

# There's No Place Like Home

Understanding the Harm of Removal to  
Infants and Toddlers in Child Welfare

October 1, 2024



# About Us



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# Learning Objectives

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| Increase understanding of how forcibly removing infants and toddlers from  
| their parent(s), even in cases of abuse and neglect, can be extremely  
disruptive to child development.

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| Enhance basic understanding of the domains of a child's life that are  
impacted by forced removal by child welfare.

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| In cases where removal is ordered, ways attorneys, social service workers,  
| and parent allies can reduce the short-term and long-term harms associated  
with the trauma of forced family separation.

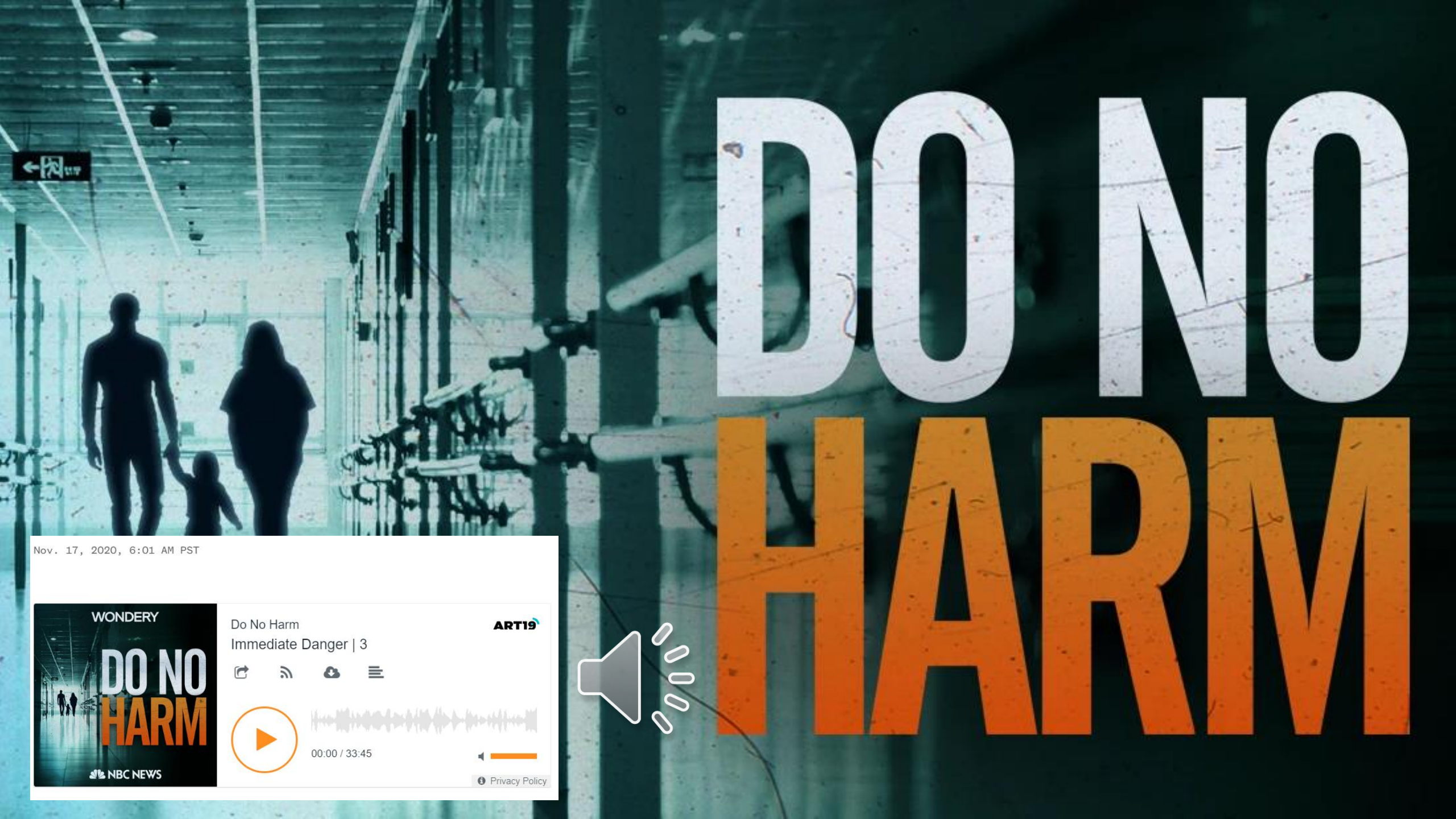


# Through the Eyes of a Child



There is a difference  
between **FEELING SAFE**  
and **BEING SAFE.**





# DO NO HARM



Nov. 17, 2020, 6:01 AM PST



Do No Harm  
Immediate Danger | 3

ART19



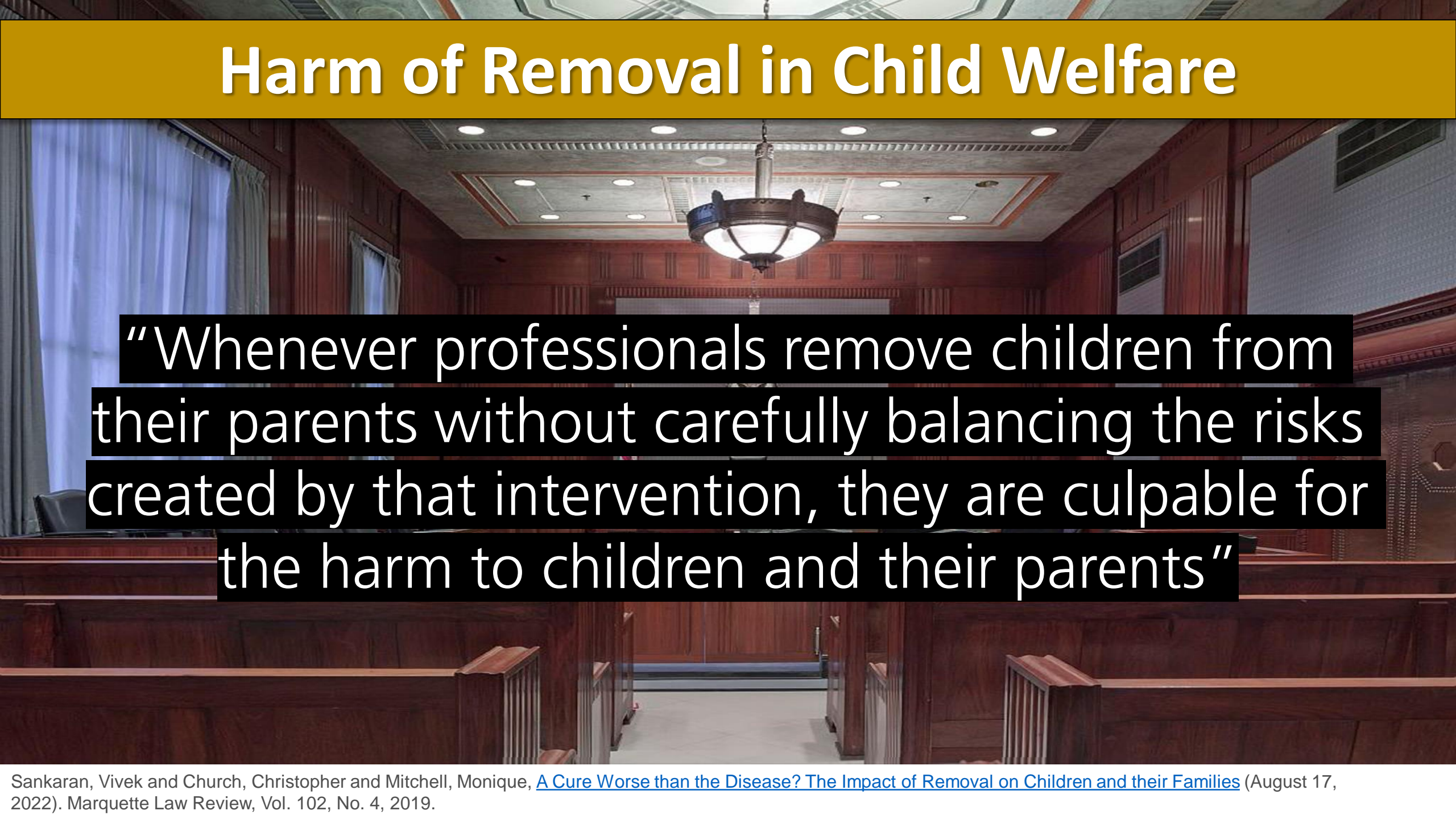
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# Harm of Removal in Child Welfare



“Whenever professionals remove children from their parents without carefully balancing the risks created by that intervention, they are culpable for the harm to children and their parents”



# United States Supreme Court

While the protection of vulnerable children is certainly a compelling interest of any government, the United States balances this governmental interest against a parent's fundamental constitutional right to family integrity, including the right to direct the care, custody, and control of their children.

See, e.g., *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 166 (1944); *Pierce v. Soc'y of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534–35 (1925); *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 400–01 (1923).





# Reasonable Efforts & Active Efforts

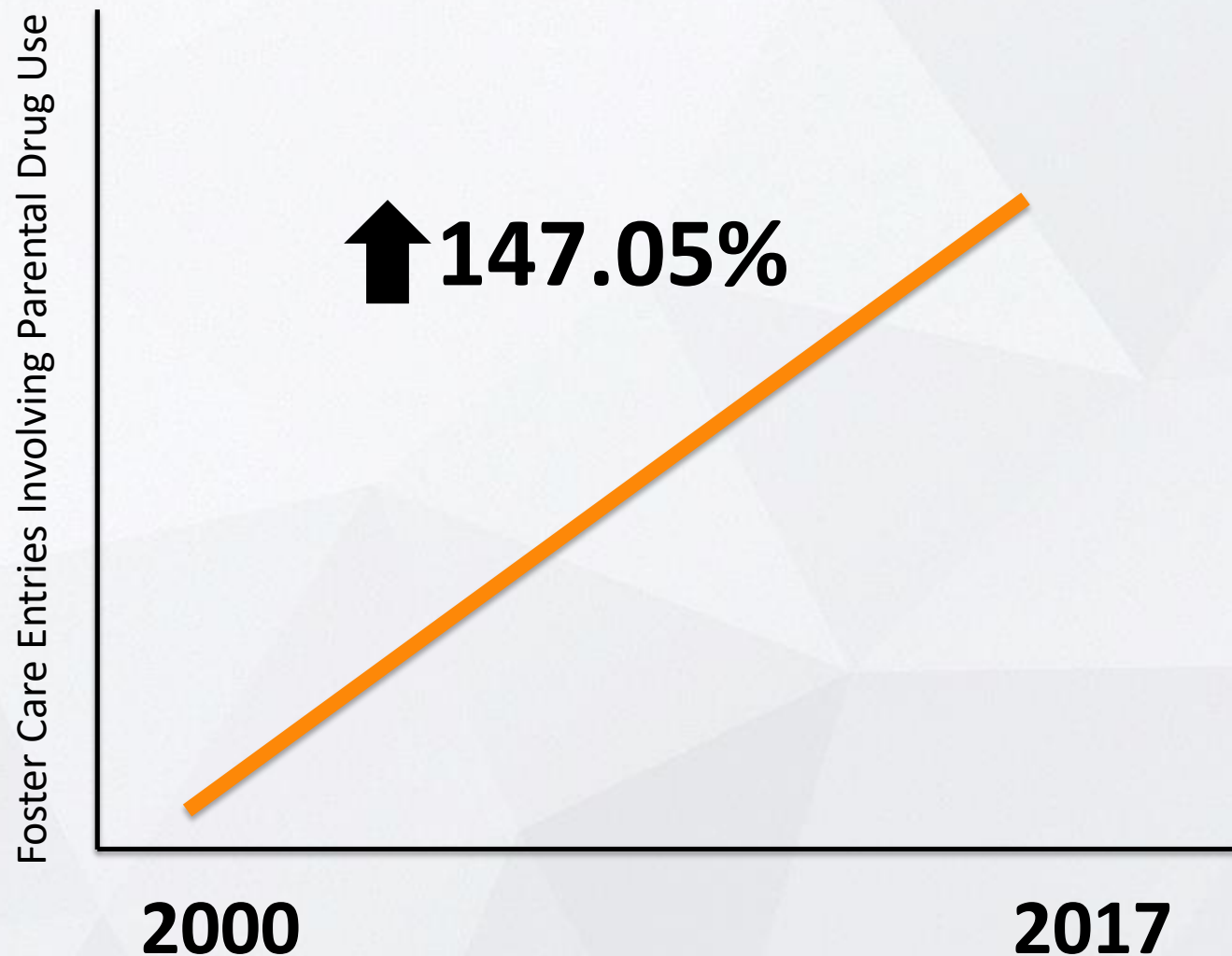
“These efforts harbor great potential to keep families safely together and help avoid the outlier tragedies that have for too long driven how we serve children and families.”

Milner, Jerry & David Kelly. “[Reasonable Efforts as Prevention](#).” ABA Child Law Practice Today, January-December 2018.






# Foster Care Panic & Child Fatalities



Meinhofer A, Angleró-Díaz Y. [Trends in foster care entry among children removed from their homes because of parental drug use, 2000 to 2017](#). JAMA Pediatr. 2019;173(9):881-883.

# The Research: Foster Care



Children in foster care are at an increased risk of experiencing negative long-term health outcomes.

Engler A.D., Sarpong K.O., Van Horne B.S., Greeley C.S., Keefe R.J. [A systematic review of mental health disorders of children in foster care](#). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 2022;23(1):255-264.

Children who have been placed in foster care have higher rates of:

## Criminal Justice Involvement

Rebbe R., Nurius P.S., Ahrens K.R., Courtney M.E. (2017). [Adverse childhood experiences among youth aging out of foster care: a latent class analysis](#). *Child Youth Serv Rev.*, 74:108-116.

## Housing Instability

Fowler P.J., Toro P.A., Miles B.W. (2009). [Pathways to and from homelessness and associated psychosocial outcomes among adolescents leaving the foster care system](#). *Am J Public Health*, 99(8):1453-1458.

## Substance Use Disorder

Braciszewski J.M, Stout R.L. (2012). [Substance use among current and former foster youth: a systematic review](#). *Child Youth Serv Rev.* 2012;34(12):2337-2344.

## Inadequate Education

Pecora, P.J., Williams, J., Kessler, R.C., Hiripi, E., O'Brien, K., Emerson, J., Herrick, M.A. and Torres, D. (2006). [Assessing the educational achievements of adults who were formerly placed in family foster care](#). *Child & Family Social Work*, 11: 220-231.


## Health Conditions

Turney K. & Wildeman C. (2016). [Mental and physical health of children in foster care](#). *Pediatrics*. 138(5):e20161118.

The American Academy of Pediatrics considers children in foster care as having “special health care needs” due to their high rates of physical and mental health problems.



# The Research: Marginal Homes



Children “on the margin” of placement experienced improved outcomes when they remained at home as compared to *similarly-maltreated* children who were removed and placed into foster care.

(Doyle 2007; Doyle 2008; Doyle 2013)

*“on the margin” which refers to cases where CPS investigators may disagree about the recommendation of removal.*

Children who remained home were far less likely to experience **teen pregnancy, commit a juvenile offense**, and were **more likely to hold a job** for at least three months as compared to those placed into foster care.

[Child Protection and Child Outcomes: Measuring the Effects of Foster Care. Doyle, Joseph J. American Economic Review Vol. 97, No. 5 \(2007\): 746-770.](#)

Children placed into foster care were **2 to 3 times more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system** as adults and experienced **higher rates of arrest, conviction, and imprisonment** as compared to those who remained home.

[Child Protection and Adult Crime: Using Investigator Assignment to Estimate Causal Effects of Foster Care. Doyle, Joseph J. Journal of Political Economy Vol. 116, No. 4 \(2008\): 746-770.](#)

Children placed into foster care were more likely to **engage in juvenile delinquency and have the need for emergency care** (3 times higher) as compared to those children who remained home.

[Causal Effects of Foster Care: An Instrumental-Variables Approach. Doyle, Joseph J. Children and Youth Services Review Vol. 35, No. 7 \(2013\): 1143-1151.](#)

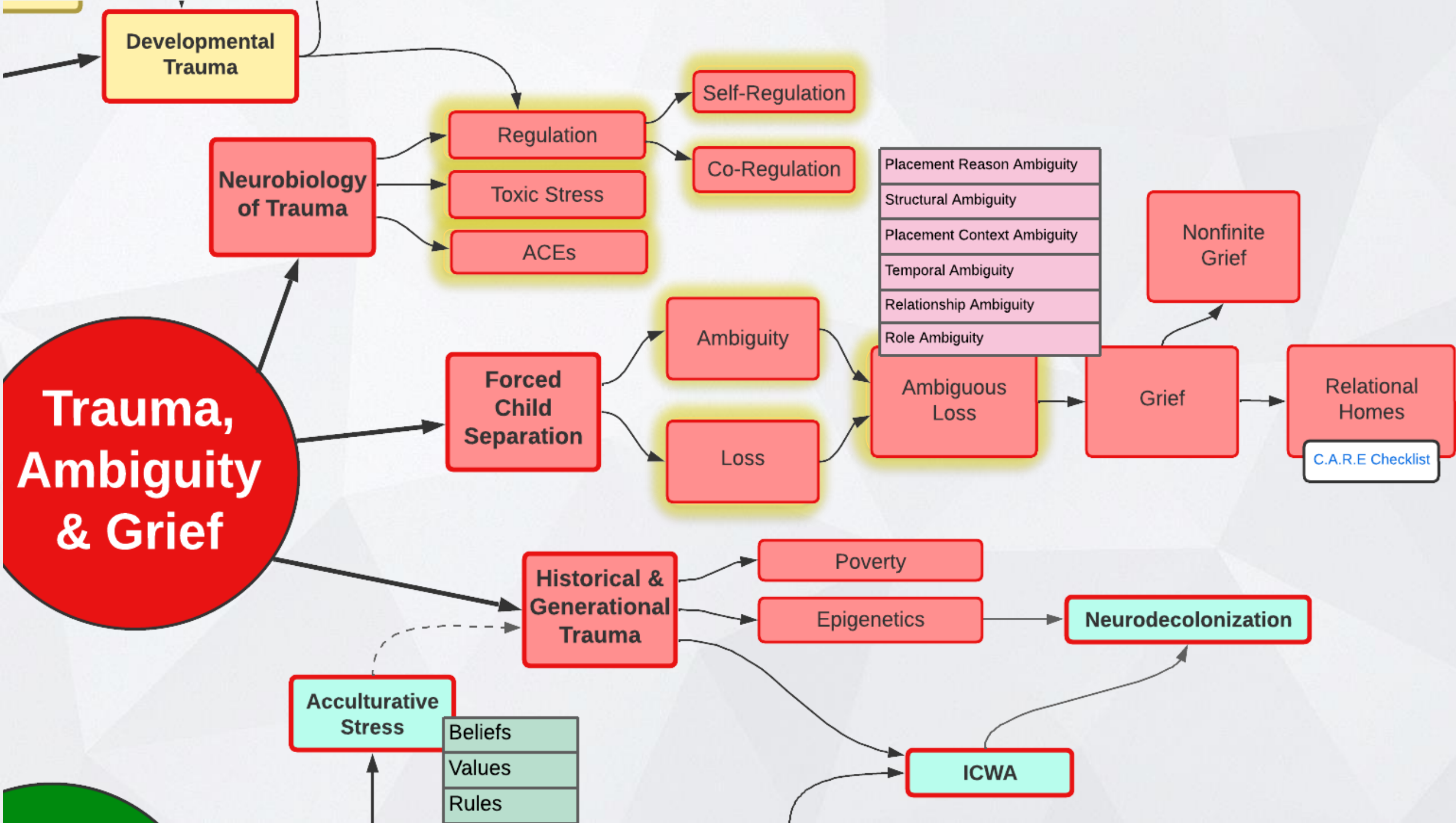
# Harm of Removal Map



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# Forcible Family Separation & Toxic Stress

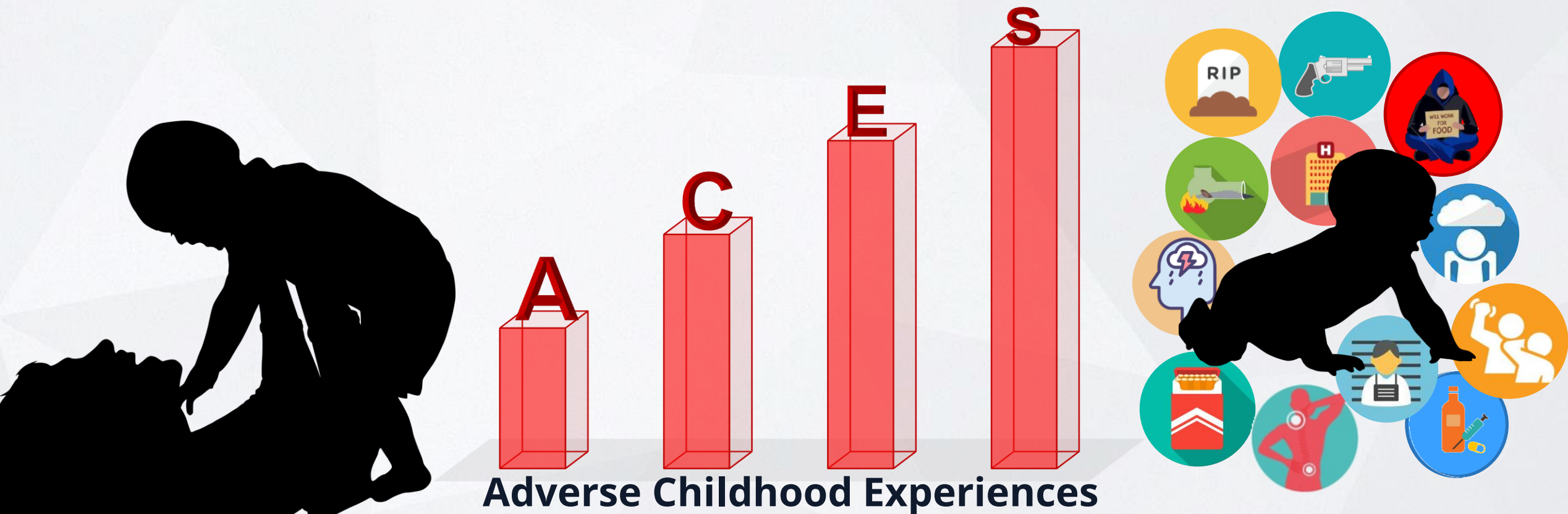
“Separating children from their families can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child’s brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health.

This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress - known as ‘toxic stress’ - can carry lifelong consequences for children.”

-American Academy of Pediatrics







Average number of ACEs reported by adults formerly in foster care was **6**  
1/3 reported **8 or more**

Placement into foster care **does not stop** the accrual of additional ACEs

Bruskas, D., & Tessin, D. H. (2013). [Adverse childhood experiences and psychosocial well-being of women who were in foster care as children](#). *The Permanente journal*, 17(3), e131–e141.

# Ambiguous Loss

Physical absence with psychological presence





# Ambiguity & Loss

Why do I have to leave?

**Placement Reason Ambiguity**

What is foster care?

**Structural Ambiguity**

Where are you taking me?

**Placement Context Ambiguity**

Who are these people?

**Relationship Ambiguity**

How about me?

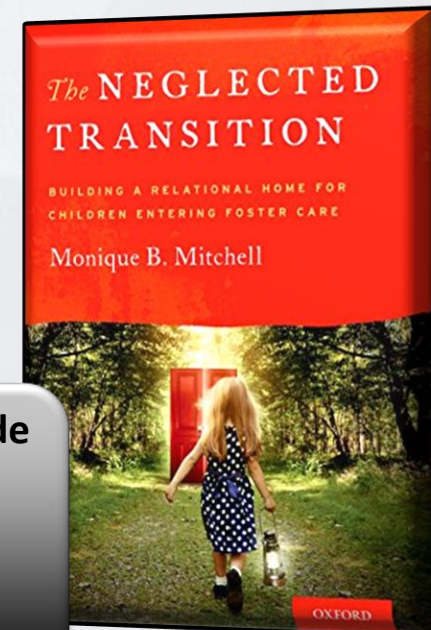
**Role Ambiguity**

When can I go home?

**Temporal Ambiguity**

C.A.R.E.  
Checklist

Scan QR Code





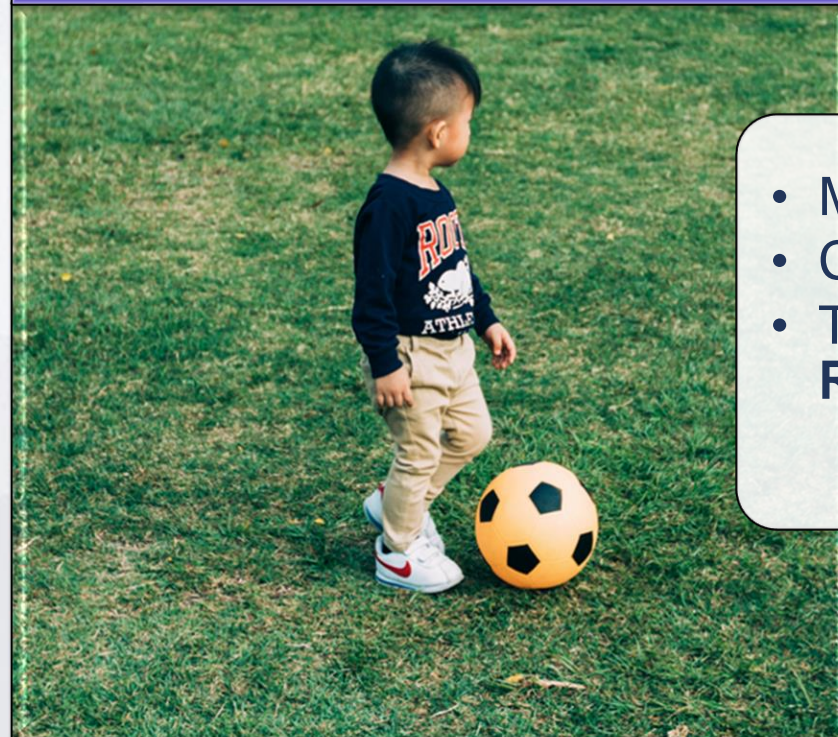
# Patterns of Stress Activation

## Unpredictable



- Extreme
- Prolonged
- Sensitization/  
**Vulnerability**

## Predictable



- Moderate
- Controllable
- Tolerance/  
**Resilience**





# Impacts of Toxic Stress

Parent-child separation is a source of toxic stress for children.



Toxic stress changes how the body responds to stress and alters brain structure and functioning.



These disruptions in neurocognitive development put children at greater risk for a multitude of health and psychological impairments in adulthood.



# Mitigation of Harm Through Regulation

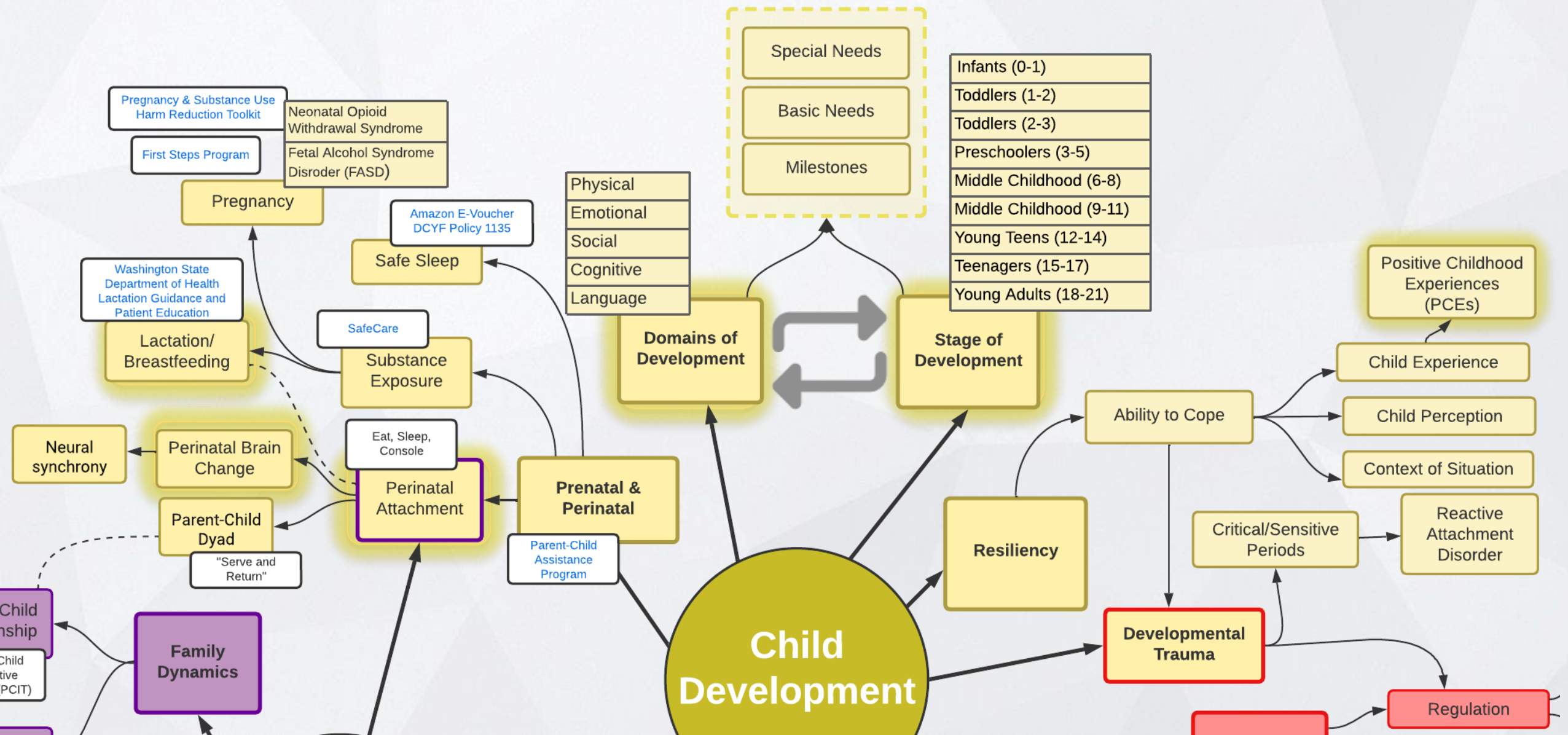


Children depend on their primary caretakers to successfully navigate stressful and traumatic events.

Children's physiological responses to stress can be significantly reduced by safe access to their primary caretaker

Supporting parents to **self-regulate** helps children **co-regulate**.





# Harm of Removal Across Stages of Child Development

Guidance for Child Welfare Courts

## Stages of Child Development

Infants (0-1)

Toddlers (1-2)

Toddlers (2-3)

Preschoolers (3-5)

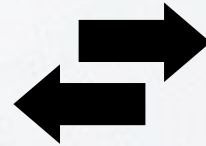
Middle Childhood (6-8)

Middle Childhood (9-11)

Young Teens (12-14)

Teenagers (15-17)

Young Adults (18-21)



## Domains of Child Development

Physical

Emotional

Social

Cognitive

Language

Scan QR Code





# Harm of Removal Across Stages of Child Development

## Example: Toddlers (1-2)

### Harms of Removal Across Stages of Child Development Toddlers (1-2 years old)

*This tool is designed to help court systems better identify, assess and mitigate the potential harmful impacts to children that result from forcible family separation by child welfare. The information in this tool should not be used to assess the developmental capabilities of a child, nor should it be used to draw any inferences about the safety of the child in the care of their parents or the ability of the parents to safely care for their child.*

#### Developmental Milestones<sup>1</sup>

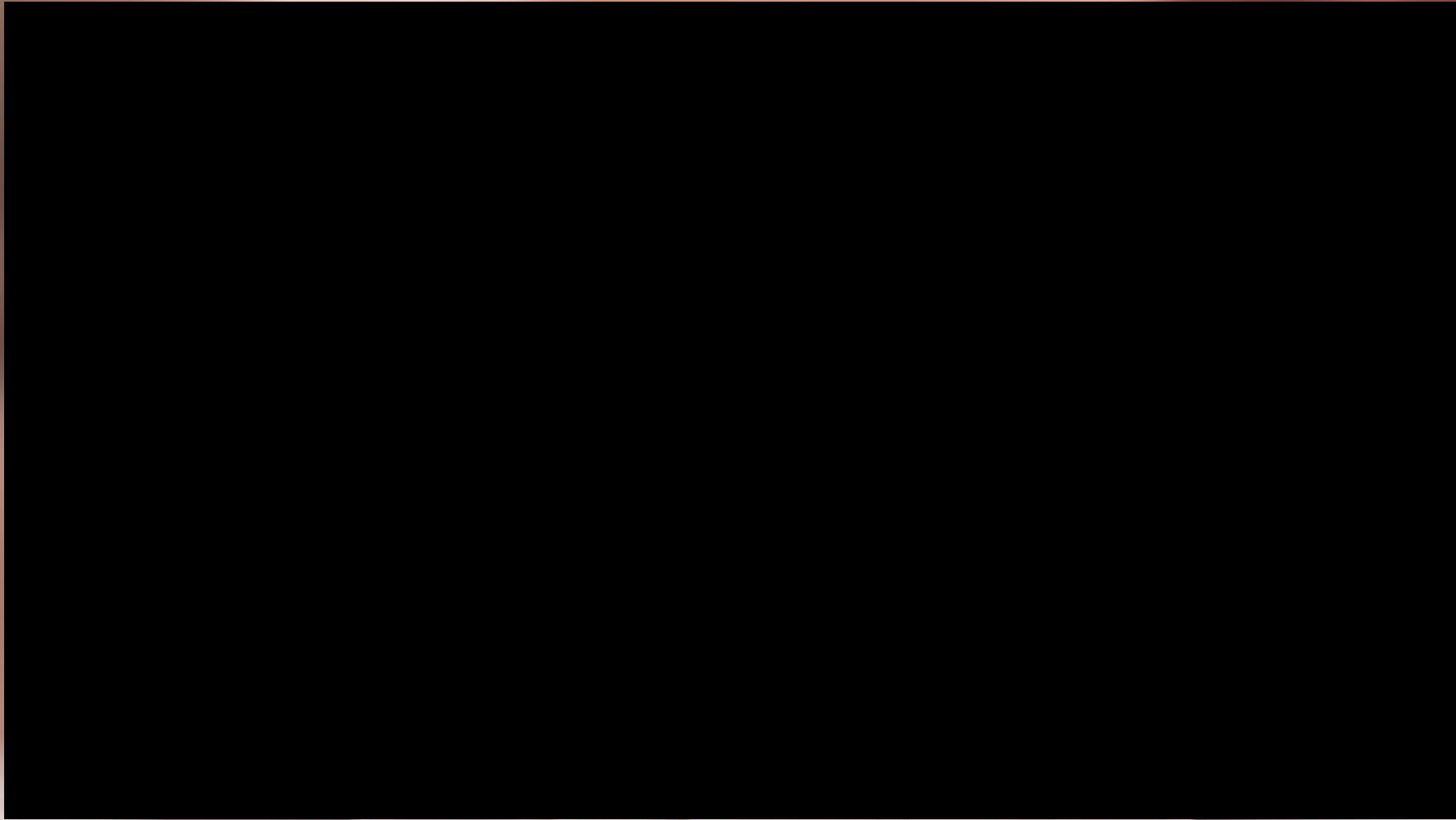
During the second year, toddlers are moving around more, and are aware of themselves and their surroundings. Their desire to explore new objects and people is also increasing. During this stage, toddlers will show greater independence; begin to show defiant behavior; recognize themselves in pictures or a mirror; and imitate the behavior of others, especially adults and older children. Most toddlers are also able to recognize the names of familiar people and objects, form simple phrases and sentences, and follow simple instructions and directions.



Centers for Disease Control (2021). Positive Parenting Tips: Toddlers (1-2 years).

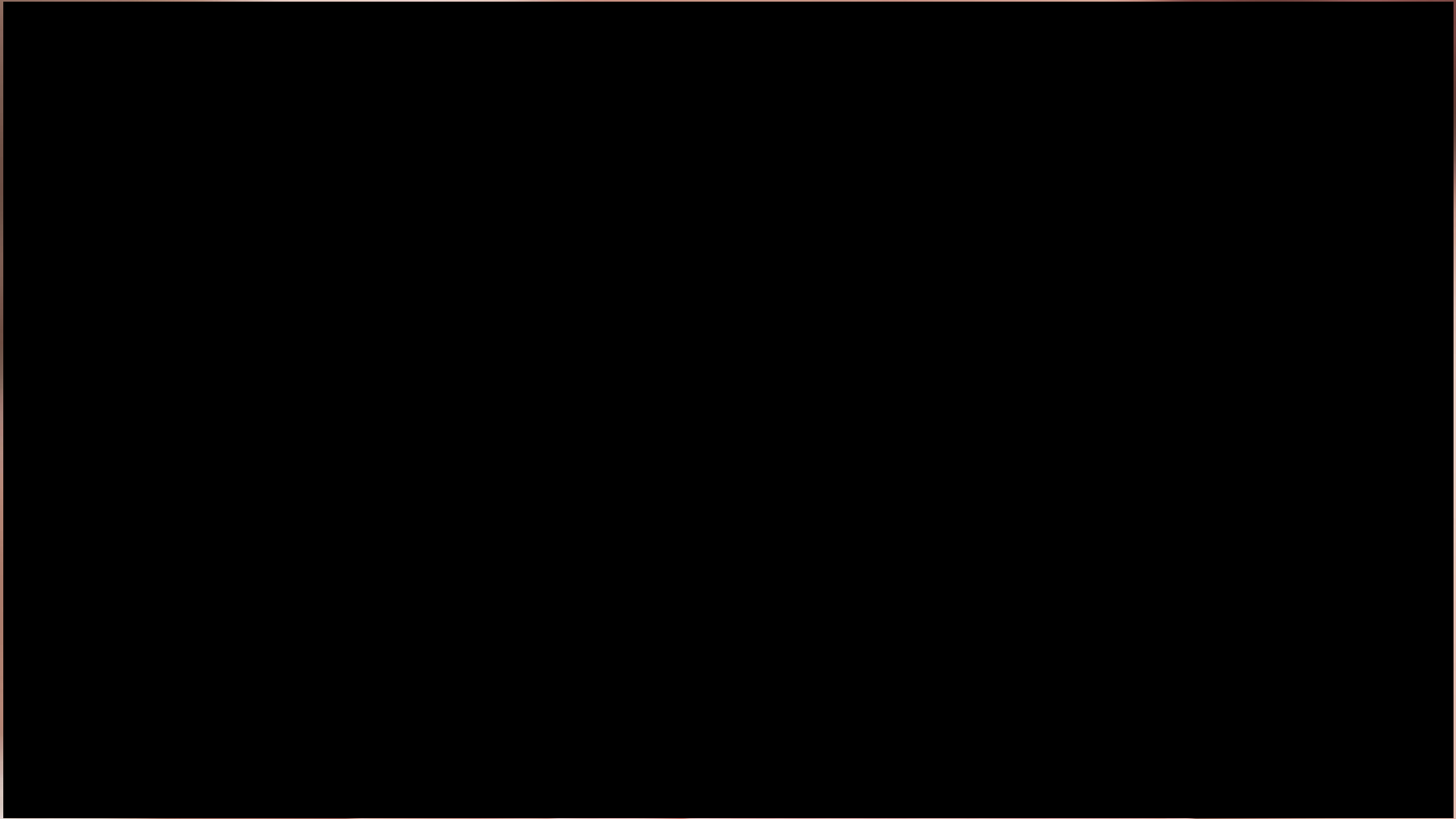


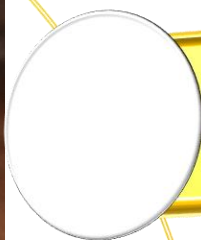
# Infants





# Infants





Parental Bonding



Perinatal Brain Change



Loss of Perceived Safety



Breastfeeding











# Mitigation of Harm Through Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)



**Relationships:** Safe and supportive relationships matter. These can be peer-to-peer, child-to-parent, or with other positive adults in a child's life. Regularly connecting, playing, and sharing activities foster strong bonds.



**Environment:** Safe spaces—whether at home, school, or in the community—allow children to grow freely. Feeling physically and emotionally secure contributes to healthy development.



**Engagement:** Civic and social engagement helps children feel valued. Opportunities to participate and matter to others build resilience.



**Emotional Growth:** Cultivating positive self-image, self-worth, and coping skills equips children to handle stress healthily.

Positive childhood experiences (PCEs) promote optimal health and mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences

Sege R, Swedo EA, Burstein D, et al. (2024) [Prevalence of Positive Childhood Experiences Among Adults — Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Four States, 2015–2021](#). MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep, 73:399–404.



# Positive Childhood Experiences Questions

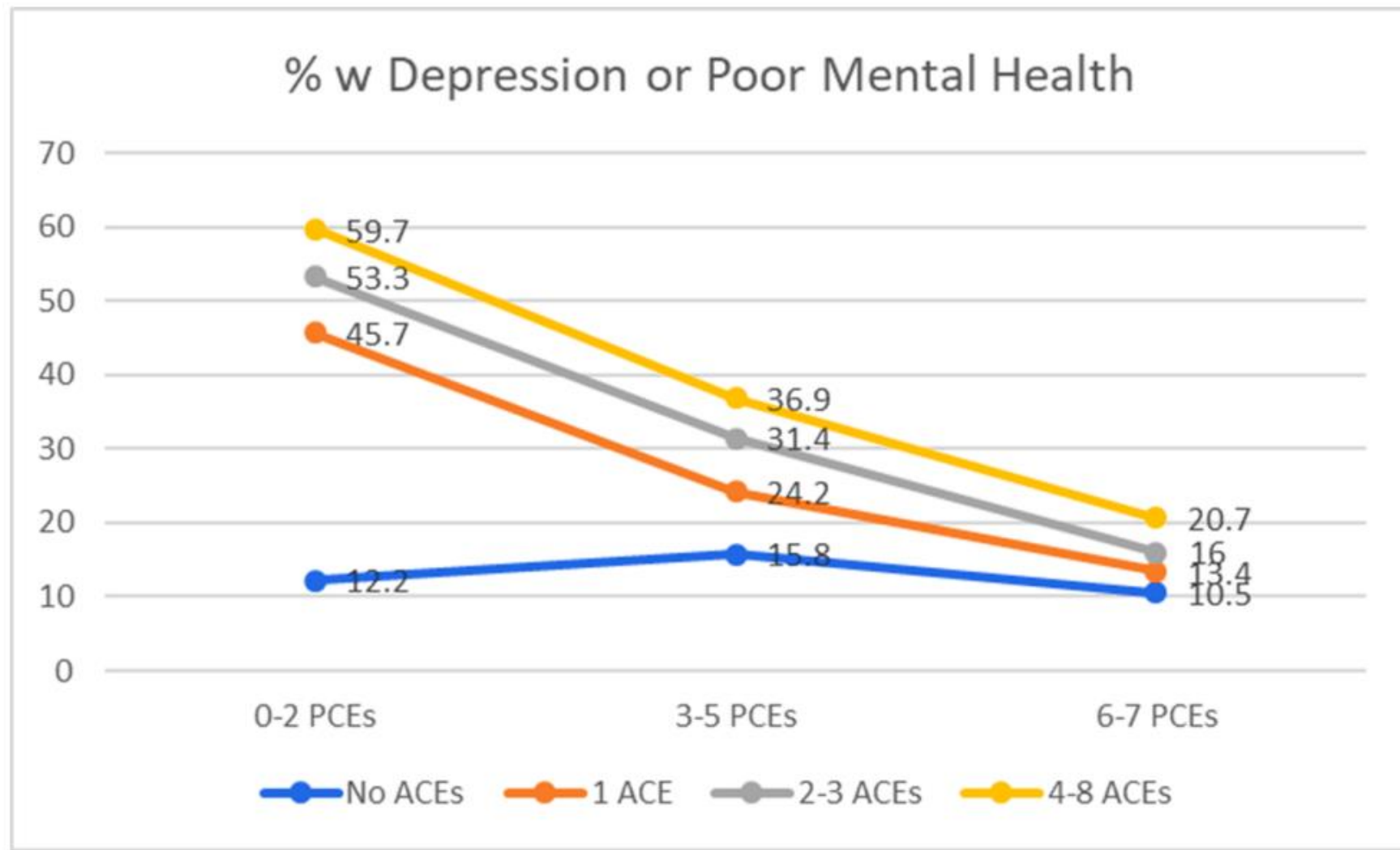
## How often the respondent:

1. Felt able to talk to their family about feelings.
2. Felt their family stood by them during difficult times.
3. Enjoyed participating in community traditions.
4. Felt a sense of belonging in high school.
5. Felt supported by friends.
6. Had at least two non-parent adults who took genuine interest in them.
7. Felt safe and protected by an adult in their home.

[Bethell C, Jones J, Gombojav N, Linkenbach J, Sege R. Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample: Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Levels. JAMA Pediatr. 2019:e193007.](#)

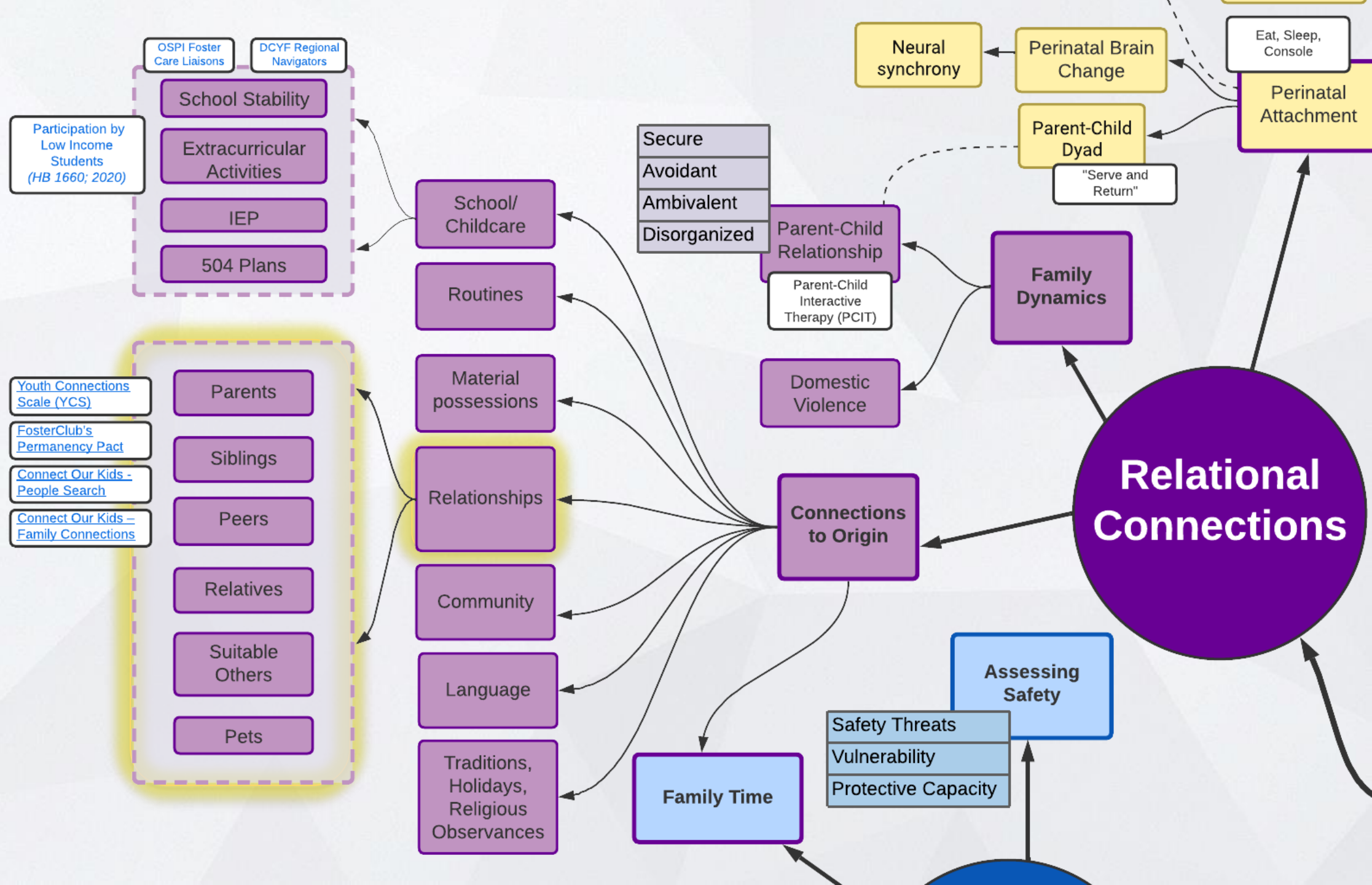


# Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)



[Bethell C, Jones J, Gombojav N, Linkenbach J, Sege R. Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample: Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Levels. JAMA Pediatr. 2019:e193007.](#)





# Expanded View of Permanency

## Legal Permanency



Legal family relationships such as parents, guardians, or adoptive parents

## Relational Permanency



Emotionally supportive relationships such as non-caregiver relatives, siblings, teachers, coaches, and fictive kin

## Cultural Permanency



Feeling of connection to culture and traditions of origin.



# Mitigation of Harm Through Relational Connections

## Placement

- Relative/suitable other
- Supports reunification
- Provides stability
- Includes siblings

## Family Time Visitation

- Frequent / consistent
- Least-restrictive, natural setting
- Developmentally appropriate

## Educational Stability

- Same school
- Pre-school and/or daycare

*“Connectedness has the power to counterbalance adversity.”*

-Dr. Bruce Perry

## Child & Family Specific Mitigations

- Race & Ethnicity
- Religious observances
- Culture & traditions
- Language
- Routines
- Extracurricular activities
- Medical & dental providers
- Pets
- Belongings
- More.....

**\*Cannot do this without knowing the family\***

# Supporting Relational Permanency

**C.A.R.E. Checklist** outlines the questions that children ask and want answered when they are removed from their homes and placed into foster care.

**Youth Connections Scale (YCS)** identifies the quality and quantity of meaningful connections a youth has with caring adult(s).

**FosterClub's Permanency Pact** creates a formalized, facilitated process to connect youth in foster care with a supportive adult and provides suggested supports that an adult could provide for youth transitioning out of care

**Connect Our Kids - People Search** was created for child welfare professionals and volunteers to find contact information for extended family members and other connections by searching over 300 sources of data.

**Connect Our Kids – Family Connections** is a visual relationship mapping tool used to build out networks of extended family members and other natural supports for vulnerable children and their families.



# Investing in Prevention

Children who experienced IPV in the household had more externalizing behaviors than children who did not experience IPV – resulting in changes in the parent-child relationship

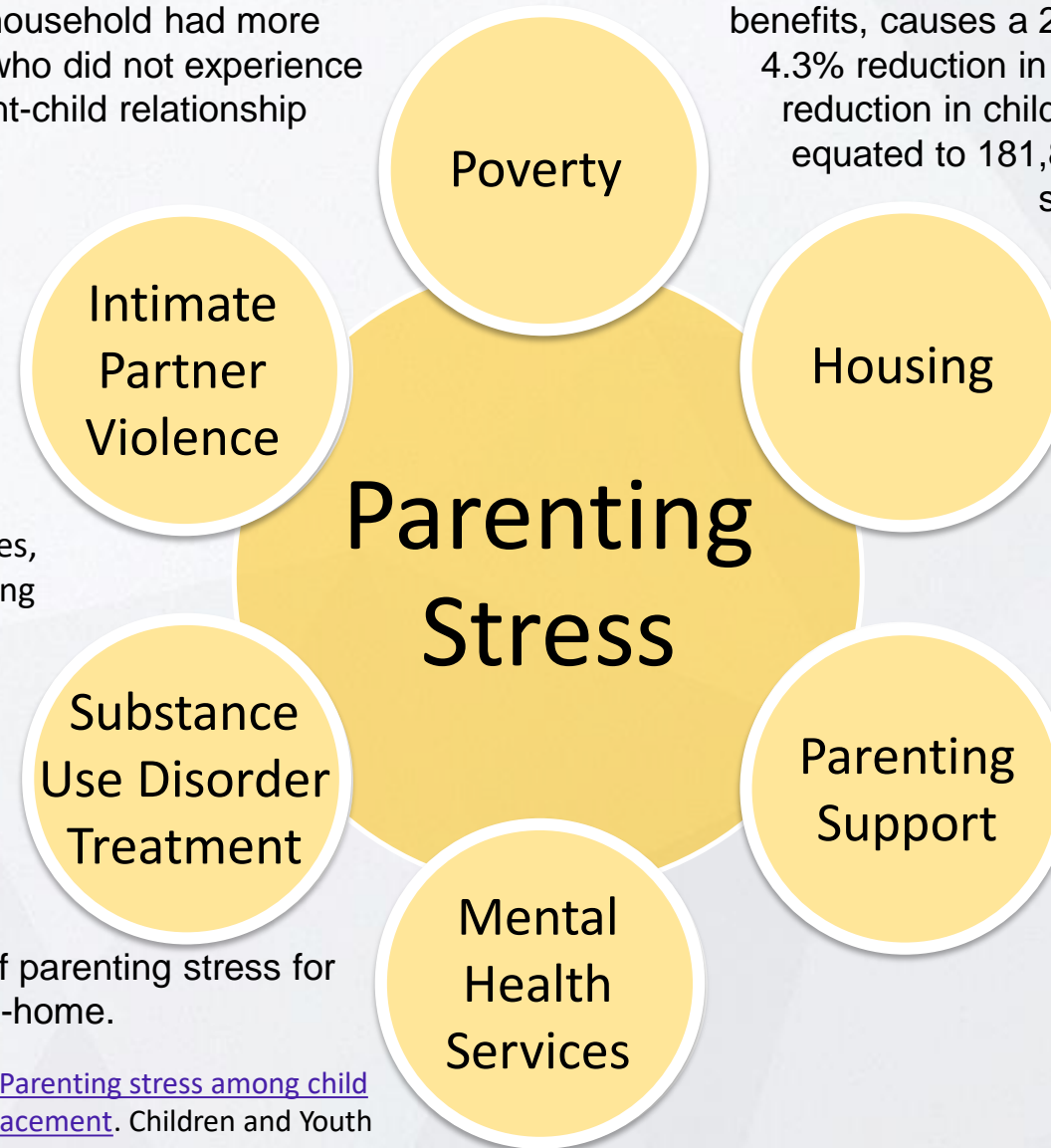
Chung, G., Jensen, T. M., Parisi, A., Macy, R. J., & Lanier, P. (2021). [Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Parenting and Children's Externalizing Behaviors: Transactional Processes Over Time](#). *Violence Against Women*, 27(14), 2576-2599.

When parents do not receive appropriate treatment and continue to abuse substances, their children are likely to experience lifelong mental health instability.

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2014). [Parental substance use and the child welfare system](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

Parent mental health was predictive of parenting stress for families where the child was placed in-home.

Rodriguez-JenKins, J. & Marcenko, M.O. (2014). [Parenting stress among child welfare involved families: Differences by child placement](#). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 46 19:27.



An additional \$1,000 per person living in poverty invested in public benefits, causes a 2.1% reduction in foster care placements, a 4.3% reduction in abuse and neglect reports, and a 7.7% reduction in child maltreatment fatalities – this would have equated to 181,850 fewer reports, 28,575 fewer substantiations, 4,168 fewer foster care placements, and 130 fewer fatalities in 2017. Puls, H. T., Hall, M., Anderst, J. D., Gurley, T., Perrin, J., & Chung, P. J. (2021). [State spending on public benefit programs and child maltreatment](#). *Pediatrics*, 148(5), e2021050685.

On average, savings due to reducing a family's time in the child welfare system through supportive housing was \$14,600 per family.

Tucker, L.P, Pergamit, M. & Bayer, M. (2023) [How much does supportive housing save child welfare systems?](#) Urban Institute. Washington, DC.

Programs that focus on enhancing parenting skills, increasing parent knowledge regarding child development, reinforcing positive child behavior, and supporting parent-child relationships help reduce parenting stress.

Rodriguez-JenKins, J. & Marcenko, M.O. (2014). [Parenting stress among child welfare involved families: Differences by child placement](#). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 46 19:27.

# Thank You!

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