

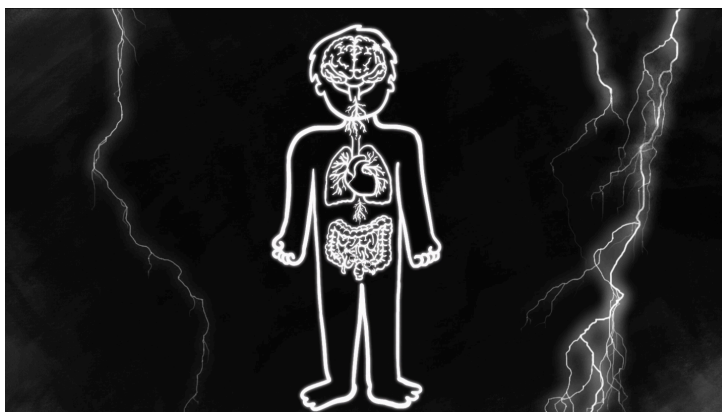
The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences



Adverse Childhood Experiences can appear as overwhelming, sudden and shocking events, or regular torments within relationships.



The feelings that arise from these experiences can be extremely difficult to process, for both children and the adults who care for them.



Many children who have been affected by adversity have responded to their experiences through the body's natural stress response system. This in-built capacity to protect ourselves when our lives are threatened is essential in keeping us alive, however it can be very damaging to our bodies, minds and social connections if we cannot return to a place of safety and calm, once the threat or danger has passed.



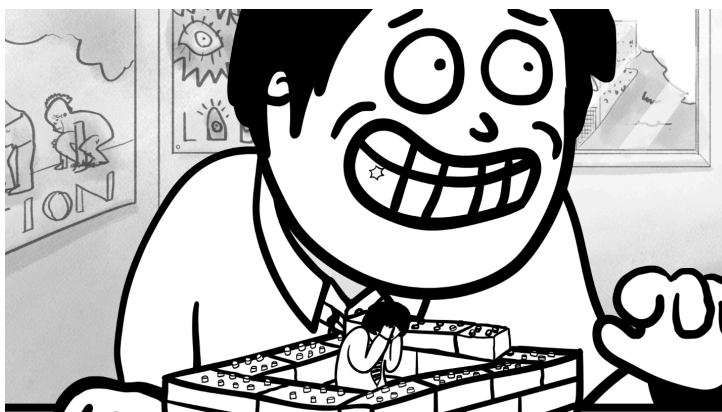
Social Defence System: Hyperarousal

Children who have experienced traumatic events may appear as defensive, disengaged and mistrustful - they might refuse to participate, say things which are disruptive or cruel to others or become angry because of difficult, overwhelming feelings or situations. For some children this 'Fight or Flight' impulse may be essential in keeping them alive, however they may also find it difficult to calm themselves down, manage their emotions and connect to others.



Life Threat: Hypoarousal

Some children affected by adversity might lack energy, curiosity or the willingness to participate in activities or engage in relationships. They could appear tired, collapsed, inattentive and have difficulty focusing on tasks. They may have had to shutdown their social and emotional responses due to their overwhelming life experiences, meaning that they can appear disaffected, disconnected or 'frozen'.



Hypervigilance

Children affected by adversity can also become very vigilant of others' needs, overly eager to please or seek approval and connection with adults by 'being good'. They may be hypervigilant to new experiences or changes within their routine or have a fragile sense of themselves when questioned, contradicted or challenged.



It is important to remember that behind every behaviour of an adult or child, is the communication of a need. This is especially true when working with children who are affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences.



Think of a child with whom you are connected whether you know of the adversity they face or not. Take the time to recall a behaviour which presented you with a challenge. What might they be communicating to you? What emotions might be informing your interactions? How might you be able to work alongside them, to meet their unmet needs?

For more information visit www.kazzum.org

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