

# Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force

## Child Abuse in Alaska: 2020 Update

---



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

### **Cathy Baldwin-Johnson MD**

Co-Medical Director, Alaska CARES  
Medical Director, The Children's Place  
[Cathy.Baldwinjohnson@providence.org](mailto:Cathy.Baldwinjohnson@providence.org)  
(907)561-8301

### **Josh Louwerse**

Senior Program Officer  
Covenant House Alaska  
[jlouwerse@covenanthouseak.org](mailto:jlouwerse@covenanthouseak.org)  
(907)339-4438

# Data credits



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- **Jared W. Parrish PhD**  
Senior Epidemiologist, MCH-Epi  
Alaska Division of Public Health  
[jared.parrish@alaska.gov](mailto:jared.parrish@alaska.gov)  
(907)269-8068
- Adverse Childhood Experiences Studies  
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy>
- <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/wcfh/Documents/mchepi/CSA%20Final%20Draft.pdf>
- <http://dhss.alaska.gov/abada/ace-ak/Pages/default.aspx>

# Introduction to the Alaska CJATF



- Federally mandated and funded
- *Mission: Identify areas where improvement is needed in the statewide response to child maltreatment, particularly child sexual abuse, make recommendations and take action to improve the system.*
- Statewide, multidisciplinary membership
- 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



# Overview of our presentation



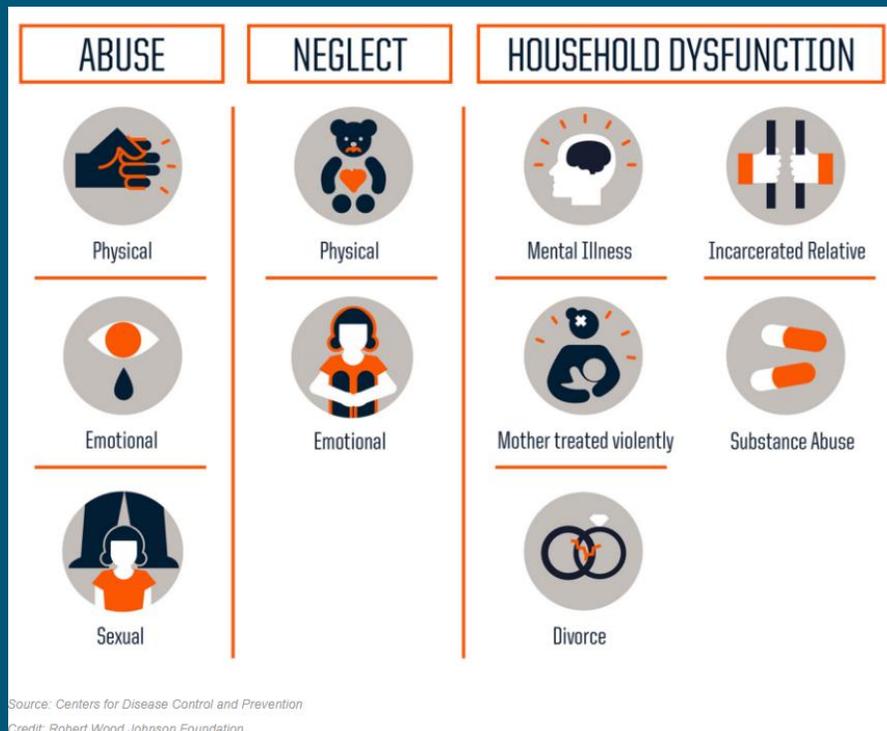
Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Newest research on child abuse and neglect in Alaska
- Including impact on state
- Opportunities for earlier intervention: Mandated reporting
- Commercial sexual exploitation of children in Alaska
- Specific requests for legislative changes

# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)



Collaborative study between CDC researchers and Kaiser Permanente<sup>1</sup>  
 >17,000 participants of an HMO asked about events before age 18  
 75% white (54% female, 46% male), mean age 57, 75% at least some college.



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.

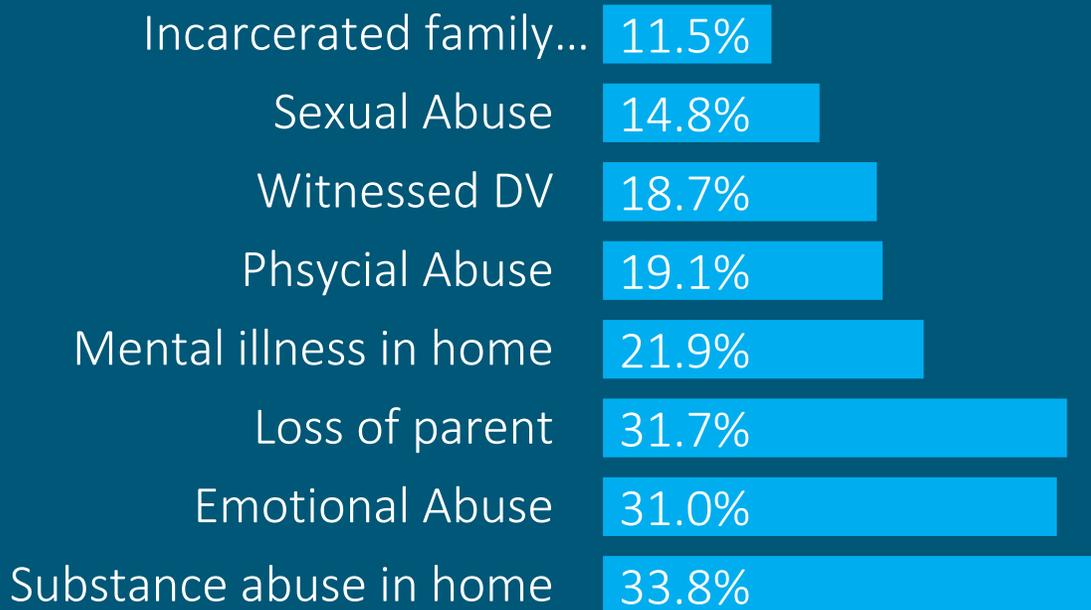
# Child Abuse in Alaska



# Alaska ACEs snapshot



<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

And it's not just one bad thing...

Rows indicate exposure to this form of adverse childhood experience. Columns indicate co-occurrence with other exposures.		Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Verbal/Emotional Abuse	Mental Illness	Substance Abuse	Domestic Violence	Separation Divorce	Household Member in Prison
Abuse	Physical Abuse		35.9%	78.4%	42.6%	60.4%	53.6%	47.2%	21.6%
	Sexual Abuse	43.7%		57.2%	44.4%	56.5%	35.9%	43.0%	18.5%
	Verbal/Emotional Abuse	47.5%	28.4%		42.7%	58.0%	40.8%	44.8%	19.1%
Household Dysfunction	Mental Illness	36.7%	31.4%	60.8%		61.3%	36.3%	43.5%	22.6%
	Substance Abuse	33.2%	25.5%	52.7%	39.1%		37.4%	49.1%	25.8%
	Domestic Violence	55.0%	30.2%	69.1%	43.3%	69.7%		56.9%	25.0%
	Separation/Divorce	27.5%	20.6%	43.1%	29.4%	52.0%	32.3%		20.8%
	Household Member in Prison	36.9%	25.9%	53.7%	44.7%	79.9%	41.5%	60.8%	

Source: Alaska data from the 2013 Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

# Maltreatment burden in Alaska



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

## Annual Prevalence



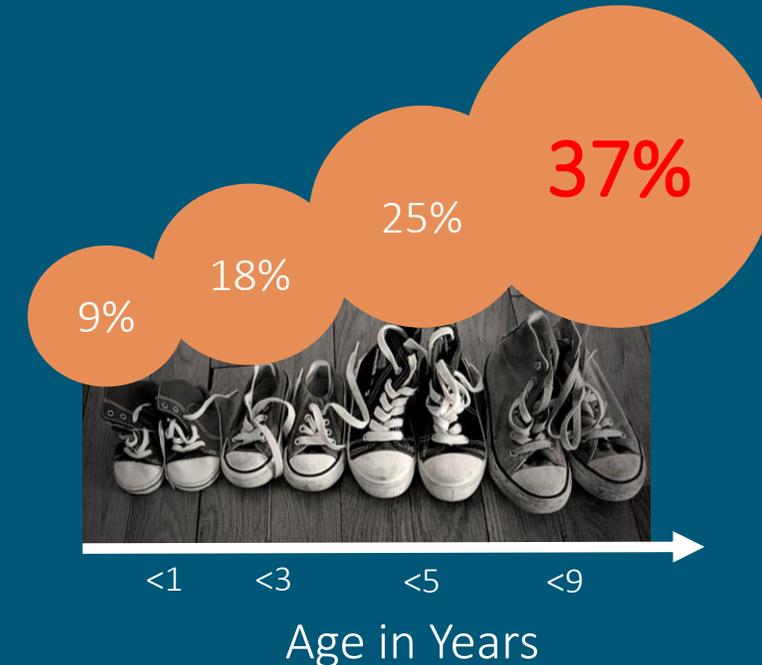
**>10%** of Alaskan children reported to OCS annually

## Adult prevalence



**34%** of Alaskan adults report experiencing physical or sexual abuse, physical neglect, or emotional neglect as a child

## Cumulative Incidence



# Impacts Start Prior to Birth



- Prenatal exposures and experiences can impact both vulnerability AND resiliency
- Impacts on brain development AND genetics
- Examples:
  - FASD
  - Asthma hospitalization risk - epigenetics

# Epigenetics

- How our gene expression is influenced by our environment
- Genes are the blueprints that tell our body's cells what to do
- Genes can be turned on or off
- Trauma & stress affects gene expression



# Development influenced by both negative and positive factors



Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force

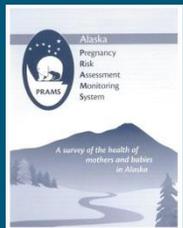


# New emerging data resources



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

Moving beyond describing the issue from an adult perspective to documenting the health and development over the life course



## Alaska Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (Alaska PRAMS)

Follow-up



Administration and response



Maternal experiences

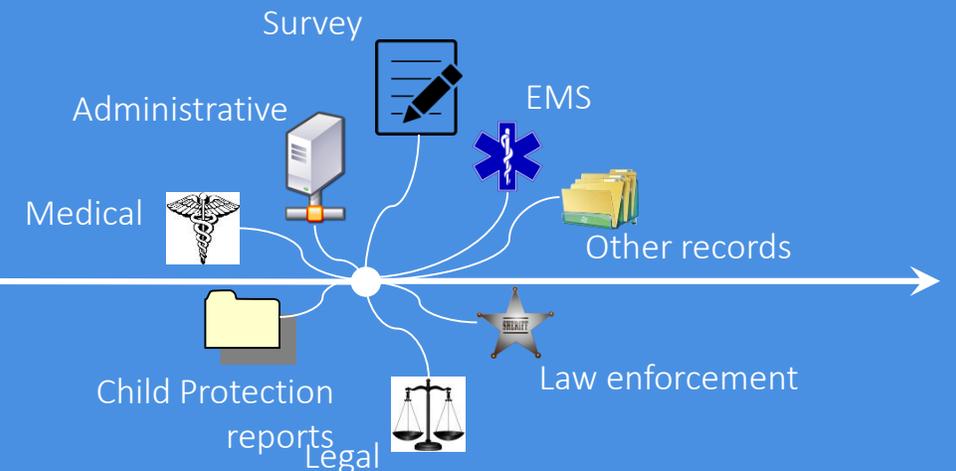


2009:2011

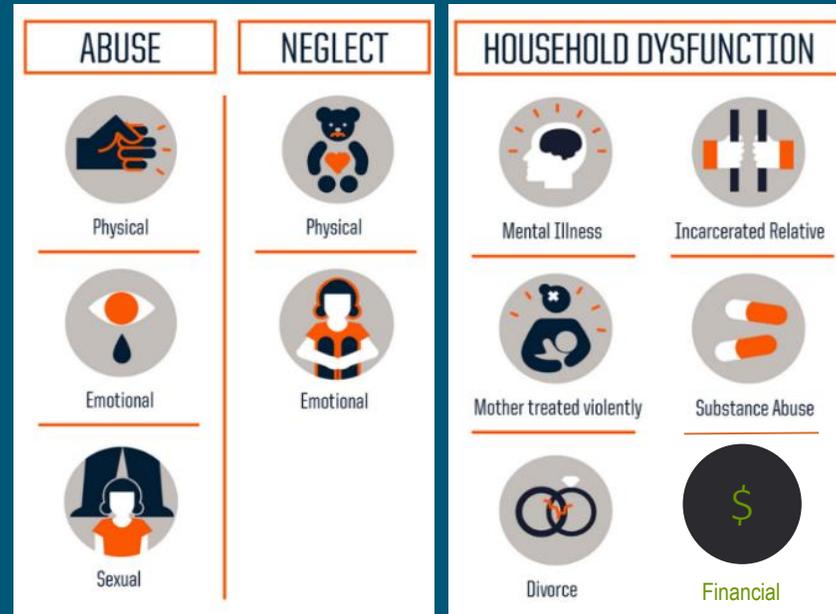


Annual Linkages

## Alaska Longitudinal Child Abuse and Neglect Linkage Project (ALCANLink)



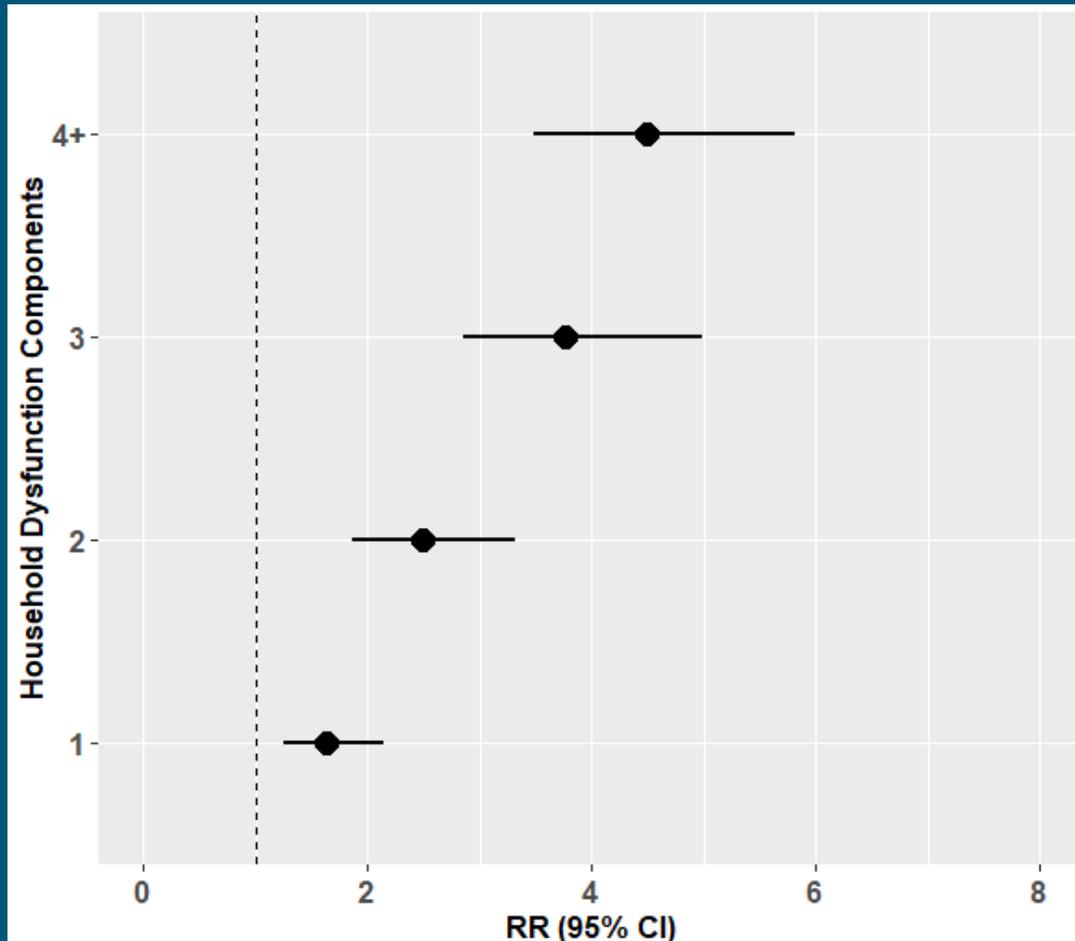
# Pre-birth household dysfunction to predict ACE Score



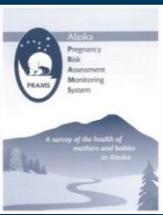
Dysfunction during the 12 months prior to birth/pregnancy

ACE score before age 3 years

# Pre-Birth Household Dysfunction and ACE Score



- Stepwise association
- More stressors prenatally = higher accumulation of ACEs
- Adjusting for maternal race, education, and age did not change outcomes



# PRAMS questions used to measure pre-birth household dysfunction ACEs



Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force

## HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



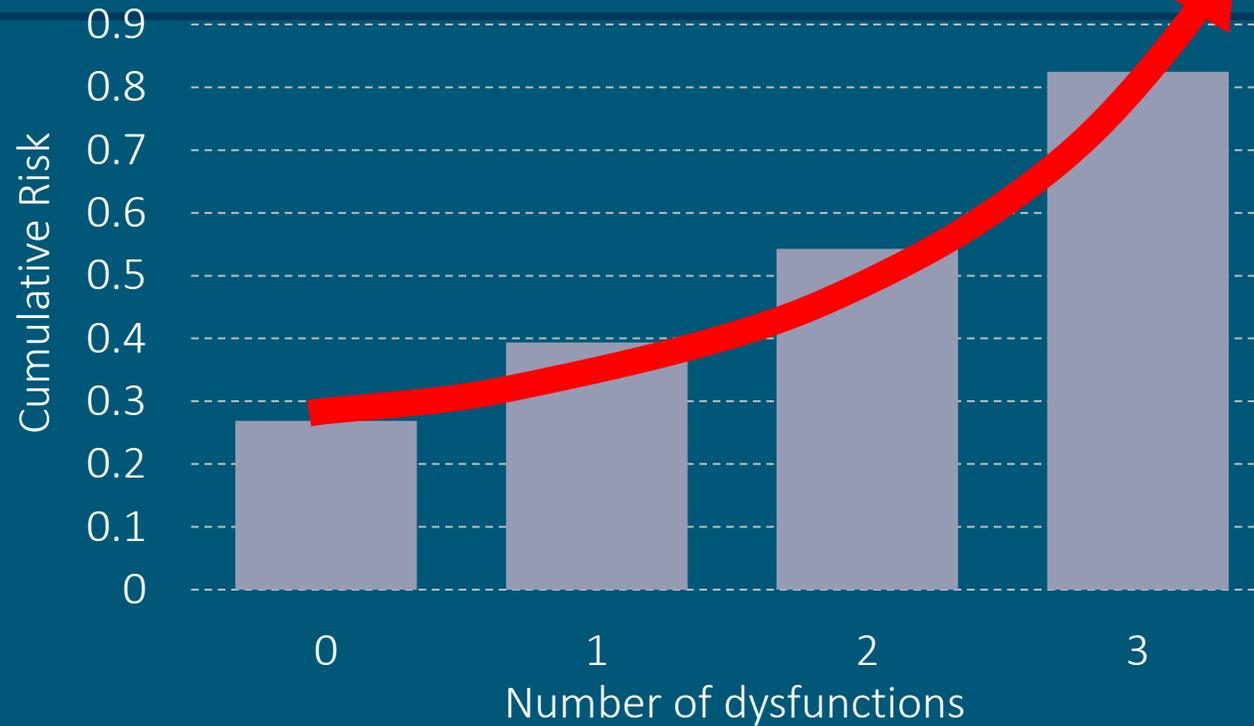
Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce



The risk of contact with child welfare systematically increases with the increased number of pre-birth household dysfunctions!

# Impacts continue after birth



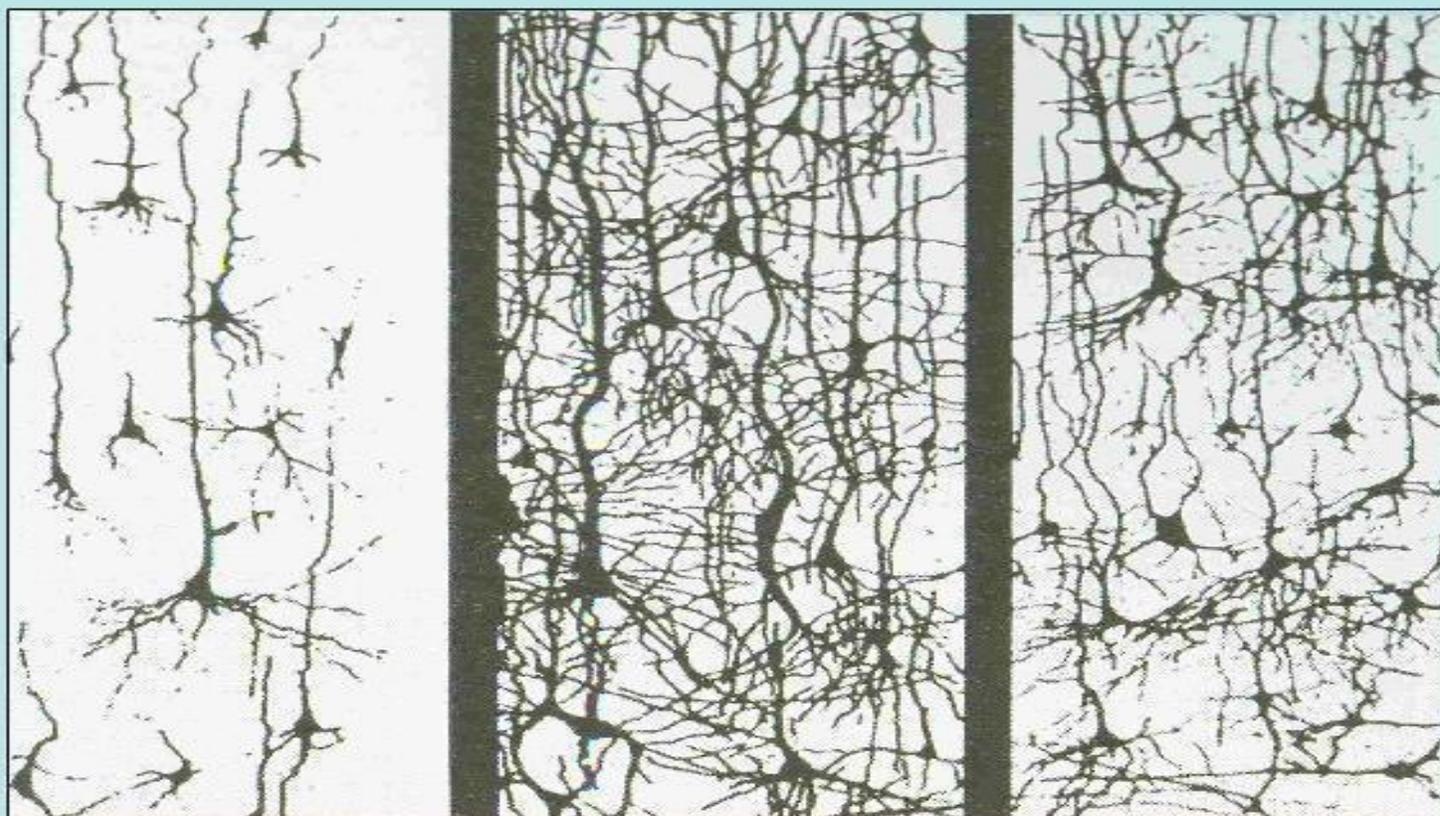
Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

## Synaptic Density

At birth

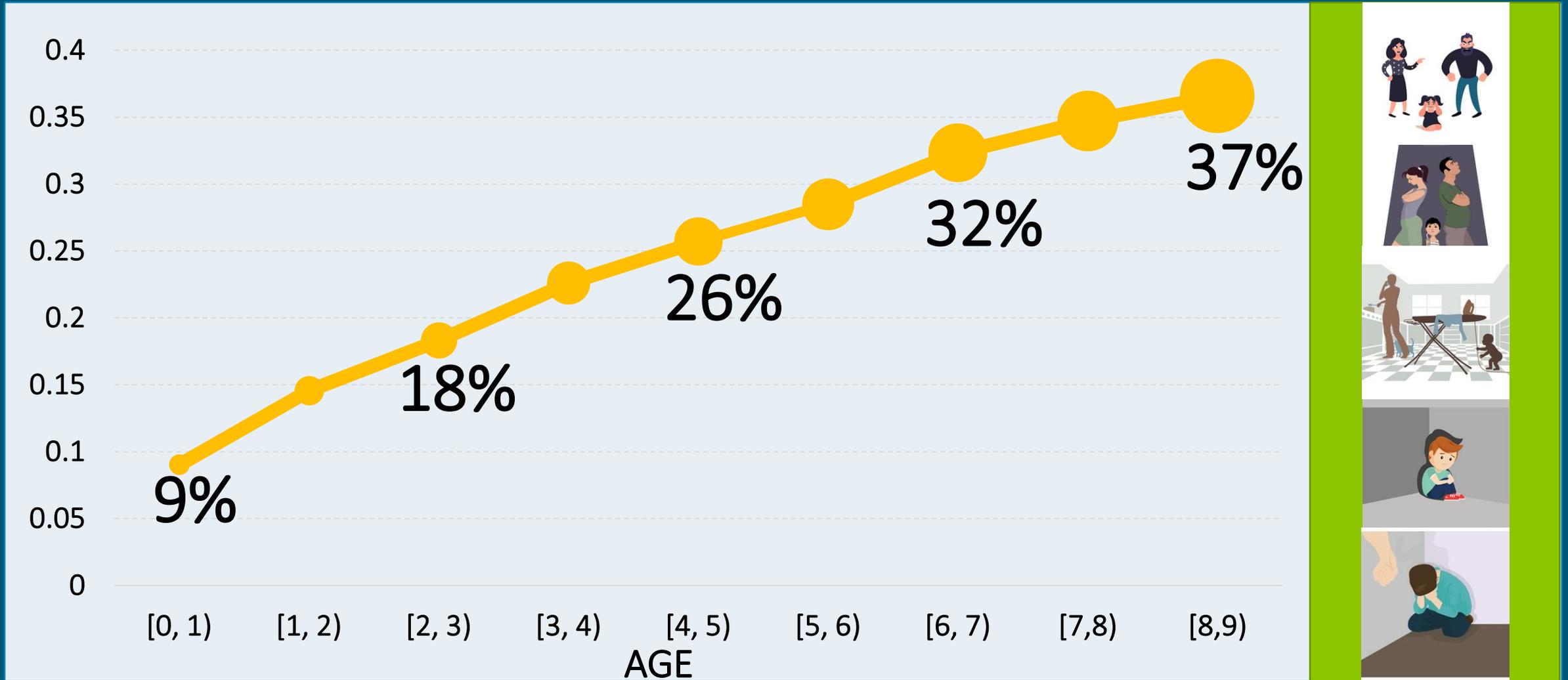
6 years old

14 years old



Source: Rethinking the Brain, Families and Work Institute, Rima Shore, 1997; Founders Network slide

# Cumulative incidence of contact with OCS among children born in Alaska



Risk (incidence) among children

# ALCANLink Study (N = 33,417) – Accumulation of ACEs Among children born in Alaska during 2009:2011

Before  
their  
ninth  
birthday

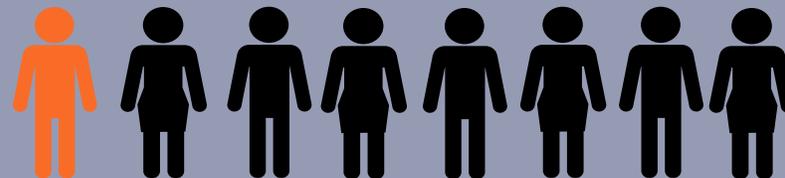
Reported  
~1 in 3



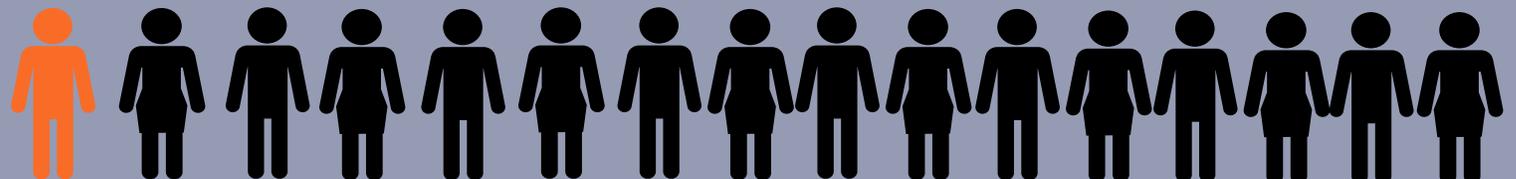
Screened In  
~1 in 4



Substantiated  
~1 in 8



Removed  
~1 in 16



# Types of maltreatment



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Screened in by OCS in 2019:
- Neglect: most common type – 59.4%
- Most common cause of child deaths
- Most commonly linked to parental substance abuse
- Mental injury – 22.5%
- Example: Exposure to DV
- Physical abuse – 11.4%
- Sexual abuse – 6.6%

# Different life trajectories: Two roads to travel

## Safe and Nurturing

- Have a stable foundation from which to explore their world
- Child feels calm and safe
- Spend more time in the upper brain: bonding, talking, interpersonal relationships, learning
- Fewer risk factors for adult health & well being



## Trauma and Chaos

- When a child is unsafe/threatened, they spend more time in the lower brain,
- Focus is on survival
- Fight, Flight or Freeze neural pathways may become “hardwired”
- Genetic expression may change
- More risk for adult health & well being

# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

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

Accumulation  
of ACEs



Trauma modifies  
development &  
genetics



# Disproportionality: Why?

- Alaska Native/American Indian children & families disproportionately represented in child maltreatment reports and deaths
- >3X as likely to be reported to OCS
- 1223 out of 2548 (48%) of children seen at Alaskan CACs
- *(Compared with 14% of total population)*



# Disproportionality: Why?

- New research in Alaska:
- NO BIOLOGICAL OR CULTURAL LINK between AN/AI people and abuse
- In a background of
  - Historical trauma & racism
  - Risk is instead related to:
    - Social determinants of health including poverty, intimate partner violence, substance use & poor mental health

The question we should ask is not

"What's **WRONG** with **YOU?**"



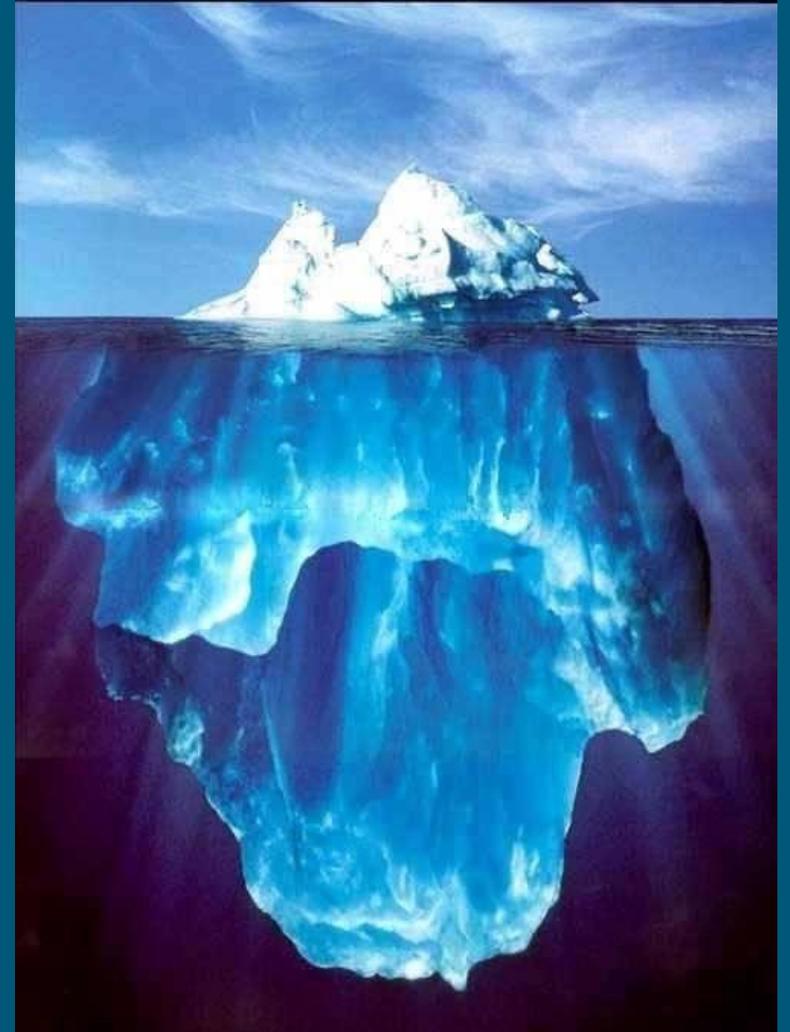
but rather  
"what happened to you?"

# What Does Child Maltreatment Cost Alaska?

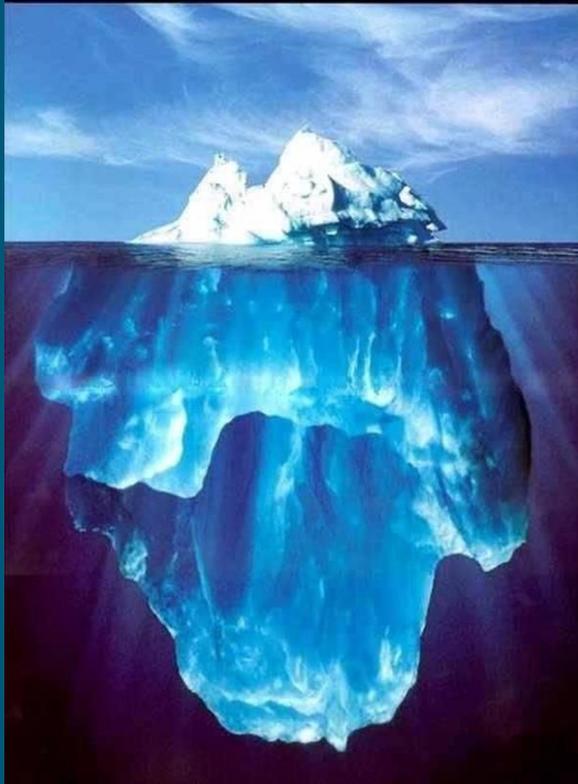


# Alaska estimates:

- Between \$631 million to \$10.7 billion ANNUALLY
- Alaska research suggests:
- Costs for SUBSTANTIATED reports: \$82 million for childhood health care, child welfare, special education
- 40.6% adult Medicaid enrollment linked to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Decreasing ACEs and improving our response to child maltreatment could save our state ~\$92 million annually in costs related just to: Medicaid, smoking, diabetes, binge drinking, arthritis, obesity



# Also below the surface: CSEC



- HB225/SB165

# Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is:



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Sexual activity involving a child in exchange for something of value, or promise thereof, to the child or another person or persons
- Treating a child as a commercial and sexual object
- A form of violence against children
- Words matter: **not** child prostitution

Federal definitions

# Sex Trafficking



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- CSEC victims are victims of sex trafficking when there is a **third party exploiter who profits from the exploitation**
- Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion,
- or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age (20 in Alaska)

# Intersections of Abuse



# Pathways to Entry:

## Ways recruitment can happen:



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Parents selling children
- Violence and force
- Kidnapping
- Seduction
- Fear, coercion, blackmail
- False advertising for “modeling,” “acting,” or “dancing” opportunities
- Peer recruitment
- Internet enticement through social media, gaming, or profile-sharing sites
- Survival

# What you need to know:



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- *Within 48 hours of becoming homeless, one in three children will be approached by a trafficker*
- *In Alaska, common age of recruitment is 14-16 years*
- *Average lifespan once recruited is 7 years*

# Alaskan Risk Factors



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Population with high amounts of historical trauma and trauma exposure
- Transient male-dominated industries
- Transient male-dominated industries placed in rural areas next to communities with high amounts of historical trauma Rural and Urban
- Celebrated history of prostitution

# Current Status of CSEC in Alaska



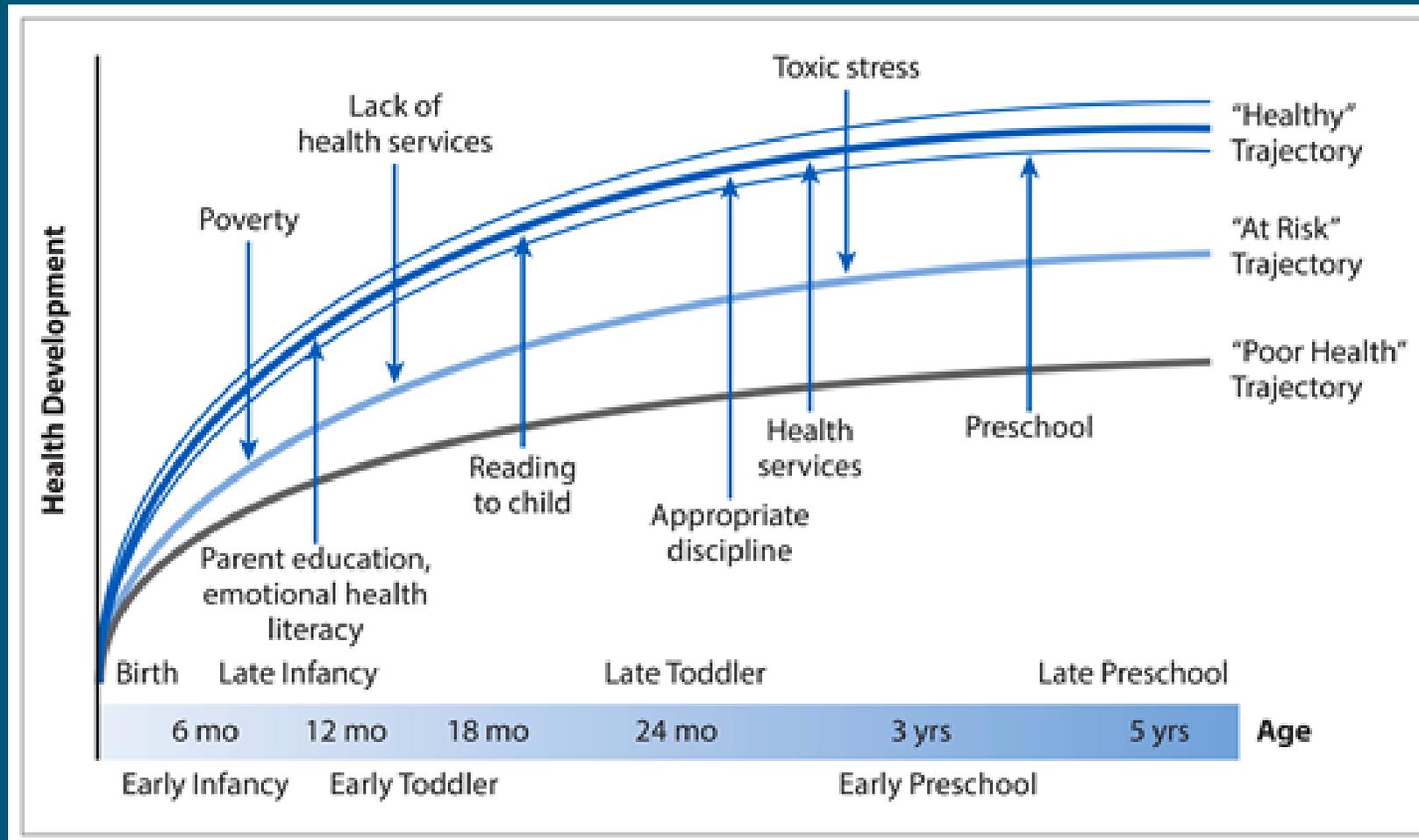
Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Loyola University/Covenant House Study 2016
- 65 youth surveyed locally (641 Nationally)
- 1 in 5 Identified as trafficking victims Nationally
- 1 in 4 Identified as trafficking (labor/sex) victims locally
- 1 in 4 females as sex trafficking locally
- 200 victims served in last two years between 5 Anchorage providers
- 10 current minor child cases FBI
- Law enforcement report an increase of online recruitment
- More cases of traffickers creating explicit images/videos of minors

# Addressing child abuse in Alaska



# How do we create the best future for our children's lives?



# What can we do?

## Reasons for hope:

- Healing is possible
- Our brains can always learn
- We can all help build resilience in children
- We can all help protect children



# Earlier recognition & intervention: Mandatory Reporting

**REPORT  
CHILD ABUSE  
IN ALASKA**

WELCOME WHY REPORT WHO MUST REPORT KNOW THE SIGNS REPORTING AFTER I REPORT REPORTER TRAINING CONTACTS

Welcome to Report Child Abuse in Alaska, click here to learn more about this site.

Call: 1-800-478-4444  
ReportChildAbuse@alaska.gov  
or Fax: 907-269-3939

**WHY REPORT?**

**ARE YOU READY TO MAKE A REPORT?**

**DO YOU NEED MANDATORY REPORTER TRAINING?**

**DO YOU NEED ASSISTANCE NAVIGATING THIS SITE?**

# Mandatory reporting gaps



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- EMS & paramedics (trainings)
- Clergy (multiple cases involving clergy as perpetrators & protectors of perpetrators)
- Animal control & veterinarians (research links between animal cruelty & child abuse)
- Guardians Ad Litem (GALs) (CASA volunteers are required already)
- Judges (recent case – reporting not required, no immediate notification)

# Early & effective intervention

- Child Advocacy Centers
  - Multidisciplinary response
  - Child focused
  - Forensic interview
  - Medical exam
  - Mental health services
  - Support & advocacy
  - Information sharing
- Nearly 33,000 children & their families served since 1996



# Protective Factors: Focus on adults

- Supportive, nurturing, stable family
- Supportive social networks
- Caring adults outside family
- Household rules, monitoring of child
- Parental employment
- Adequate housing
- Access to health care, other services
- Community safety
- Community involvement
- Cultural connectedness



# What can you do?

- Realize this affects ALL of us in Alaska
- Make your decisions using a trauma-informed lens
  - “It’s not what’s wrong with you, it’s what happened to you”*
- Support community-based & system-wide approaches to strengthen children and families



# Alaska data indicates that:



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Many Alaskan adults bear the burden of a lifetime accumulation of family violence and dysfunction
- Alaskan children start accumulating these adverse events early in life
- Our economy and our society bear the costs

# To reduce this burden we need:



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- Prevention
- Early recognition
- Early, effective, timely intervention
- Effective treatment
- Effective legislation to protect children & hold offenders accountable

A focus on supporting healthy, stable, safe and nurturing families and communities so our children can be healthy & successful adults

# Specific legislative “asks”



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force



# SB165/HB225: “An Act relating to sex trafficking...”



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- CJA supports the proposed legislation
- Support prosecution of patrons (Johns) including requirement to register as a sex offender
- Support vacating prostitution convictions
- Recommendations for Amendment
- Expand vacating convictions
  - Drug possession and theft
- Safe Harbor
  - Special protections and system of service for minors
- Mandatory training for law enforcement, prosecutors, judges

# SB168/HB228 for Sex Offender Registries



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- CJA supports:
  - Victim notification & ability to testify
  - Clear criteria
  - Continue registration from other states
  - Additional registerable crimes

# Expand mandatory reporting law to include:



Alaska Children's  
Justice Act Task Force

- EMS, paramedics & other first responders
  - Clergy
  - Animal control & veterinarians
  - GALs
- 
- Mechanism for judges – immediate notification to law enforcement for imminent risk cases

# How will you be a champion for Alaskan families?

