

AUGUST 2020 | ISSUE 3

JULY NEWSLETTER

Allegheny Highlands Healthy Youth Coalition



Card Project

Newsletter written by: Chelsea Dunaway, AHHYC
Chair

The Allegheny Highlands Healthy Youth Coalition has been busy! We have launched our "Let's Talk, Allegheny" campaign which aims to reduce the stigma of mental health and bring awareness to suicide prevention.

During the month of August, we have launched the Card Project. This project asks people to make uplifting cards. The cards were collected and sent to places that are able to reach our elderly population. Some of the places that we partnered with were LOA, Allegheny Rehab and Scott Hill.

We hope that we were able to brighten someone's day !

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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The Alleghany Highlands Community Services offers a free training called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). This training is a two hour virtual and three hour in person training that is offered to the community for free.

What does this training cover? The ACEs training goes over how trauma affects the brain, the ACE Study, and Resiliency. Did you know that trauma in early childhood can lead to attention problems, problems with self regulation and overall health? This training will dive into the what parts of the brain that trauma affects and how.

The ACE Study was published in the 1990's by Dr. Vincent Felitti and Dr. Rob Anda. They started to see a trend on how early adversities in life can lead to poor health outcomes later in the life. They were able to study the population as whole and surveyed roughly 17,000 people about their household dysfunction prior to their 18th birthday. The results they found were startling.

But, there is a way to stop ACEs from multiplying in a child's life and a way to "re-wire" the brain so that a child can overcome these adversities. Having a structured routine, being a part of a community, and building self regulation can be taught to a child. Whether you are a teacher, neighbor, parent, grandparent etc. having this information will be valuable.

For a list of current upcoming trainings, please visit our Facebook page at @AHHYC.



UNDERSTANDING
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Upcoming Events

- Don't Give Up Movement - throughout month of September for Suicide Prevention Month
- 9/17 at 11:30 AM Coalition Meeting
- 9/18 from 9 AM - 11 AM ACEs training



COVID-19, Trauma, and Mental Health

Article from *Child Trends* and written by Brandon Stratford

Regardless of whether students return to school in person or via distance learning, education leaders and policymakers across the country must equip schools to address the social, emotional, and behavioral effects of the ongoing pandemic. To address these issues, many policymakers are turning to school-based mental health services as a key strategy for supporting student wellness. Although mental health services are a critical, often underfunded element of supporting the needs of students—particularly those who are experiencing trauma—we recommend that education leaders take a comprehensive approach that goes beyond mental health services as schools reopen.

Mental health treatment is most effective when delivered within a schoolwide, coordinated approach to supporting wellness. Several clinical interventions—delivered by school mental health professionals—have been demonstrated to be effective, including programs like Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS), which has been adapted to meet the needs of diverse student populations. However, in many cases, there are more students who need services than resources to provide them. While mental health services are a critical resource for students—more than half of youth across the country receiving mental health treatment receive it through their schools—the reality is that fewer than half of all schools report offering mental health treatment services, and the National Association of School Psychologists notes a shortage of qualified professionals. With most school districts bracing for budget cuts, it is hard to imagine that schools currently without mental health professionals will hire large numbers of practitioners anytime soon.

While the challenges that schools face are daunting, education leaders may consider some of the following strategies to support mental health and address trauma as they prepare to reopen:

Educate all school staff about trauma and mental health. Whether schools open in person or with some aspect of distance learning, staff will likely interact with students experiencing heightened stress and anxiety—and some experiencing symptoms of trauma. While educators should not be expected to replace trained mental health professionals, they should be aware of common causes of trauma and mental health challenges, and be able to recognize signs of distress.

Acknowledge that not all communities have experienced the pandemic in the same way. Black, Latino, and Native American communities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to the longstanding impacts of systemic racism in the health, education, housing, and justice sectors (among others). Many students and staff may also be dealing with the impact of nationwide protests. Ensure that all staff know how to connect students to mental health services. For schools with mental health clinicians, it is important that all school staff have a clear understanding of the process for referring students. Schools that lack mental health clinicians should establish relationships with community-based mental health providers and develop a system for making referrals. These processes should address both in-person and distance learning situations. Schools may also consider taking advantage of expanded access to telehealth to maintain mental health services while providing distance learning. It is particularly important to ensure that students and their families have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate treatment. Equip school staff with skills to foster safe and supportive learning environments.

Addressing mental health and trauma requires a coordinated effort across the entire school. High-quality social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula can be a great resource to foster relationships and teach important coping skills. Many SEL developers have produced guidance and activities for implementing SEL through online platforms.

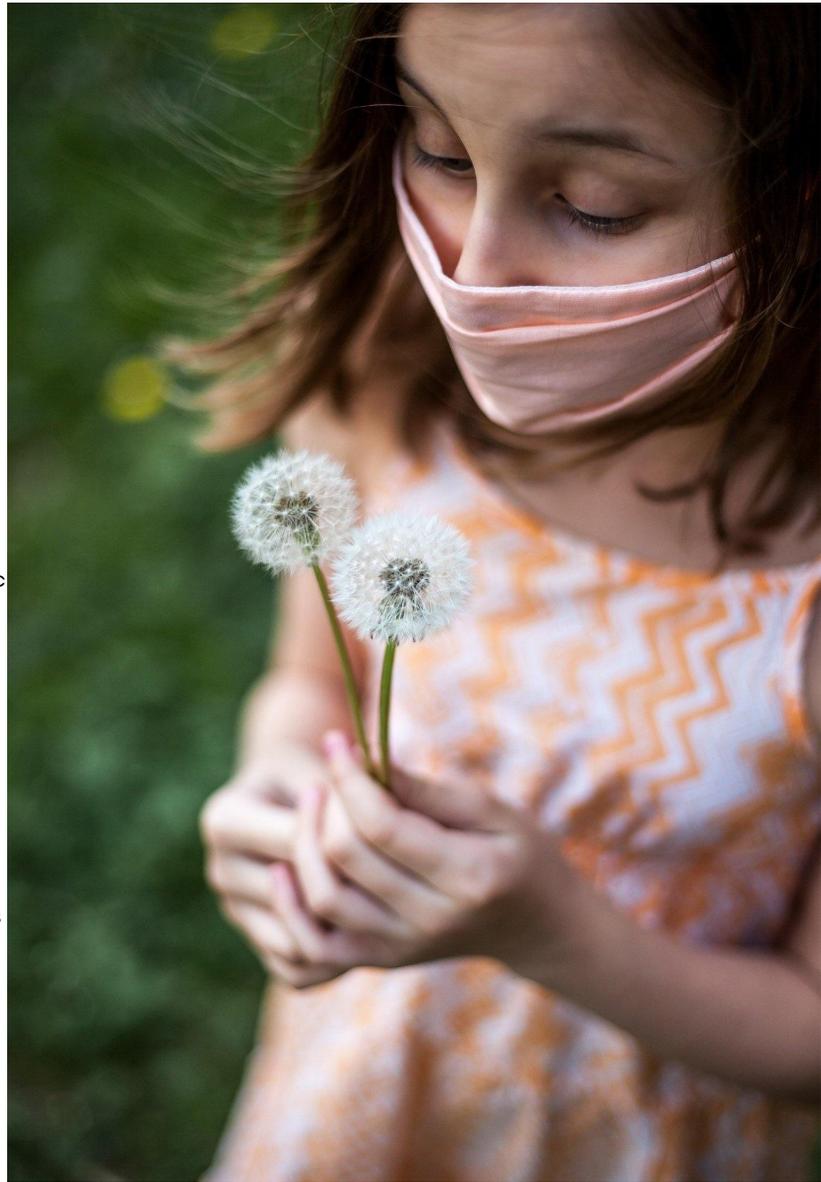
Schools should also consider implementing trauma-specific interventions. Child Trends researchers recently published an article reviewing a number of resources for addressing trauma in schools. The article highlights a lack of rigorously evaluated interventions for educators and suggests that schools attempt to monitor the effects of untested interventions to determine whether they are working as intended.

Pay attention to the mental health needs of school staff. Staff members themselves may have experienced some level of personal adversity or trauma due to the pandemic—including concerns about their health—which can be exacerbated by the strains of supporting students experiencing stress. School staff may also be dealing with heightened stress related to experiences of racism, especially in light of the national protests for racial justice, as well as questions about helping their students process their own experiences with racism. Given these added stressors, schools should offer staff resources that support their own wellness—especially related to trauma. Involve the school community in efforts to support students and staff.

School leaders must work quickly to prepare to support students in the fall, either in person or through distance learning. However, it is critical to partner with the school community (i.e., parents and members of the broader community) when identifying student needs and determining how to address them. This is particularly true in schools serving Black, Latino, and Native American students, which are often disproportionately and negatively impacted by decisions related to the allocation of health and education resources.

For more information about *Child Trends* please visit Childtrends.org.

For mental health services please call the Allegheny Highlands Community Services at 540-965-2100



COVID-19 Updates

- Allegheny County: 62 cases
- Covington: 19 cases
- Wash hands, wear face masks, maintain 6 feet of distance