

# There's No Place Like Home

Understanding the Harms of Removal and Family Separation

October 18, 2024



# About Us



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# Learning Objectives

Increase understanding of how forcibly removing a child from their parent(s), even in cases of abuse and neglect, can be extremely disruptive to a child's neurological and socio-emotional development.

Enhance basic understanding of the domains of a child's life that are impacted by removal and continued family separation.

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

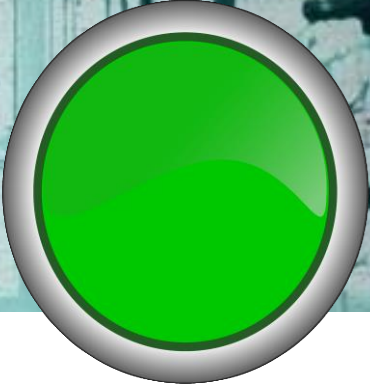
# Through the Eyes of a Child



- 1.** Removal should always be the option of last resort.
- 2.** Removals should be done with forethought, planning, and intention.
- 3.** When children do need to be removed to ensure their safety there are many things we can be doing to help mitigate the impacts of this trauma.

# DO NO

# HARM



Nov. 17, 2020, 6:01 AM PST



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Do No Harm  
Immediate Danger | 3

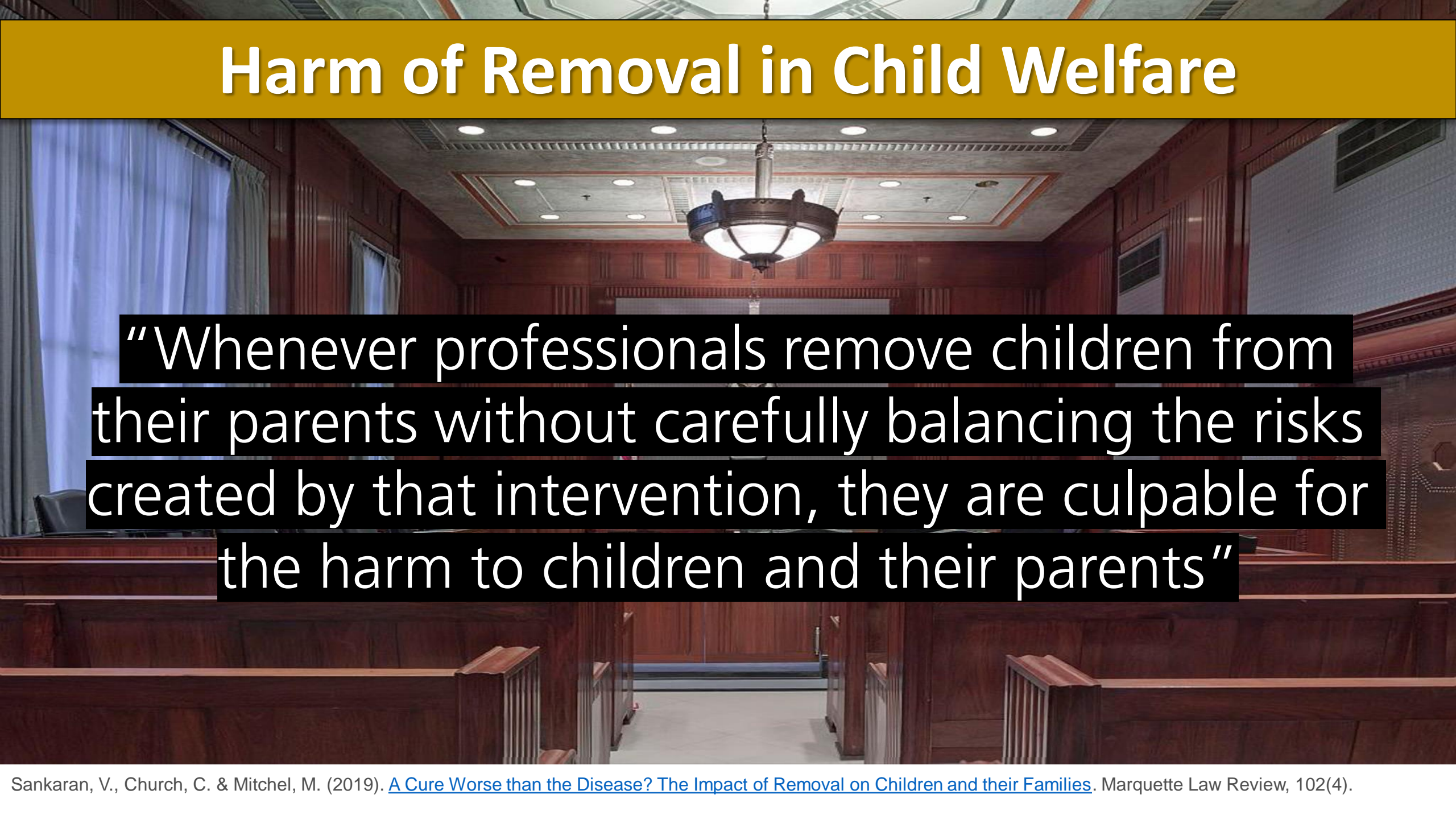
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# Harm of Removal in Child Welfare



“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, J. & Kelly, D. (2018). [“Reasonable Efforts as Prevention.”](#) ABA Child Law Practice Today.





# Foster Care Panic & Child Fatalities


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# 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.




Threat to Safety

Threat to Safety

Harm of Removal

# 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.](#)

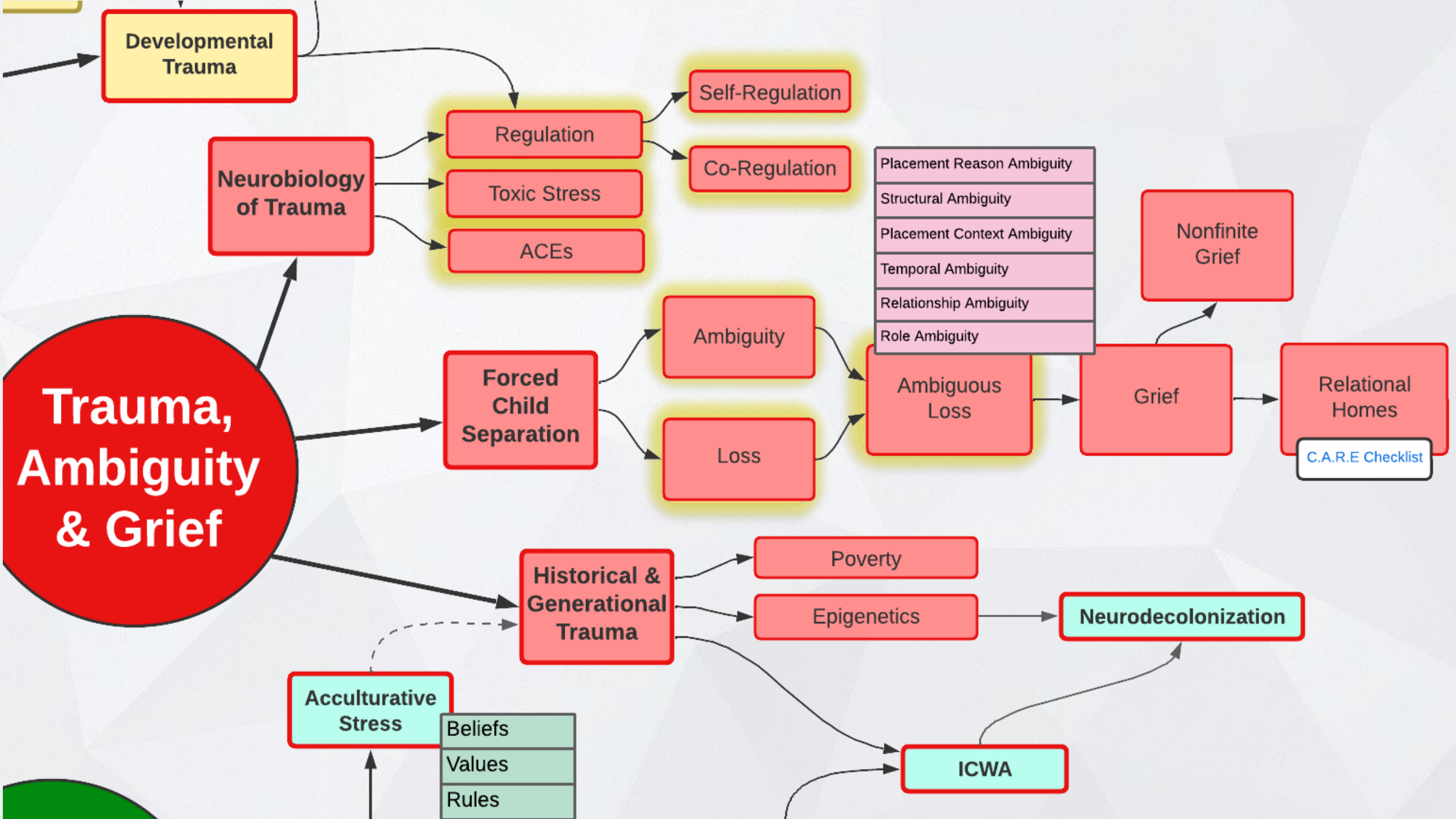
# State Care of Another Kind



# Harm of Removal Map



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# Forcible Family Separation & Toxic Stress

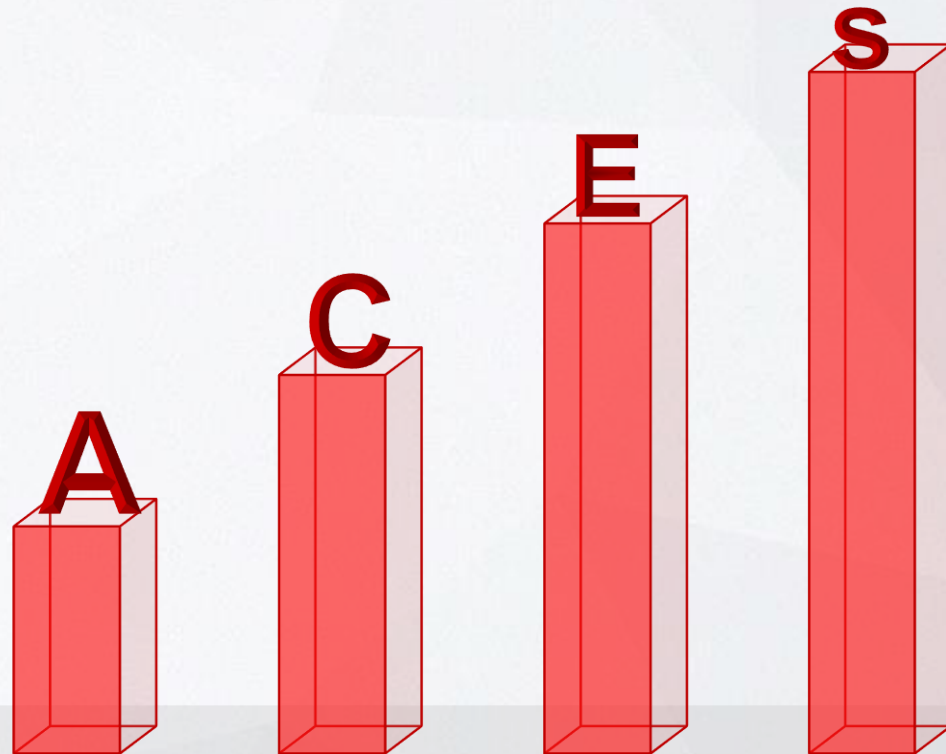
“Separating children from their families can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child’s brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health.

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

-American Academy of Pediatrics







## Adverse Childhood Experiences

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.



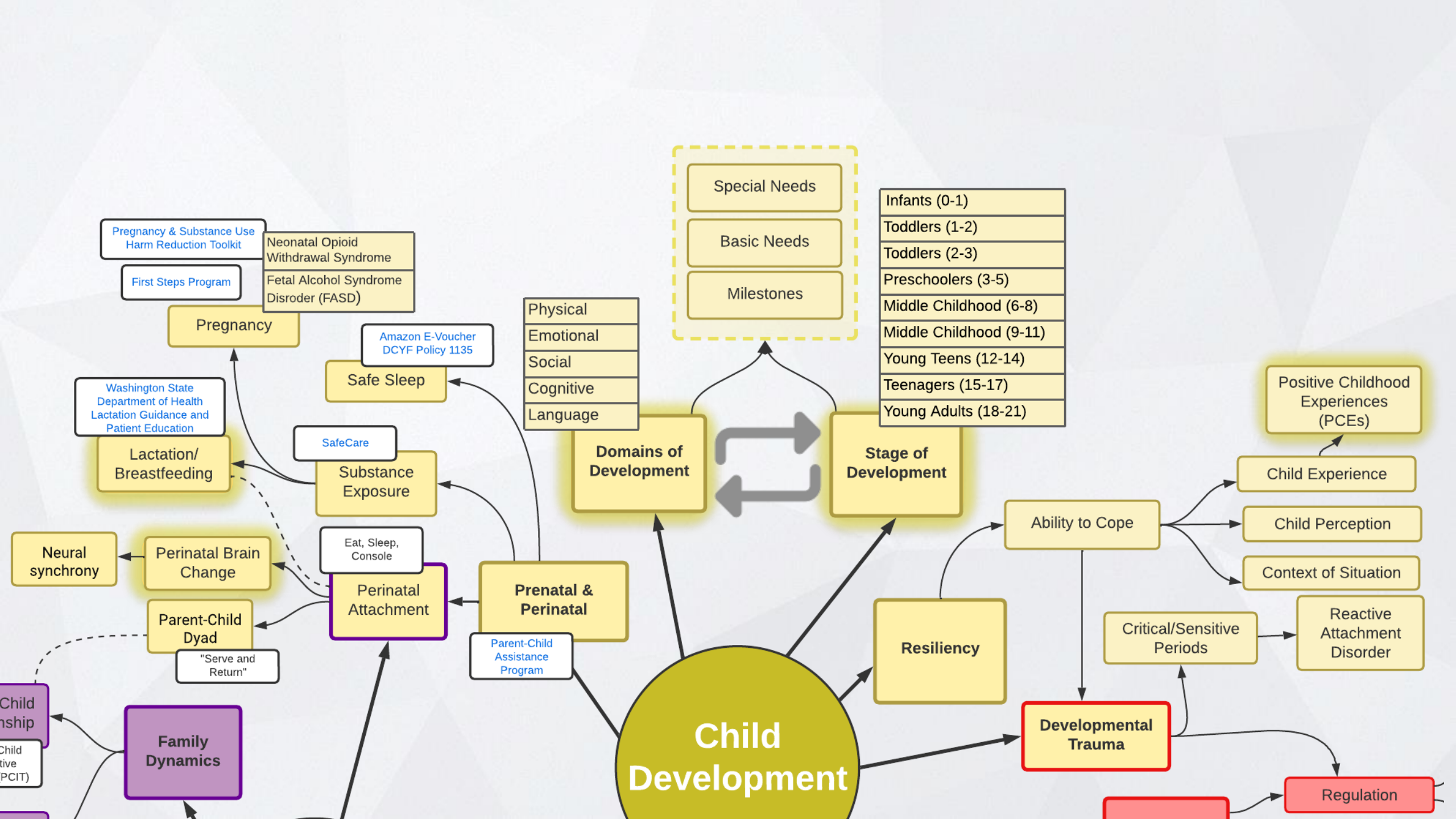
# Mitigation of Harm Through Regulation



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

Children's physiological responses to stress can be significantly reduced by safe access to their parents.

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)

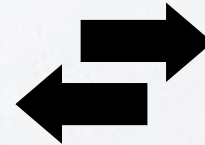
Middle Childhood (6-8)

Middle Childhood (9-11)

Young Teens (12-14)

Teenagers (15-17)

Young Adults (18-21)



## Domains of Child Development

Physical

Emotional

Social

Cognitive

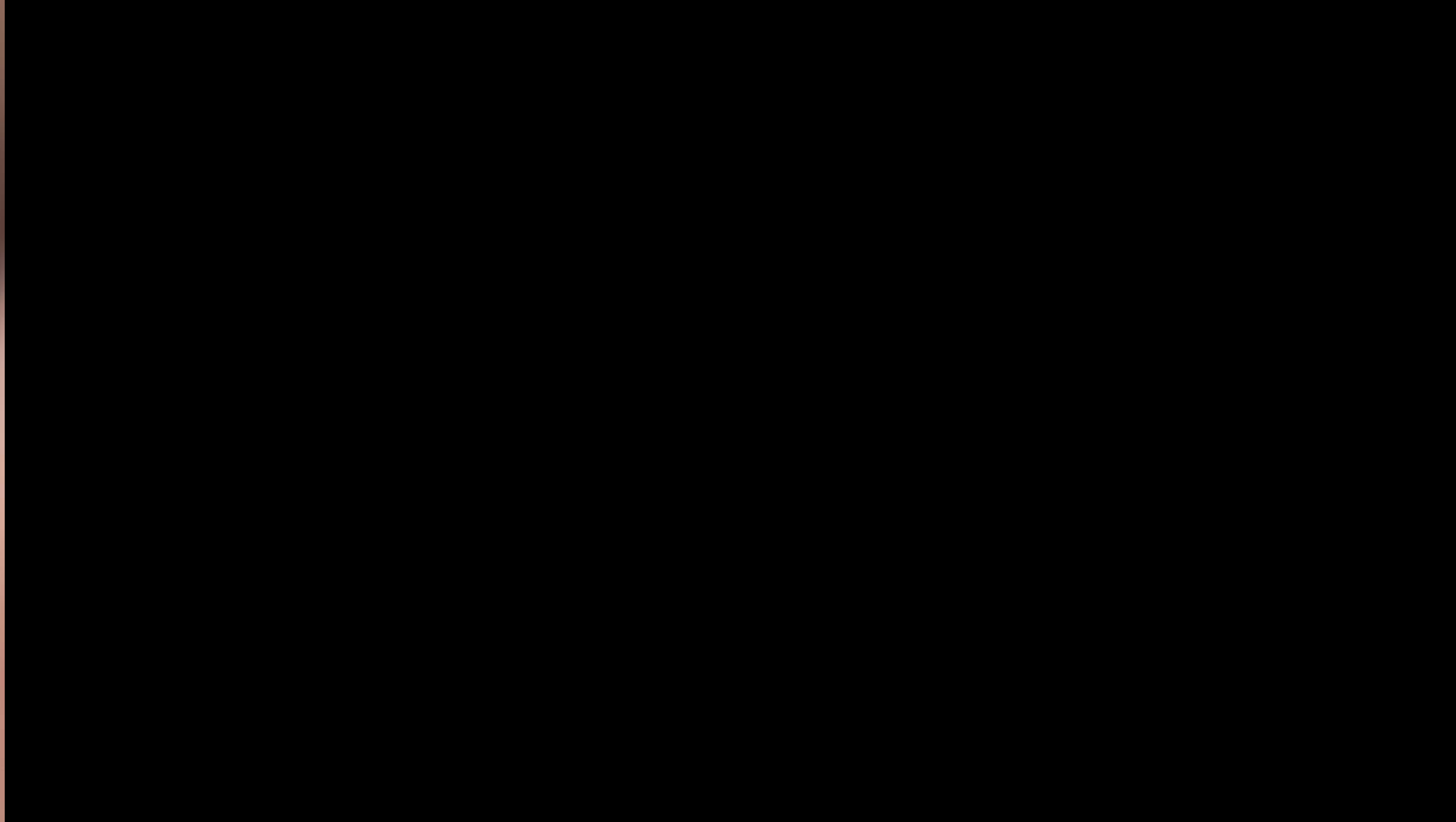
Language

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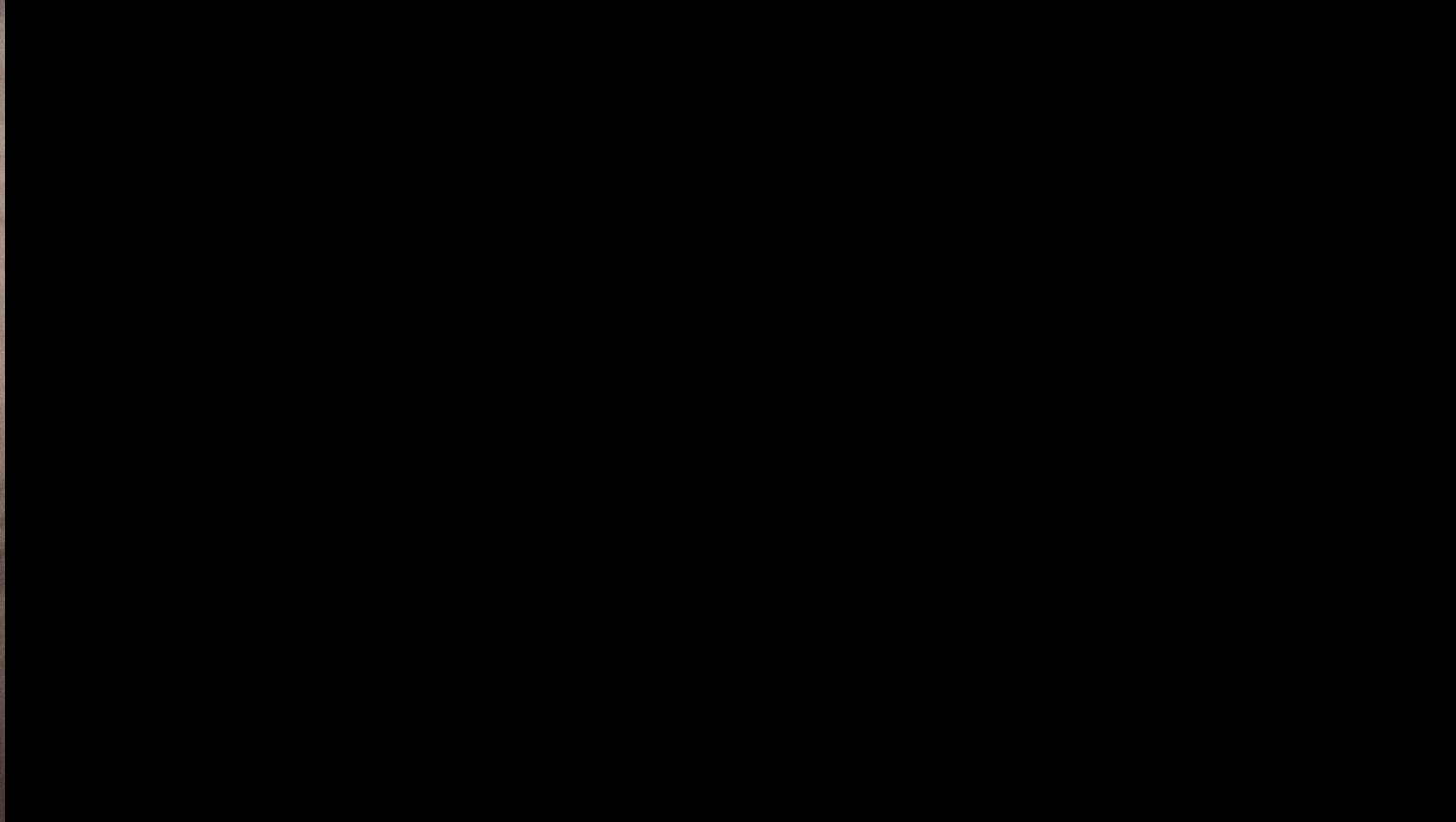


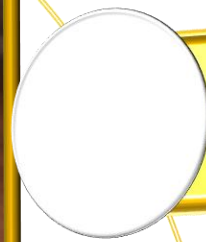


# Infants



# Infants





**Parental Bonding**



**Perinatal Brain Change**



**Loss of Perceived Safety**



**Breastfeeding**

# Harm of Removal Across Stages of Child Development

## Infants (0 – 1 years old)

Summer 2024



### Harms of Removal Across Stages of Child Development Infants (0-1 years old)

*The information in this tool is designed for use by court systems to 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>**

In the first year, babies learn to focus their vision, reach out, explore, and learn about the things that are around them. Cognitive development means the learning process of memory, language, thinking, and reasoning. Learning language is more than making sounds (“babble”), or saying “ma-ma” and “da-da”. Listening, understanding, and knowing the names of people and things are all a part of language development. During this stage, babies also are developing bonds of love and trust with their parents and others as part of social and emotional development. The way parents cuddle, hold, and play with their baby will set the basis for how they will interact with them and others.



# Young Teens & Teenagers



- Increased autonomy and independence
- Better understanding of the world and ability to advocate for themselves – may want to be removed/not return home
- Parents no longer seen as infallible
- “Parentification” (caring for younger siblings)
- School/education stability
- Highly susceptible to peer influence
- Risk-taking activities

# 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, E. A., 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

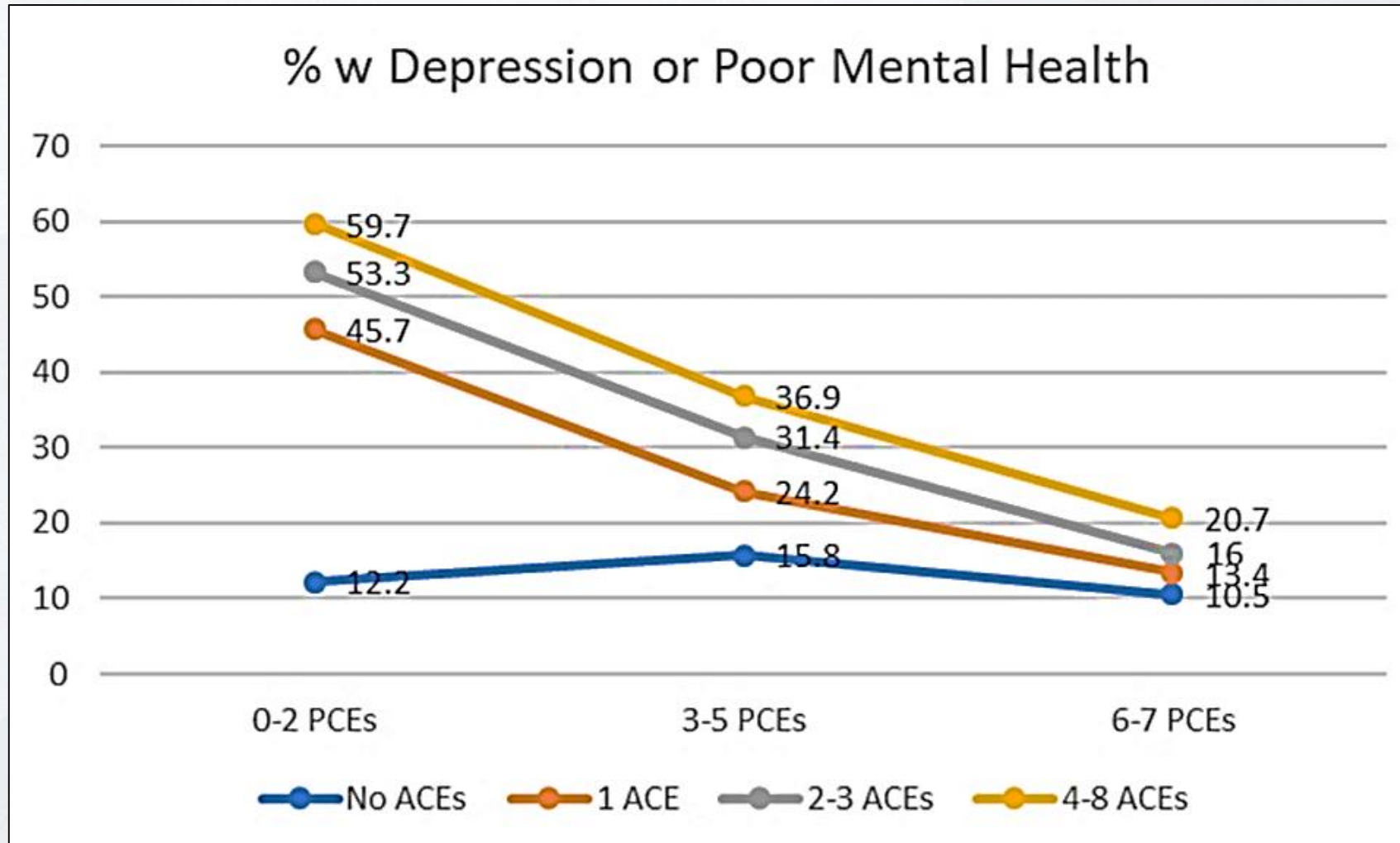


## How often the respondent:

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.

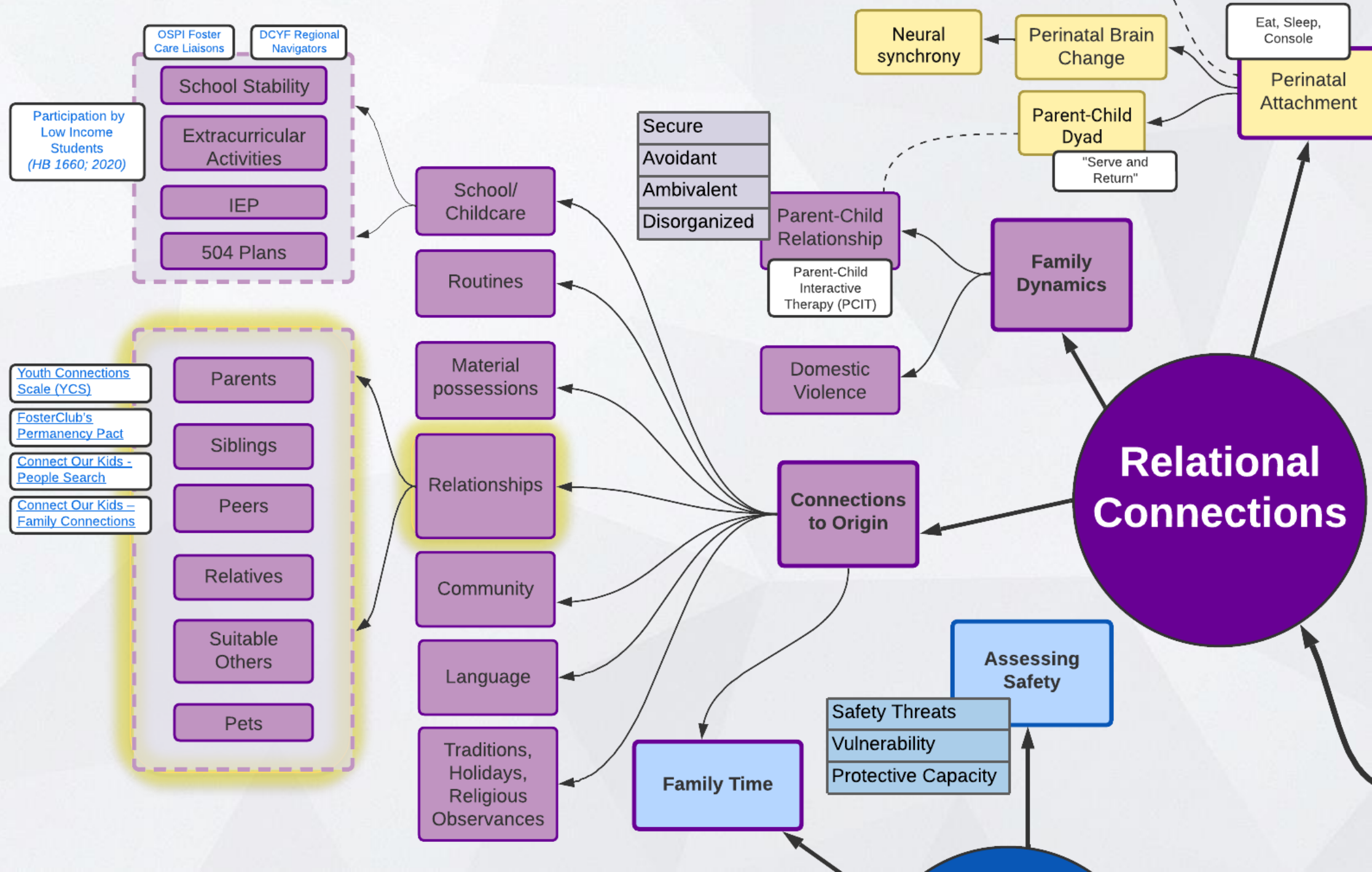
Bethell, C., Jones, J., Gombojav, N., Linkenbach, J., & Sege, R. (2019). [Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample: Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Levels](#). JAMA Pediatr. e193007.

# Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)



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

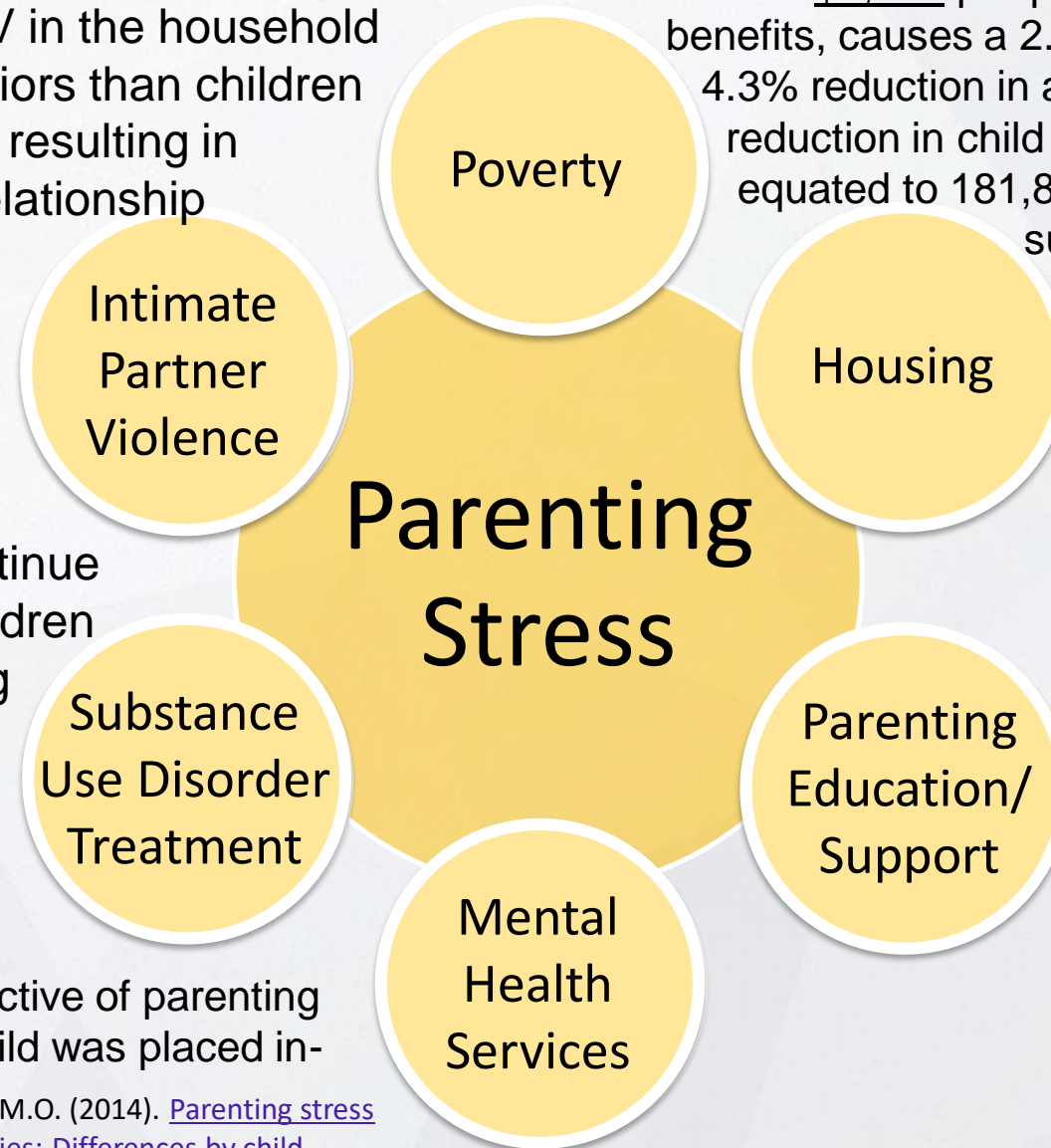
An additional \$1,000 per person living in poverty invested in public benefits, causes a 2.1% reduction in foster care placements, a 4.3% reduction in abuse and neglect reports, and a 7.7% reduction in child maltreatment fatalities – this would have equated to 181,850 fewer reports, 28,575 fewer substantiations, 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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