAC family advocate*
- *OCS worker*
- *Law enforcement officer*
- *Medical provider*



The team met with Alicia and explained their concerns for Patricia

Alicia was shocked and tearful

The “talking room”

Patricia talked with someone specially trained to talk with kids about difficult things in non-leading ways

Patricia said that since she was 6 her daddy would come into her room at night when mommy was working at the hospital and do inappropriate things

Daddy also showed her videos of naked people on his phone

Patricia also described daddy drinking, then yelling and hitting mommy



Medical exam

Patricia had a head-to-toe exam by a nurse practitioner with specialized training and experience

Patricia's exam was normal -as expected given what she described and the time since the last abuse

A urine sample was collected to test for gonorrhea and chlamydia

Patricia & her mom were relieved to know her body was OK



William



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

Patricia's 6-year-old brother William was also interviewed as a possible witness or additional victim

He did not disclose sexual abuse by his father

He did describe his sister coming into his room when he was getting dressed, asking if she could kiss his "peepee" like she does for daddy

He said yes, then later told his dad who hit Patricia with a belt "a million times" and then Patricia couldn't sit down

Next steps: LE investigation

The detective explained possible next steps to gather additional information such as:

- *Scene investigation*
- *Court authorized recordings*
- *Additional witness interviews*
- *Other corroborating evidence*



Next steps: OCS

Their OCS worker discusses safety planning to protect Patricia and William from future harm

Mom Alicia explains her parents play an active role in their lives and are willing to let she and the children move in with them

Alicia will get a protective order on behalf of the children



Next steps: CAC advocacy



Their CAC advocate works with Alicia to determine family strengths & needs

Strengths:

- *Alicia has a secure well-paying job with benefits as well as supportive friendships*
- *Grandparents can provide a safe living situation & help with childcare*
- *Patricia is doing well in school & has a good relationship with the teacher to whom she disclosed*

Needs:

- *Alicia, Patricia & William are referred for counseling to therapists with specialized training in treating children and parents who have experienced trauma*

Follow up: OCS



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

OCS substantiates the sexual abuse allegation against Jason

OCS closes their case concerning Alicia because she has demonstrated her protectiveness for her children

Follow up: Court system

Thorough investigation by the law enforcement officer finds corroborative evidence for Patricia's disclosures

At Grand Jury Jason is indicted for multiple counts of sexual abuse of a minor

Jason accepts a plea deal that reduces the number of counts but results in a prison sentence of 20 years and lifetime sex offender registration



Follow up: CAC advocacy

The CAC advocate stays in regular contact with Alicia to ensure she and the children are still accessing mental health services and doing well

She continues her involvement until the court case is settled and Alicia feels that she and the children don't need further support from the CAC



“Ideal” outcome



Made possible when all our agencies work well & together AND there are protective factors in place

HOWEVER many children in our state:

- *Don't feel safe talking about their abuse*
- *Don't have a safe person to talk to about their abuse*
- *Don't have supportive, protective caregivers*
- *Have to wait months to be seen by a trained therapist*
- *Don't have adequate resources in their communities*

And most of our agencies responsible for responding are understaffed

Because of Child Advocacy Centers:



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

- We reduce future exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Cases are more likely to have successful resolutions
- Children and families receive services
 - *Advocacy*
 - *Mental health services*
 - *Needed resources (for example related to food and transportation)*
 - *Families can better protect their children going forward*
- We can reduce the state budget devoted to the long-term downstream effects of ACEs

What if we could
work further
upstream?



ALCANLink

Alaska Longitudinal Child Abuse and Neglect Linkage Project

A population-based mixed design

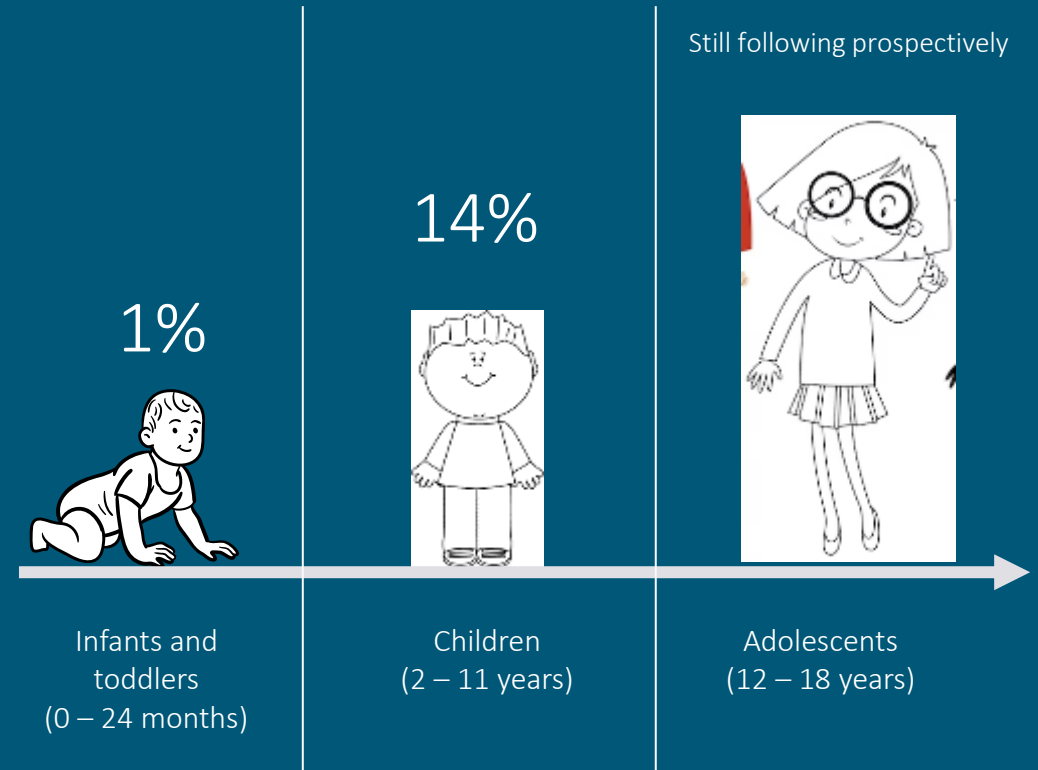


Risk of allegation of harm for sexual abuse



~ 1 in every 7 children born in Alaska will have a report made concerning child sexual abuse before their 12th birthday

~ 1 in 3 will have a report made to OCS for some type of abuse or neglect

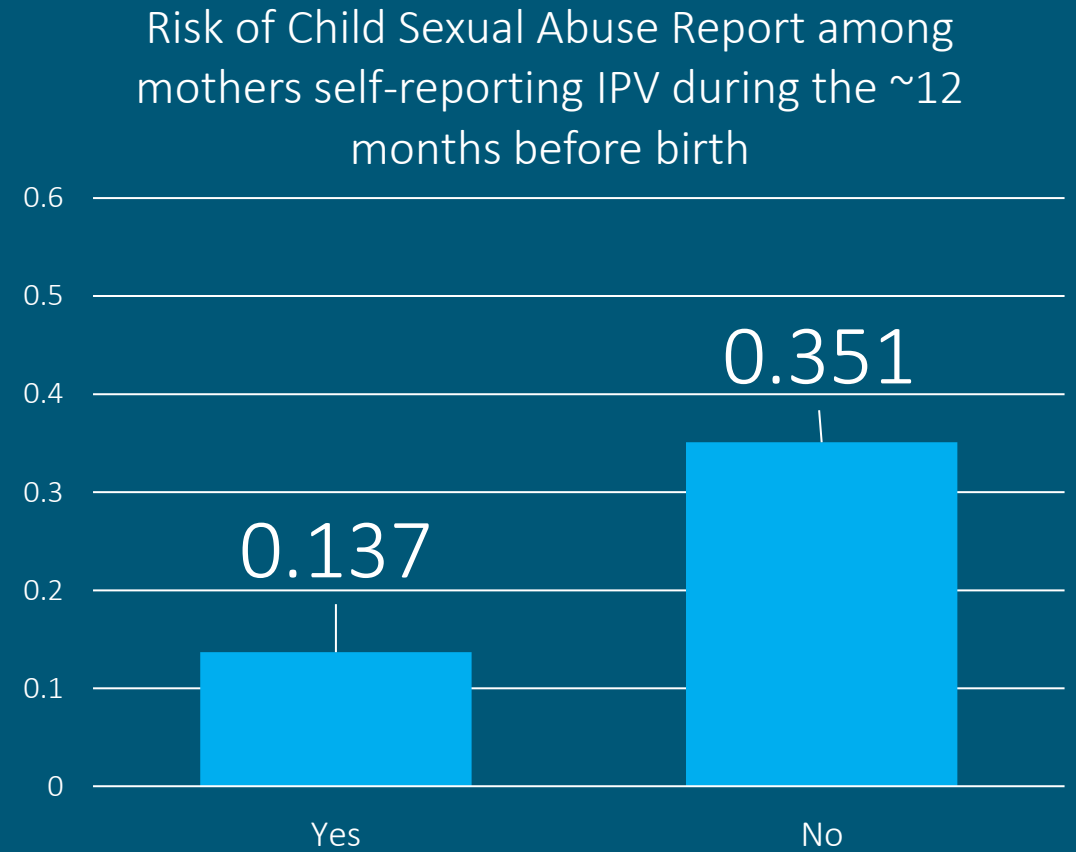


Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and child sexual abuse report

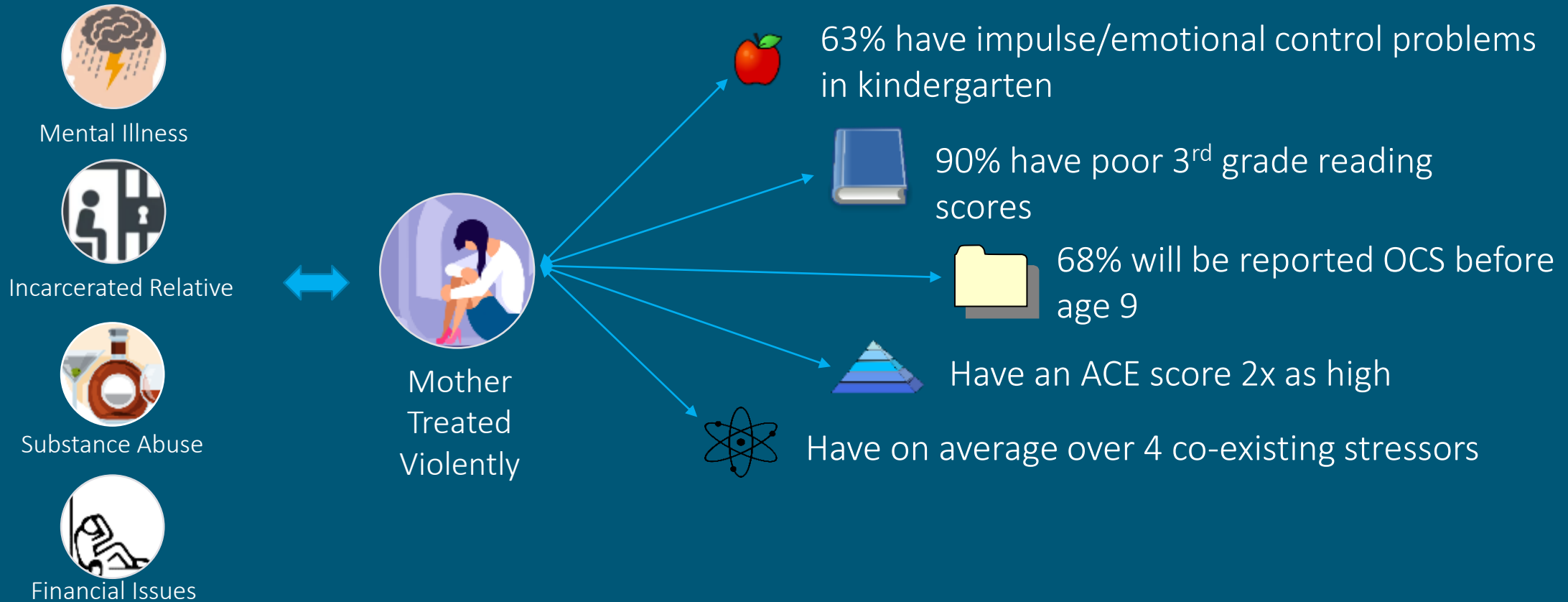
Among children born in Alaska to mothers self-reporting IPV:

35% experienced a report of harm prior to age 13 years.

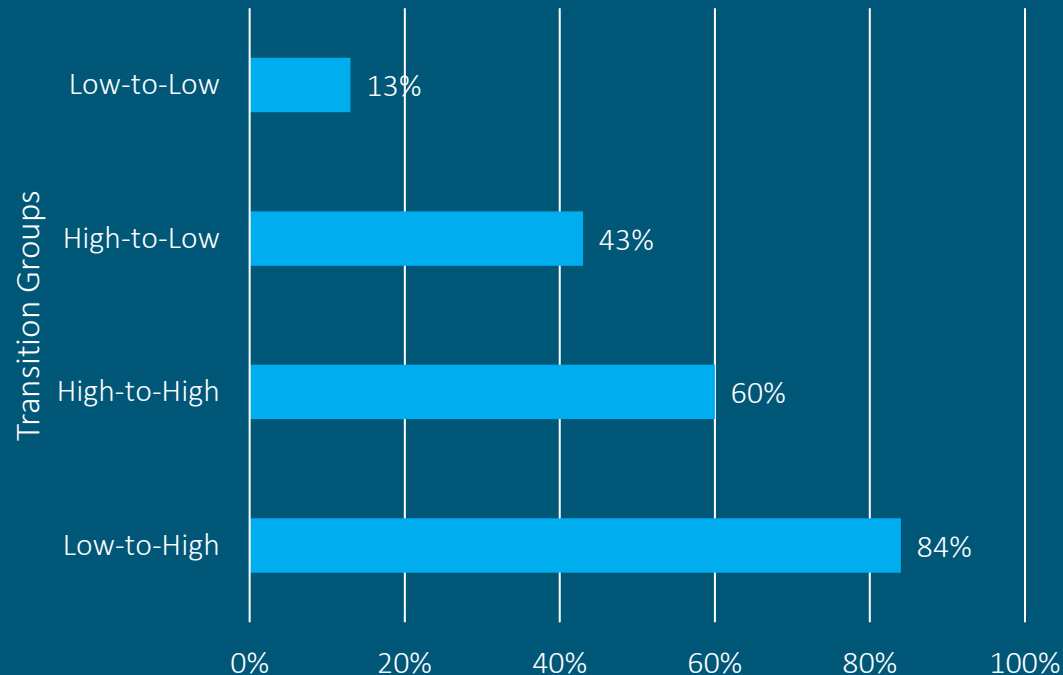
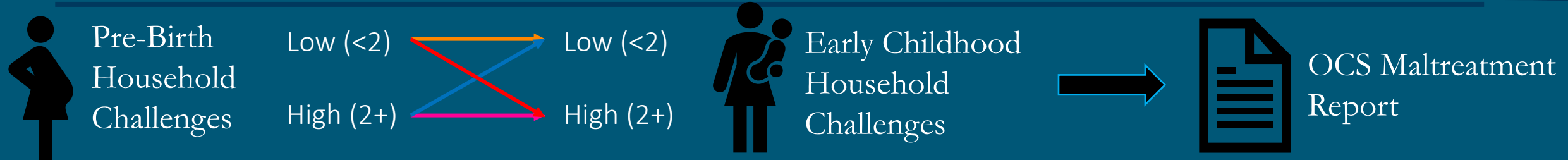
Are **2.6 times** as likely to experience an allegation of harm for sexual abuse relative to those born to mothers not reporting IPV



IPV and Child Wellbeing



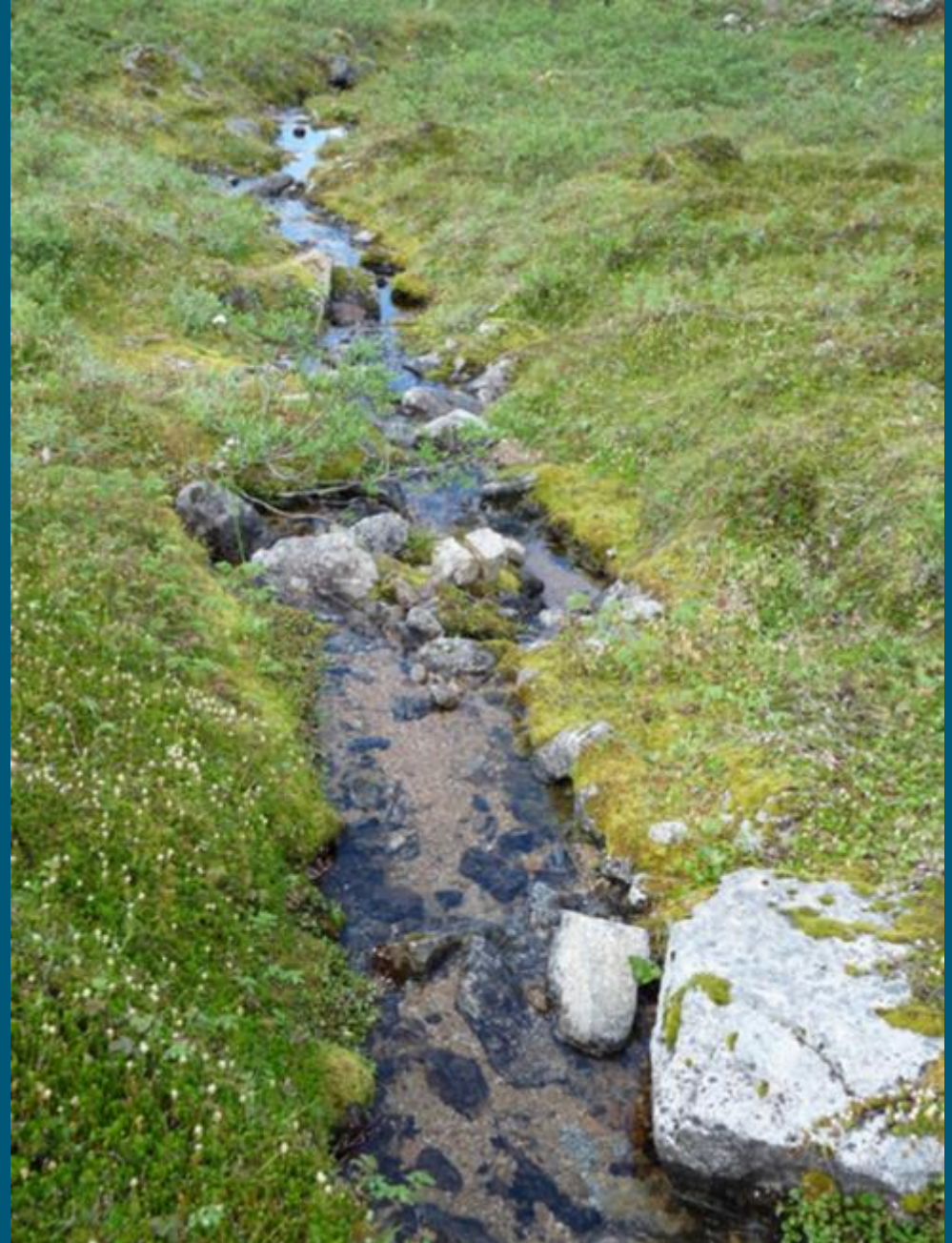
Family changes affect risk



Key points:

- Homelessness, partner going to jail, and IPV were the strongest individual challenges for both time periods.
- Relative to remaining in the high challenge group, the probability decreased by 40% for those that transitioned to the low challenge group.
- Transitioning from low to high risk results in a 550% increase in risk relative staying low.

Could we help
Alicia sooner?



Prevent further child abuse & neglect



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

Primary, secondary & tertiary prevention strategies:

- Programs that strengthen families

 - Strong, stable, nurturing families create strong, healthier, safer children

 - Example: Help Me Grow

- Reporting of child maltreatment when it is suspected

- Best practice responses

 - Multi-disciplinary through our Alaskan Child Advocacy Centers (CACs)

 - Accessible, appropriate treatment for children with trauma & sexualized behaviors

 - Services to support children and families in their healing journey

- Laws that hold offenders accountable

Strengthen families: Promote protective factors

Parental resilience: able to manage stress & adversity

Nurturing & attachment

Social connections

Knowledge of parenting & child development

Concrete support in times of need

Access to health care, other services

Caring adults outside the family

Cognitive & social competence of children



NOTE FOCUS ON ADULTS

Improve our system response



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

Greatest challenges facing system improvement today:

Shortage of professionals

Social workers

Teachers

Health care workers trained in child abuse

Mental health workers trained in trauma

Law enforcement

Attorneys: prosecution, defense, judicial

Fewer incentives for hiring and retention

What the CJATF is addressing:



Alaska Children's
Justice Act Task Force

- Changes to the MDT statute to allow CACs to offer support and referral services for families with children with problematic sexual behaviors
- Changes to the mandatory reporter statute to increase the community safety net for children (i.e. first responders, early childhood development workers, etc)
- Statutory changes to deter unreasonable corporal punishment that injures children
- We are looking for champions
 - *A big thank you to Senators Giessel and Tobin and Representatives Cronk and Galvin for re-establishing The Children's Caucus!*

Hope for the future

ACEs are not destiny – we can make a difference at any age

Every Alaskan can help protect Alaska's children



“It is easier to build a child than repair an adult”

Be a champion for Alaska's children and families



THANK YOU!