

Early Childhood Trauma

Learning briefs describe the goals of major programs and strategic initiatives, what we have learned through monitoring and evaluation, key conclusions and examples of impact.

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAUMA?

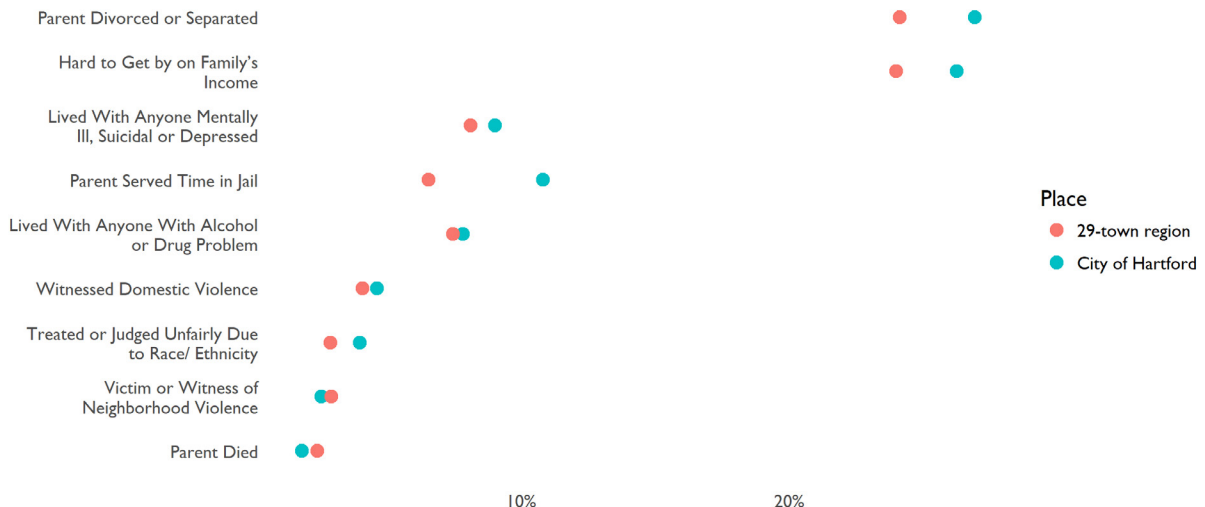
Early childhood trauma refers to experiences that occur to children aged 0-6 that cause harm or pose a serious threat to the child’s emotional and physical well-being. This can include witnessing an event that threatens the security of a family member, loved one, or neighbor.

Young children who experience trauma are at particular risk because their developing brains are quite vulnerable. Evidence suggests that high levels of stress in early childhood undermines brain development.¹ This effect on development can lead to impairments of attachment, cognition, language, and emotional regulation, which, in turn, can produce problems with behavior, learning, and social-emotional development.

The effects of early trauma are not limited to childhood; traumatic experiences in childhood have been linked to increased poor physical and mental health conditions in adulthood.² The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is a longitudinal study that explores the long-lasting impact of childhood trauma into adulthood. Over 40 percent of Connecticut children (0-18) have experienced one or more ACE. As in all 50 states – the most common ACEs in Hartford and the Greater Hartford Region are parental divorce and separation and household economic hardship.³

Exposure to specific Adverse Childhood Experiences

Results for children in Hartford region (0 - 18), from National Survey of Children's Health, 2017



1 The Science of Early Childhood Development. (2007). National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/the-science-of-early-childhood-development-closing-the-gap-between-what-we-know-and-what-we-do/>

2 Stone, C. (2013). Association between number of adverse events in childhood and adult risk behaviors and poor health outcomes, Connecticut Department of Public Health, Hartford, CT. <http://www.ct.gov/dph/brfss>.

3 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health. (2017). “Indicator 6.13: Adverse Childhood Experiences.” Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health. <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=4576&r=1>.

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WHAT ARE PROMISING STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAUMA?

Promising strategies for addressing early childhood trauma prioritize decreasing risk factors that contribute to the likelihood of experiencing trauma (e.g. parental stress, lack of parent understanding of child development, community violence, social isolation) while also increasing the protective factors that may lessen the possibility of trauma (e.g. supportive family environment, nurturing parent skills, access to health and social services).

Commonly identified promising strategies include preventative programs that strengthen families and communities; direct clinical services; partnerships between early childhood, education, and community service providers that facilitate screening and service provision; professional development in trauma-informed practices for early childhood providers; and systems change that integrates trauma-informed practices, identifies service gaps, and sustains effective services.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving has made significant investments to prevent and address trauma in young children. These investments fall into three broad categories that are well-aligned with best practice and policy. Examples include:

Direct clinical services:

- **The Bridge Family Center** has received general operating support since 2013. The Bridge provides counseling and crisis resources to children and families who have experienced trauma.
- **Klingberg Family Centers** received a grant for administration of the Greater Hartford Child Advocacy Center. Klingberg provides integrated services with police, medical and mental health providers, forensic interviewers, lawyers and victim advocates from criminal and juvenile court, and child protective services.

Professional development in trauma-informed practices for early childhood providers:

- A partnership with the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood led to the creation of the **Capital Region Alliance for Family Support and Engagement (CRAFSE)**. With more than 65 members, CRAFSE provides provider trainings and convenings, including strategies to incorporate parent leadership in trauma informed systems.
- The **Connecticut Association for Infant Mental Health** received a three-year grant to provide training and supervision in topics including trauma and brain development to early childhood mental health providers.

Systems change to support trauma-informed practices:

- **Brighter Futures Family Centers** support programs targeting young children and families, including parent education on avoiding inappropriate behaviors that can lead to trauma.
- The Hartford Foundation helped launch the **Trauma-Informed School Mental Health Task Force** that provides CT school-based and school-linked stakeholders with opportunities to develop stronger connections to existing state and community-based children's mental health systems.