

Trauma and Addiction: A Tangled Relationship

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Healthy People

- People whose integrity has not been damaged in childhood, who were protected, respected, and treated with honesty by their parents, will be - both in their youth and in adulthood - intelligent, responsive, empathic, and highly sensitive. They will take pleasure in life and will not feel any need to kill or even hurt others or themselves. They will use their power to defend themselves, not to attack others.

- Alice Miller

Trauma and Substance Use Disorders

Many with substance use disorders have experienced trauma as adults or children.

Substance abuse predisposes people to higher rates of trauma due to high risk behaviors.

Substance abusers who have experienced trauma have worse treatment outcomes than those without trauma histories.

More than half of the women seeking treatment have histories of trauma.

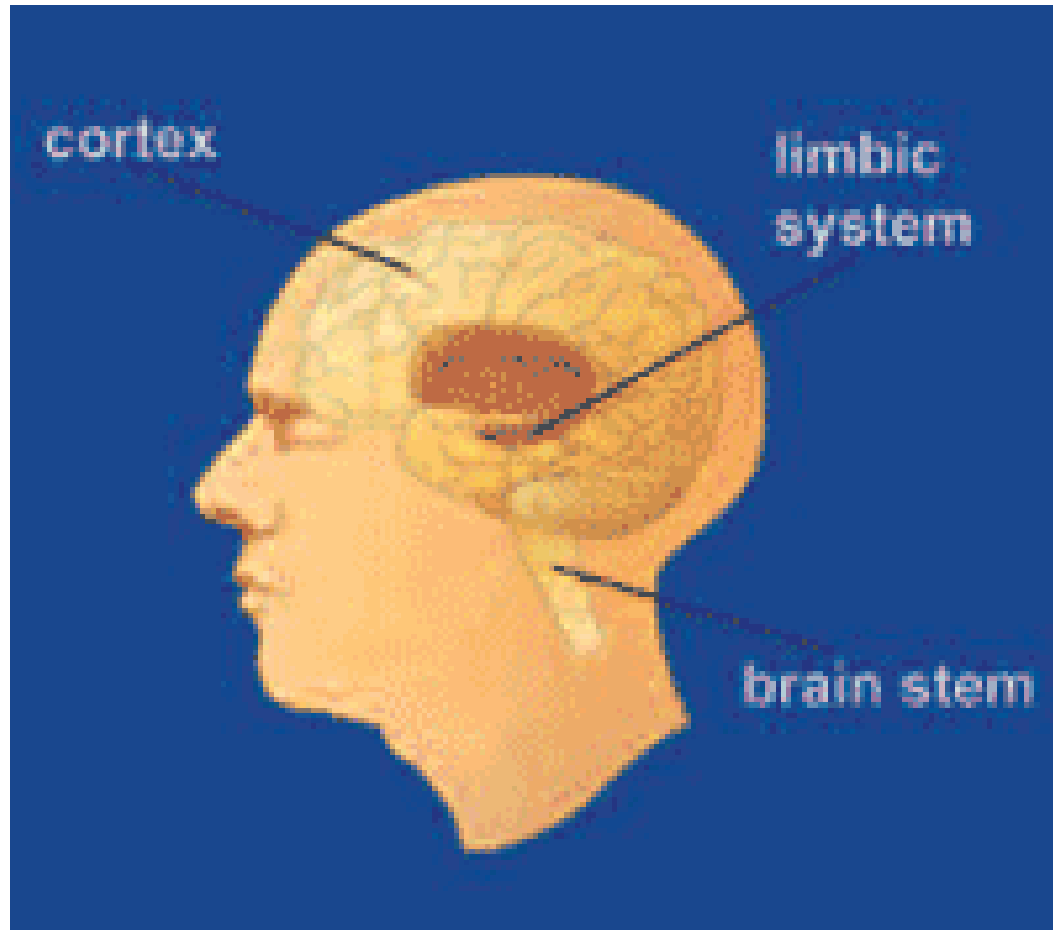
Addiction Defined

“A primary, progressive, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations.”

Morse and Flavin, 1992, Journal of the
Medical Association

American

The Reward Pathway



- **The brain stem** is in charge of all of the functions our body needs to stay alive—breathing, circulating blood, and digesting food
- **The limbic system** links together a bunch of brain structures that control our emotional responses, such as feeling pleasure when we eat chocolate.
- **The cortex**, known as the frontal cortex or forebrain, is the thinking center. It powers our ability to think, plan, solve problems, and make decisions.

About Genetics



Whether teens engage in *pathological relationships with objects or events* is environmental

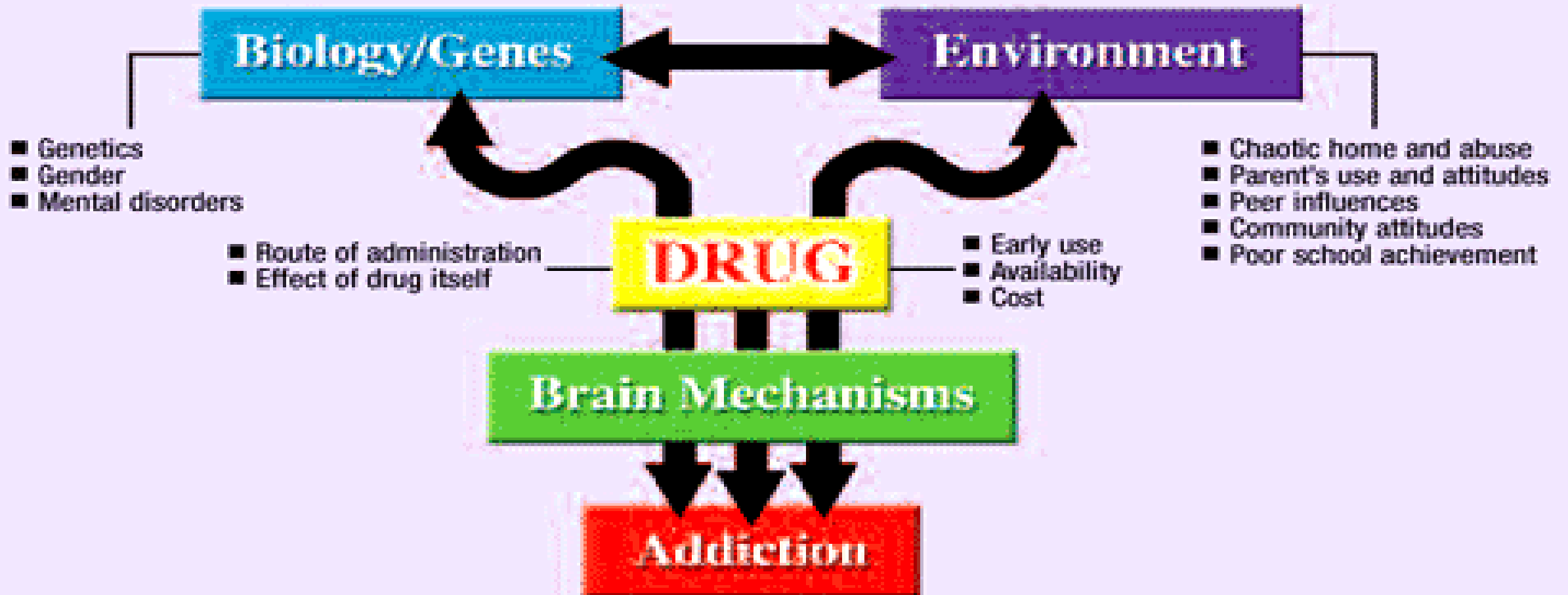
HOWEVER

Genetics and biology determine whether the behavior develops into addiction.

Robert Dupont, The Selfish Brain

An overview of risk

RISK FACTORS



To Bear Reality

Therapy: Allows us to “Acknowledge, experience and bear reality.”

“Sometimes we encounter experiences that so violate our sense of safety, order, predictability and right, that we feel utterly overwhelmed. Unable to bear reality. We have come to call these shattering experiences trauma.”

Bessel A. van der Kolk, MD

Defining Trauma

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social emotional or spiritual well being. (SAMHSA 2012)

Trauma ...

... Ignites Fight, flight or freeze response

... Re organizes the brain

About Trauma

- Trauma results in an alienation from the body and a reduced capacity to be present in the here and now.
- Although exact prevalence estimates vary, there is a consensus in the field that most consumers of mental health services are trauma survivors and that their trauma experiences help shape their responses help.

The first 1000 days

- There are critical periods in developing brain's when they are open to development. Then they close and an opportunity may be missed.
- The developing brain is constantly responding to its environment.
- The brain's priority is survival in its environment.
- Enriched environments provide for optimal development. (higher iq's)
- The first 1000 days of life are a critical period.

The Amygdala

- The Amygdala stands guard waiting to sound the alarm. It is quicker than cognitive responses.
- It constantly scans for danger
- When the danger is often and unresolved the alarm system diverts energy from all other systems resulting in hypervigilance.
- Failure to resolve the threat with fight or flight results in possible freeze (dis association)

The Autonomic Nervous System

Sympathetic

- It is a nice, sunny day...you are taking a nice walk in the park. Suddenly, an angry bear appears in your path. Do you stay and fight OR do you turn and run away? These are "Fight or Flight" responses.
- In these types of situations, your sympathetic nervous system is called into action - it uses energy - your blood pressure increases, your heart beats faster, and digestion slows down.

Parasympathetic

- It is a nice, sunny day...you are taking a nice walk in the park. This time, however, you decide to relax in comfortable chair that you have brought along. This calls for "Rest and Digest" responses. Now is the time for the parasympathetic nervous to work to save energy - your blood pressure decreases, your heart beats slower, and digestion can start.

ACE Study

Addiction is experience-dependent and not substance-dependent.

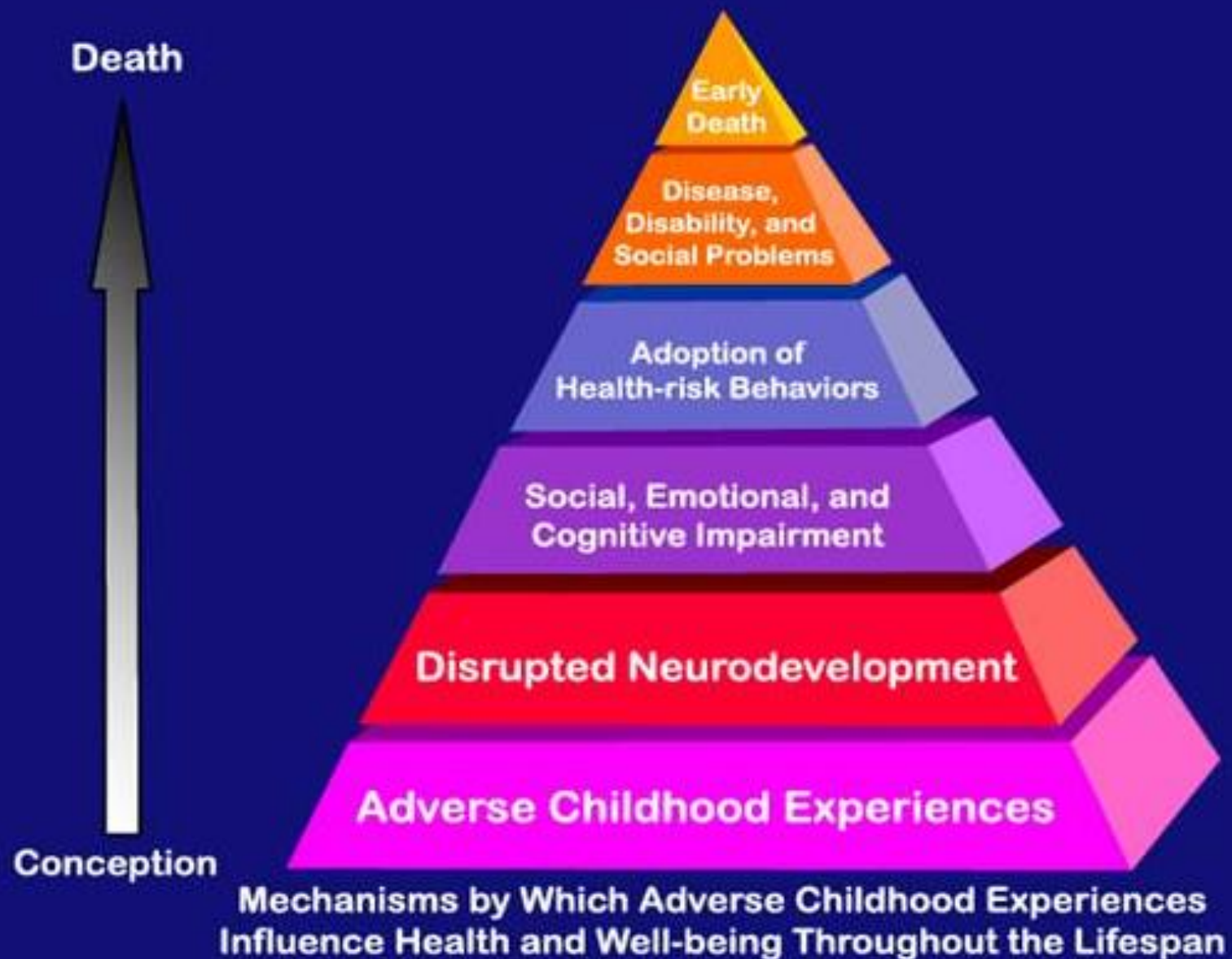
- The ACE study shows addiction to be a readily understandable although largely unconscious attempt to gain relief from well-concealed prior life traumas by using psychoactive materials.

ACE Study categories (Life Trauma's)

1. Recurrent and severe physical abuse
2. Recurrent and severe emotional abuse
3. Contact sexual abuse

Growing up in a household with:

4. An alcoholic or drug-user
5. A member being imprisoned
6. A mentally ill, chronically depressed, or institutionalized member
7. The mother being treated violently
8. Both biological parents *not* being present



Trauma: The body keeps score

- THE ORDINARY RESPONSE TO ATROCITIES is to banish them from consciousness.
 - Certain violations are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word **unspeakable**.
- Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried.
- What we can't say aloud gets stored in the body.

Stress response in children

- **Stress causes physiological and structural changes in the brain and neurological systems that without intervention, result in enduring problems such as depression, addiction, anxiety, aggression, impulsiveness, delinquency, hyperactivity, and substance abuse.**
- **More than 60% of youth age 17 and younger have been exposed to crime, violence and abuse either directly or indirectly.**
- **Young children exposed to 5 or more significant adversities in the first 3 years of childhood face a 76 percent likelihood of having one or more delays in their cognitive, language, or emotional development.**

Stressed children

cannot learn

cannot feel

cannot calm down

cannot get along

Self regulation

Defined as a child's ability to gain control of bodily functions, manage powerful emotions, and maintain focus and attention.

The growth of self-regulation is a cornerstone of early childhood development and is visible in all areas of behavior

(Shonkoff & Phillips 2000)



A Trauma Informed Approach



“Trauma-informed services are not specifically designed to treat symptoms or syndromes related to sexual or physical abuse or other trauma, but they are informed about, and sensitive to, trauma-related issues present in survivors.”

- —Jennings, 2008

A Trauma Informed System

- When a human service program takes the step to become trauma-informed, every part of its organization, management, and service delivery system is assessed and potentially modified to include a basic understanding of how trauma affects the life of an individual seeking services.
- Trauma-informed organizations, programs, and services are based on an understanding of the vulnerabilities or triggers of trauma survivors that traditional service delivery approaches may exacerbate.

A Culture Shift: Core Principles of a Trauma-Informed System

- **Safety**: Ensuring physical and emotional safety
- **Trustworthiness**: Maximizing trustworthiness, making tasks clear, and maintaining appropriate boundaries
- **Choice**: Prioritizing consumer choice and control
- **Collaboration**: Maximizing collaboration and sharing of power with consumers
- **Empowerment**: Prioritizing consumer empowerment and skill-building

Organizational Considerations

1. Staff Training
2. Creating a safe and supportive environment (physical and emotional)
3. Assessing and planning services
4. Adapting policies

*"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but
anyone can start today and make a new ending."*

- Maria Robinson

