

HOW ARE OUR CHILDREN?

2023 Update by the Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force



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Key Points



- Who we are & what we do
- ACEs: Why we do what we do
- Newest research on child abuse and neglect in Alaska
- Hope for the future

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





Building a stronger Alaska

Prevention along a continuum...

Goal: Support pregnant women/parents to build environments that maximize learning/development

Time: Our efforts (teen, pregnancy, childhood, adult) matter for prevention

Factors: co-exist and require coordination to mitigate impact



Prevent further child abuse & neglect



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- Primary, secondary & tertiary prevention strategies
- Programs that strengthen families
 - Strong, stable, nurturing families create strong, healthier, safer children
- 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 sexualized behaviors
 - Services to support children and families in their healing journey
- Laws that hold offenders accountable

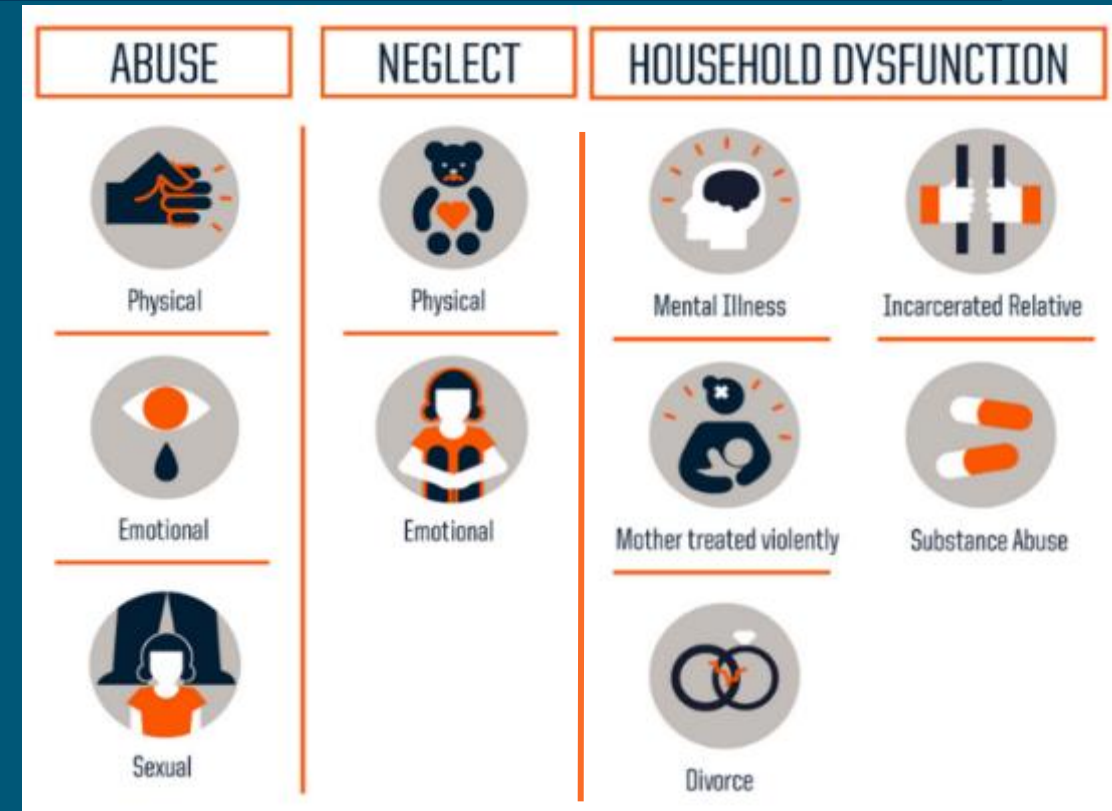
Why this is important:
ACEs

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.

Findings: ACEs Are Common



Abuse, by Category

Emotional	11%
Physical	28%
Sexual (anyone)	21%

Neglect

Emotional neglect	15%
Physical neglect	10%

Household Dysfunction, by Category

Substance Abuse	27%
Mental Illness	19%
Mother Treated Violently	13%
Parental separation/divorce	23%
Incarcerated family member	5%

ACES: It's Not Just One Bad Thing...



- If any one ACE is present:
- *There is an 87% chance at least one other category of ACE is present*
- *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

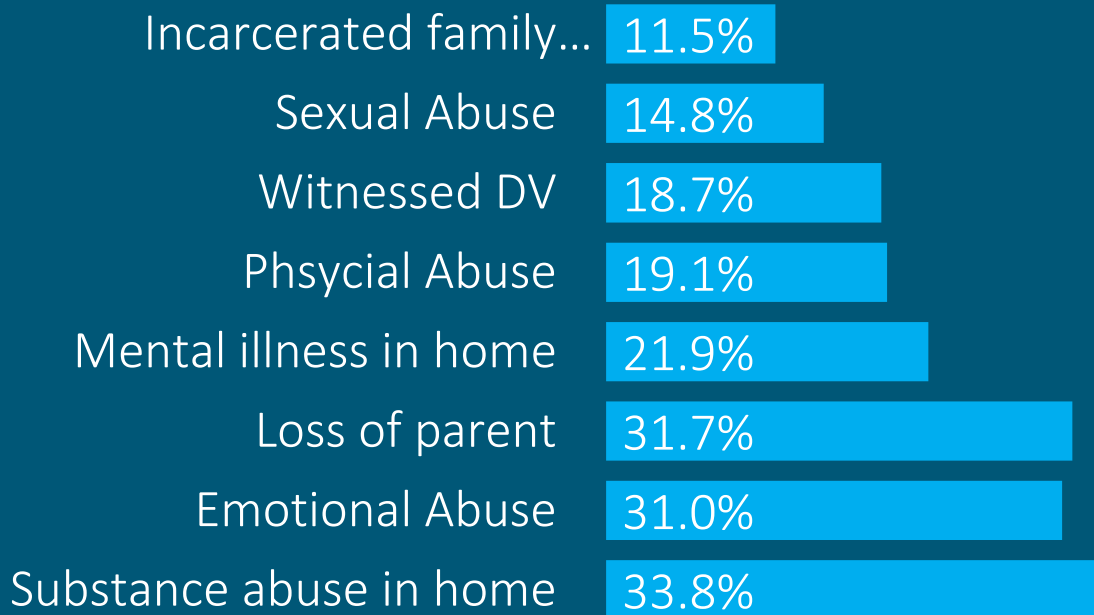


Child Abuse & Neglect in Alaska



ACEs in Alaska: Snapshot

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



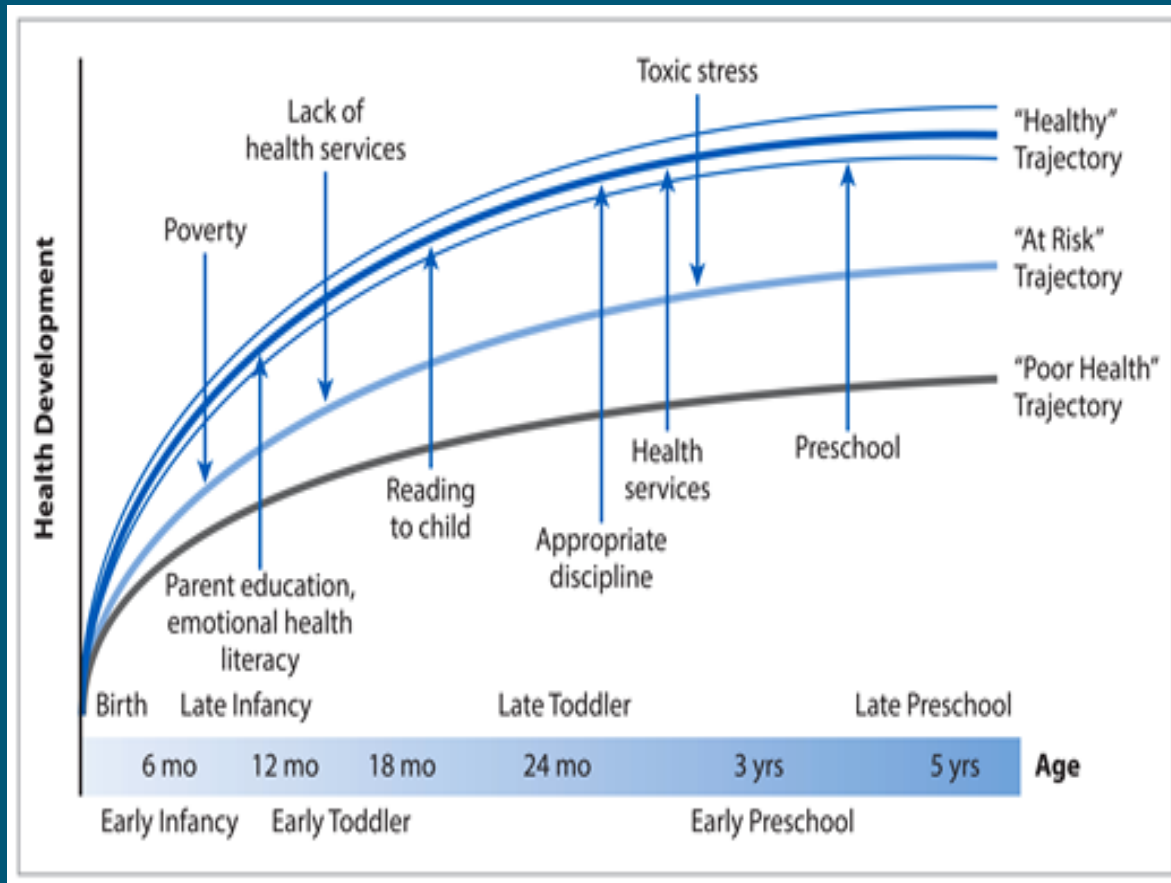
Reporting 4+



- 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

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%	

Life course perspective



Life can start with and develop differential health trajectories over the life course.

- Assets and deficits support or reduce healthy development
- Prevention/intervention timing during the life course can have positive impacts on health
- Lifetime burden (Risk) is important to measure to inform public health prevention efforts

From Alaska Maternal Child Death Review



- 502 deaths Alaska children age 0-17 reviewed by MCDR 2016-2019
- 19% of child deaths were maltreatment related (abuse and/or neglect)
- Neglect more common than abuse: 82% of maltreatment-related cases
- Abuse and/or neglect caused or contributed to:
 - 40% child deaths from firearms
 - 31% child deaths from suicide
 - 29% SUID deaths
 - 17% child deaths from motor vehicle crashes
 - 8% child deaths from medical causes

From Alaska MCDR, cont.



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- 55% of children who died had parent or caregiver who maltreated any child
- In 80% of child deaths at least one caregiver had history of substance misuse
- *c/w 47% child deaths not maltreatment related*

Budget considerations



- *Recent study: costs 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
- *“Economic Costs of Child Abuse and Neglect in Alaska in 2019” – Nolan Klouda MPA, CEcD*

ALCANLink

Alaska Longitudinal Child Abuse and Neglect Linkage Project

A population-based mixed design



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



The beginning

- Alicia's pregnancy with Patricia was planned and desired
- She struggled with depression
- Smoking helped, but she did cut down somewhat once she found out she was pregnant



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 expansion



- Alicia met Jason through work
- He swept her off her feet and was eager to adopt Patricia
- They moved in together when Patricia was 4
- Alicia had baby boy William shortly after

Disclosure

- When Patricia was 10 she 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”



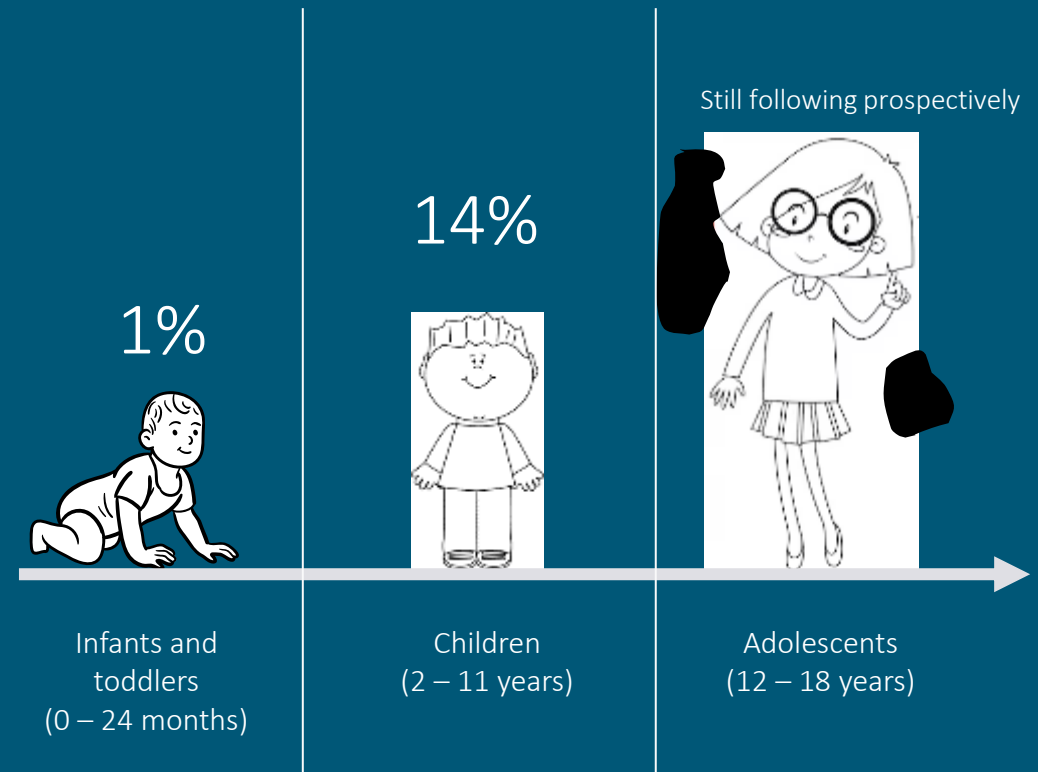
Risk of allegation of harm for sexual abuse



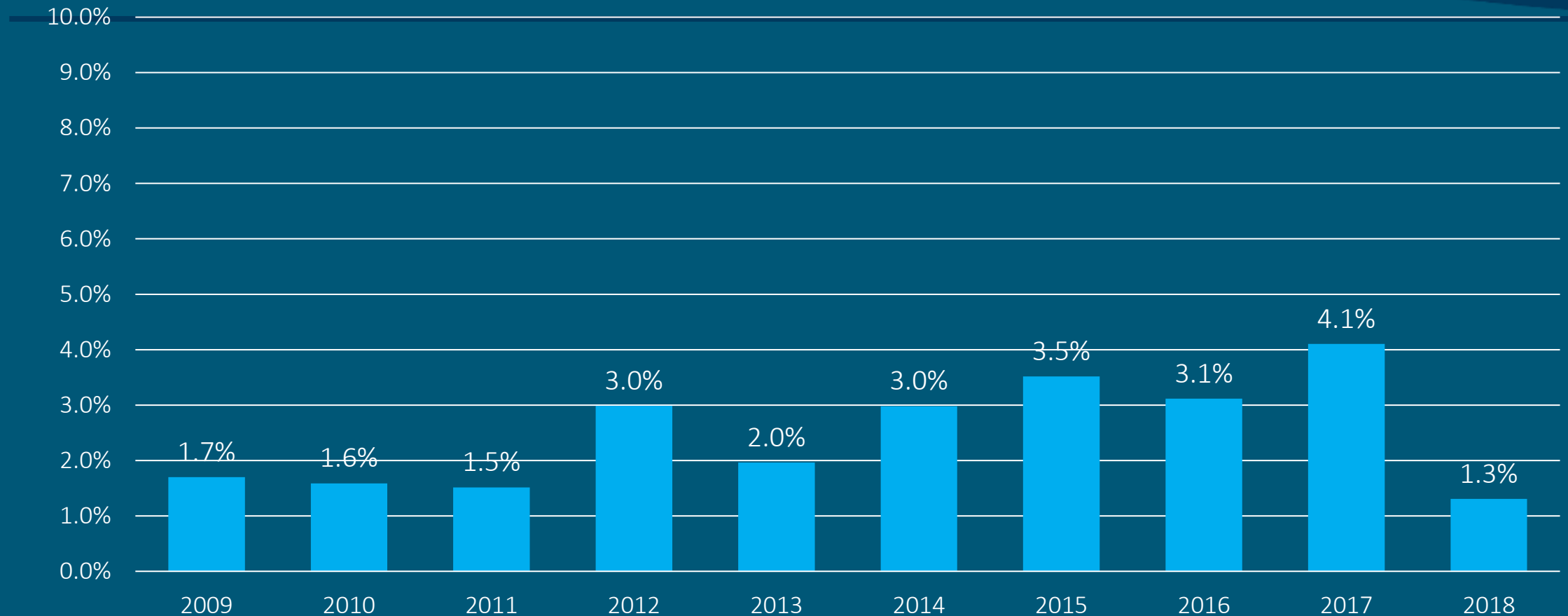
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~ 1 in every 7 children born in
Alaska will experience an
allegation of child sexual abuse
before their 12th birthday

*This means, at current trends of the 9,410 births
that occurred in Alaska in 2021, ~1,317 will have
a sexual abuse allegation before age 12.*



Incidence Proportion (Risk) of allegation of child sexual abuse before age 4 years by birth year



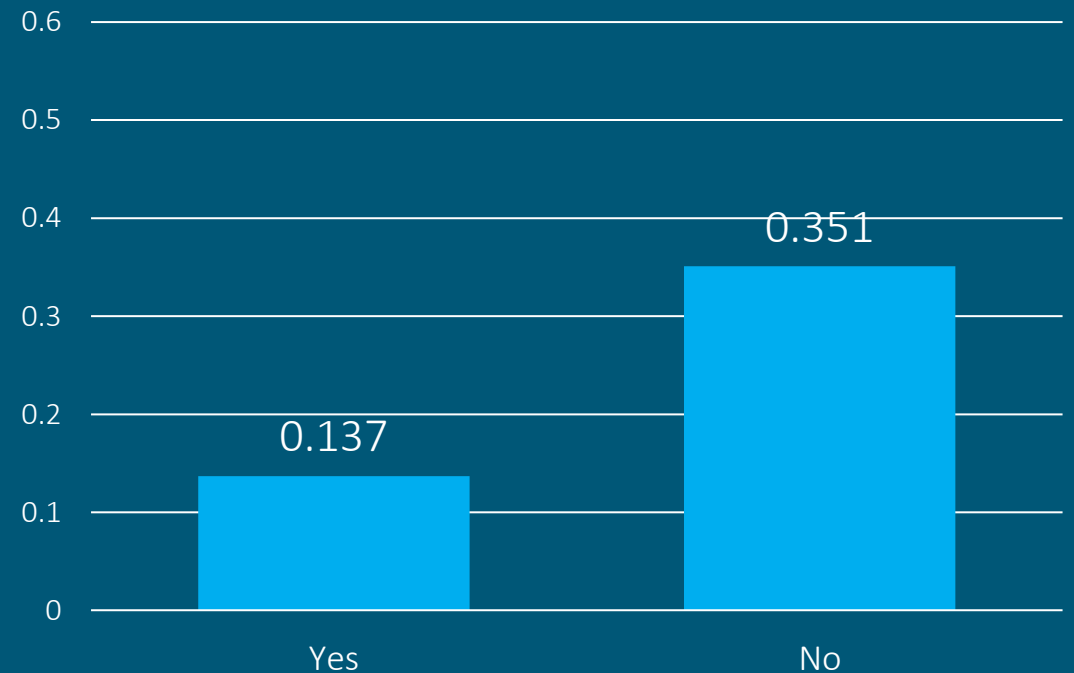
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and child sexual abuse report

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

Risk of Child Sexual Abuse Report among mothers self-reporting IPV during the ~12 months before birth



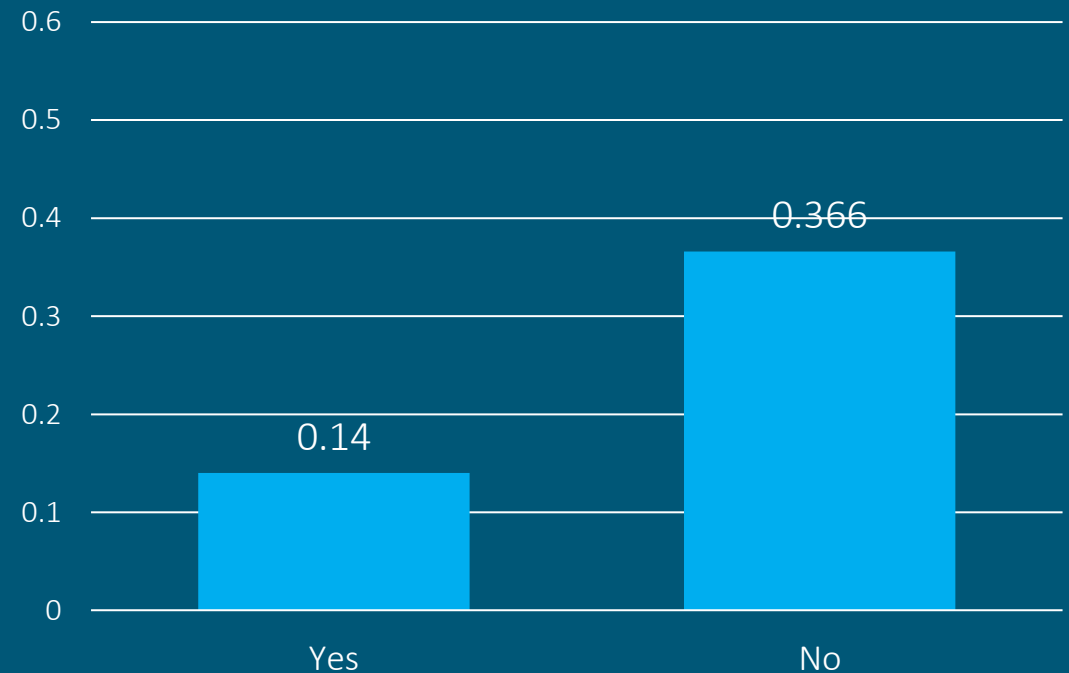
Threat of Violence and child sexual abuse report

Among children born in Alaska to mothers self-reporting threats of violence:

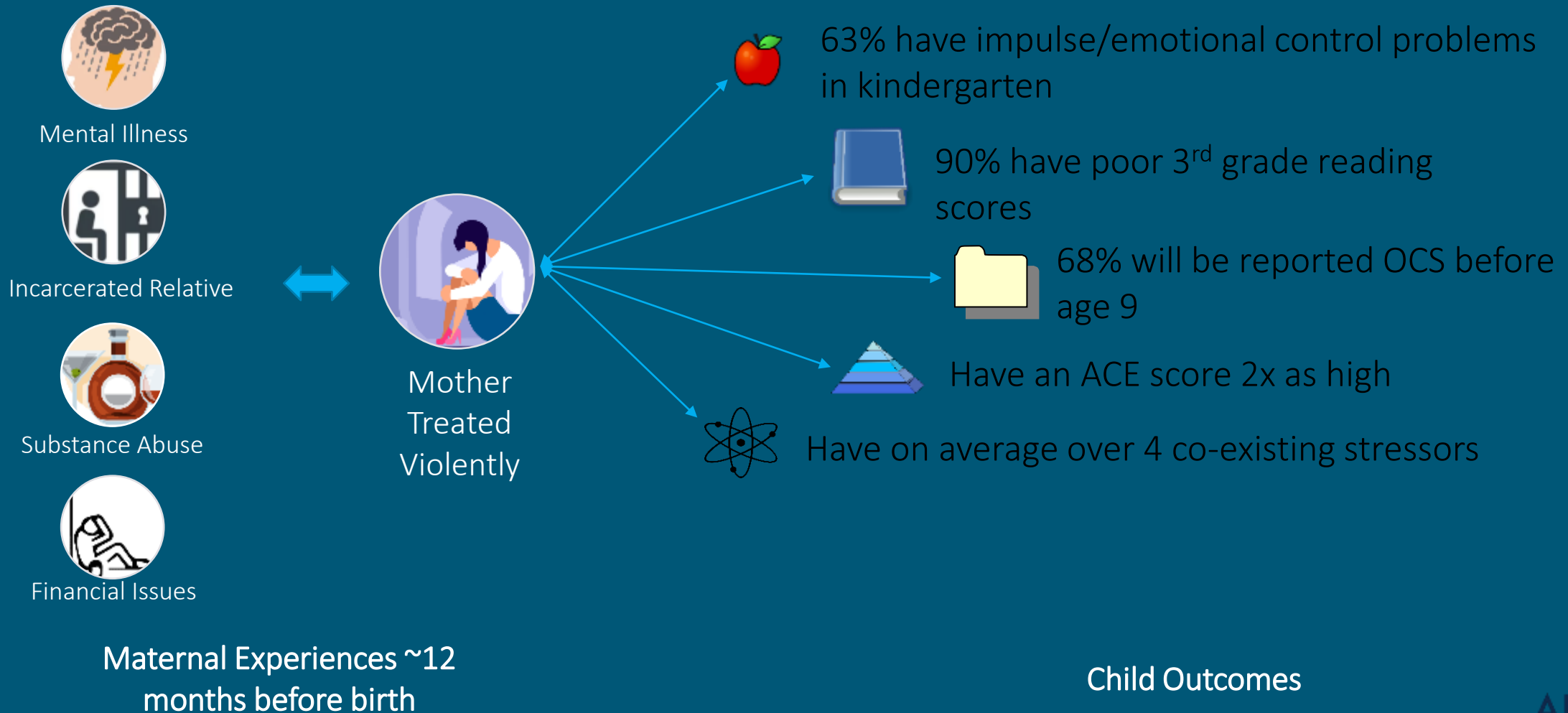
37% experienced a report of harm prior to age 13 years.

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

Risk of Child Sexual Abuse Report among mothers self-reporting threats of violence during the ~12 months before birth



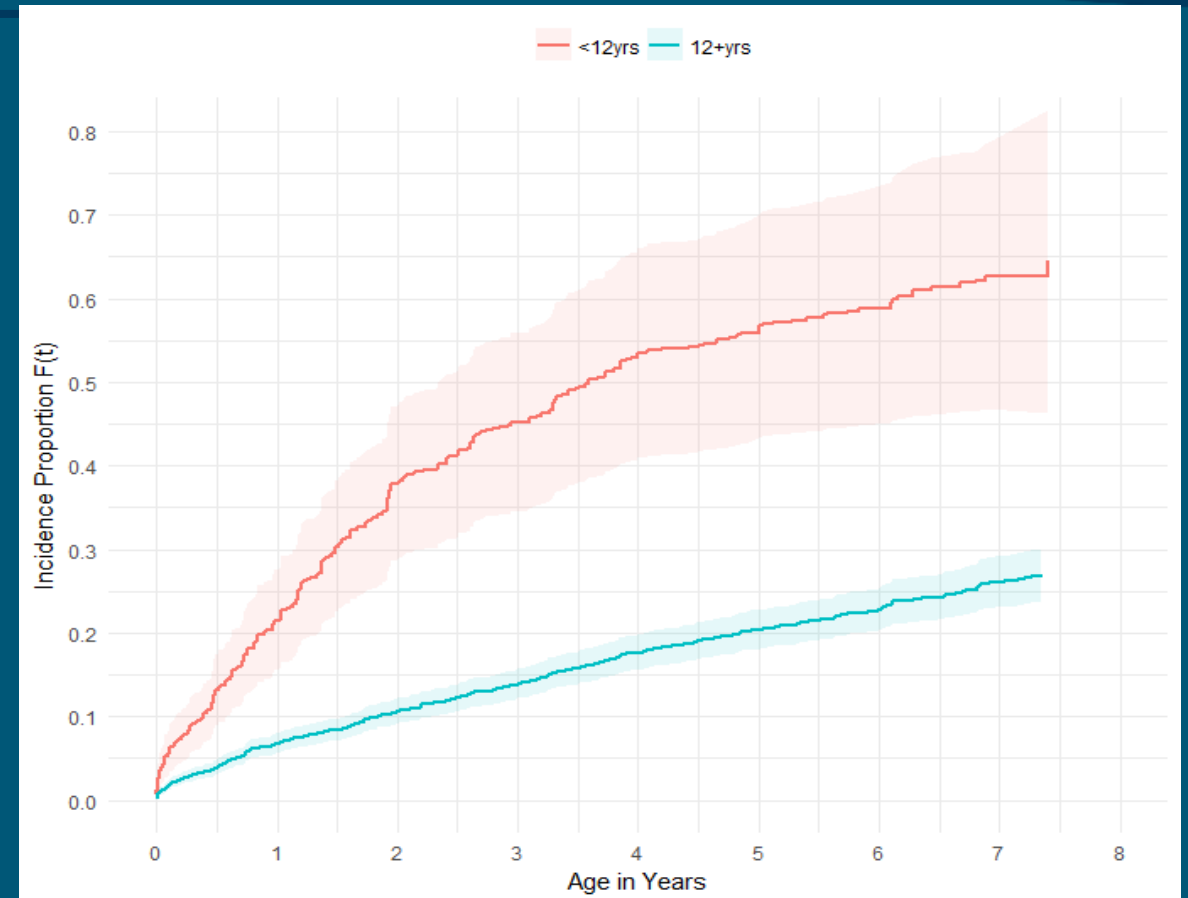
IPV and Child wellbeing



Cumulative incidence to first report before age 8 years by maternal education level reported at birth, ALCANLink 2009:11 births



Children born to mothers with <12 years education 3.5 times as likely to be reported to OCS before age 8 relative to those born to mothers with 12+ years of education.



Relationship between IPV and child maltreatment reports stratified by maternal education level at birth, ALCANLink 2009:11 births

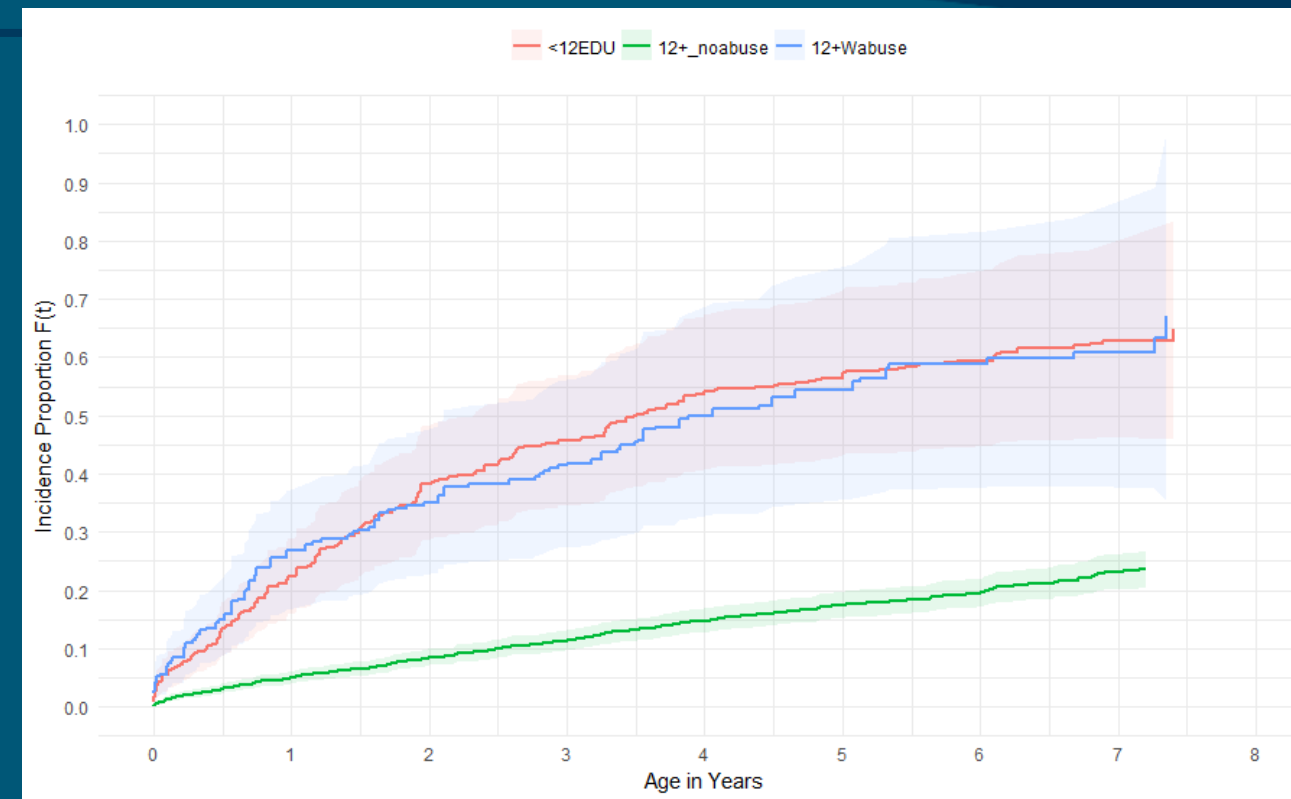


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Maternal education	Race	Full Model	Final Model
<12 Years			0.93 (0.44, 1.98)
	Alaska Native	0.92(0.41, 1.98)	
12+ Years	non-Native	0.93 (0.34, 2.57)	
			3.88 (2.25, 6.71)
	Alaska Native	3.86 (1.97, 7.55)	
	non-Native	3.91 (1.84, 8.30)	

Key points:

- 1) Among those with < 12 years education, the addition of IPV has little impact on risk of future maltreatment reports of child (already high risk)
- 2) Among those with 12+ years education, the addition of IPV significantly increases the risk of future maltreatment reports and likely the ones most likely missed through screening.
- 3) Regardless of race the impact is the same.



Mandated reporting

- Patricia's teacher made a report to both OCS & law enforcement
- OCS talked to Patricia briefly at school and determined her mother was not aware of the abuse
- OCS & law enforcement then coordinated 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
- The rest of the team watched from the listening room
- She described that since she was 6 her daddy would come into her room when mommy was working her night shift at the hospital and do inappropriate things
- Daddy also showed her videos of naked people on his phone
- Patricia also described daddy drinking brown stuff, then yelling and hitting mommy



Medical exam

- Patricia had a head-to-toe exam by a nurse practitioner with specialized training and experience
- Patricia had a normal exam which was expected given the details of her disclosure and the time elapsed since last event
- A urine sample was collected to test for gonorrhea and chlamydia
- Patricia & her mom were relieved to know her body was OK



William

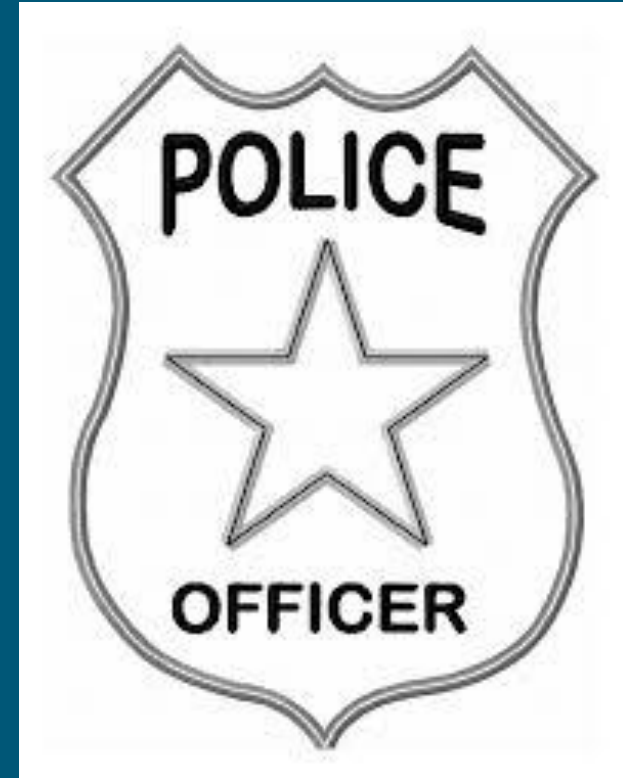


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- William was also interviewed as a possible witness or additional victim
- He did not disclose sexual abuse by his father
- He did describe his sister coming into his room when he was getting dressed, asking if she could kiss his “peepee” like she 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
- Alicia explains her parents play an active role in their lives and are willing to let her 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



- 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 LE finds corroborative evidence for Patricia's disclosures
- Jason is indicted on multiple counts of sexual abuse of a minor at Grand Jury
- Jason decides to accept a plea deal that reduces the number of counts but still results in a prison sentence of 20 years



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



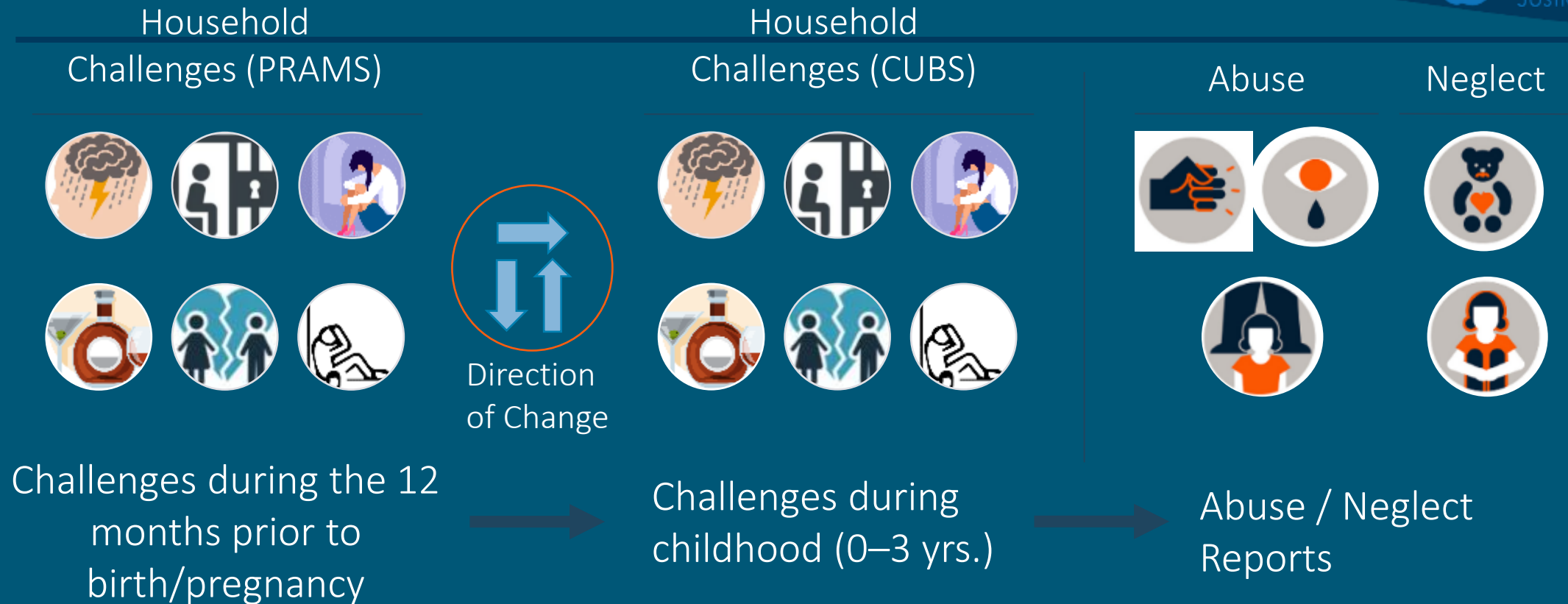
“Ideal” outcome



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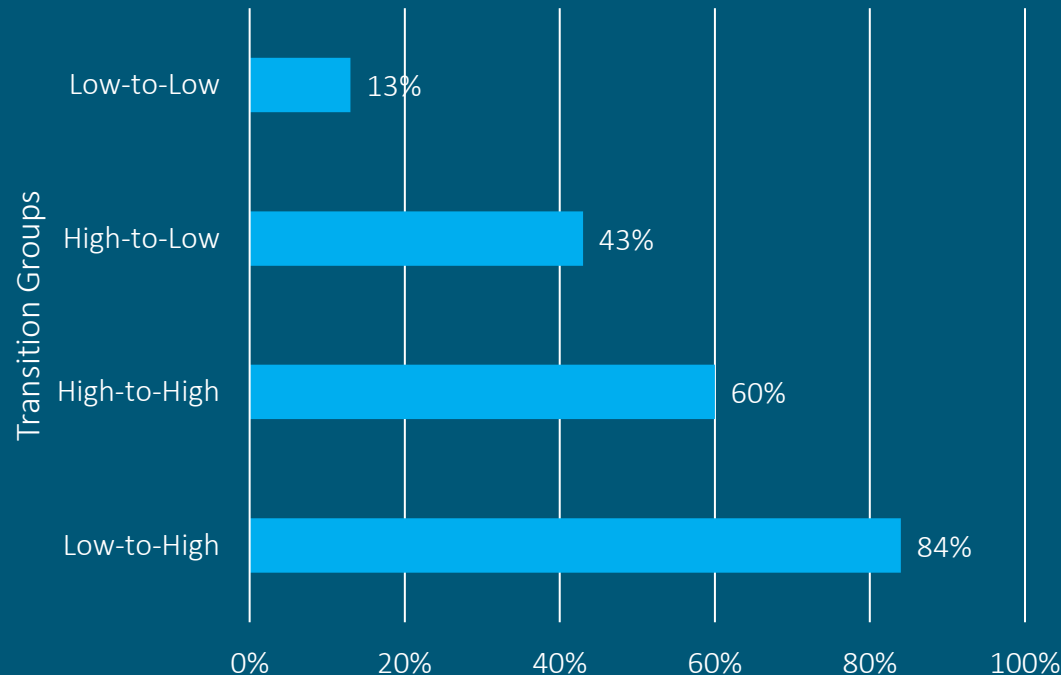
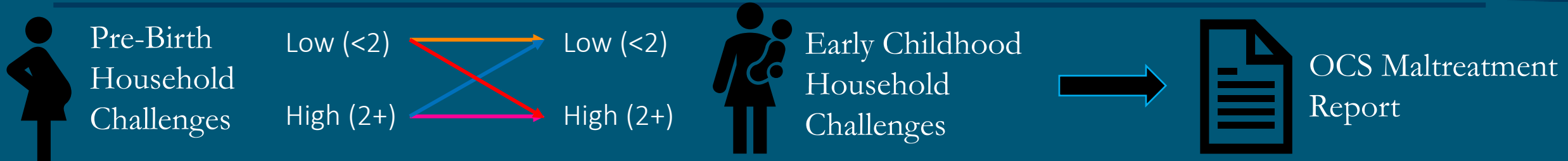
- Made possible when all our agencies work well & together AND there are protective factors in place
- HOWEVER many children in our state:
 - *Don't feel safe talking about their abuse*
 - *Don't have a safe person to talk to about their abuse*
 - *Don't have supportive, protective caregivers*
 - *Have to wait months to be seen by a trained therapist*
 - *Don't have adequate resources in their communities*

Changes in Household Challenges Predicting Maltreatment



Transition in the Number of Household Challenges between the pre-birth and early childhood period is associated with Risk of OCS Report

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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.

Hope for the future



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- Understanding risk & protective factors:
- *Helps us predict which children will be at greatest risk EVEN BEFORE THEY ARE BORN*
- *Helps us determine which families will benefit most from primary prevention services*
- *Helps guide interventions that will be most beneficial*

Issues the CJATF is addressing:



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- Mechanism for OCS to share information with CACs to offer support and referral services for families with children with problematic sexual behaviors
- Improving the ability for our system to respond by ensuring abuse is reported
- Working to deter unreasonable corporal punishment
- Reduce rates of abuse, neglect, and deaths of Alaskan children by identifying risk and protective factors in their lives as early as possible, and provide early and appropriate interventions

Build a stronger Alaska



How will you be a champion for Alaskan families?



THANK YOU!