



Becoming a Healing-Centered, Trauma-Responsive County: Helping Children Thrive in the Face of Adversity

February 2023

The Montgomery County Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services Board (ADAMHS) has launched an initiative to become a healing-centered, trauma-responsive county – to raise awareness, and reduce the impact, of adversity and trauma on children’s health and well-being, and address health disparities. Three county agencies—Juvenile Court, Children Services, and the Board of Developmental Disabilities Services—will lead this effort to help our youth thrive.

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Montgomery County

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic experiences that occur in childhood, such as violence, child abuse, and neglect, and growing up in a household with challenges including with mental health and substance misuse/dependence. In our county, 22% of Black youth in grades 7 through 12 reported having three or more ACEs.¹ There are additional adversities that children face, including racism and discrimination, bullying, community violence, and poverty among many others.

When children experience adversity – without the protection of nurturing relationships and other supports – this can cause toxic stress. When this happens for a long time, it can affect their brain, hormones, and the immune system and lead to lasting wear and tear on the body and brain. Toxic stress leads to a higher risk of developing health problems in childhood and into adulthood – such as depression, anxiety, suicide attempts, cancer, heart disease, and earlier death. Early detection and intervention have been found to be critical in reducing the impact of adversity on children’s long-term health.

Key Partners

ADAMHS is overseeing the initiative and will rely on the commitment and expertise of county agencies and organizations throughout Montgomery County to establish a healing-centered, trauma-responsive system. They are convening the Montgomery County Childhood Trauma Advisory Council, which provides guidance on planning and implementation.

¹ 2019 Community Health Assessment
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Three county agencies – Juvenile Court, Children Services, and the Board of Developmental Disabilities – will work within certain departments to align policies, practices, and the culture with a healing-centered, trauma-responsive approach, identify ACEs and trauma, and incorporate evidence-based strategies for addressing toxic stress into care plans and referrals.

Numerous community-based organizations from many sectors are partnering to build a broad network of care that provides support services and resources to youth and families using evidence-based strategies to prevent, treat, and heal toxic stress.

Transforming to a Healing-Centered, Trauma-Responsive County

The initiative focuses on recognizing and responding to ACEs and toxic stress among youth and building a network of care to provide healing-centered, trauma-responsive care and evidence-based interventions. Key components of the initiative include:

1. **Training and education** for the key partners mentioned above as well as additional county and community-based organization staff. Training will be rolled out in phases and a train-the-trainer program will be established within ADAMHS to expand the reach of this initiative. The first trainings, led by national leaders in trauma-responsive care and ACE screening, will be aimed at the staff within certain departments in the three county agencies.

Training will include the following sessions:

Healing and Trauma-Responsive Care 101. Participants will build their knowledge of trauma and toxic stress, skills in identifying signs of trauma, and strategies for supporting youth who have experienced trauma and toxic stress.

Building a Trauma-Responsive Organization. Participants will discuss how they and their departments will work to achieve cultural and organizational change.

Building a Network of Care to Address Toxic Stress. Participants will explore the network’s role in providing evidence-based strategies to help youth prevent and heal toxic stress.

Using Information on ACEs to Support Healing. Participants will learn how to educate youth about ACEs and toxic stress, and incorporate information about youth’s experiences into a plan to help them prevent and heal from toxic stress.

We anticipate ongoing education and efforts to continue to build a trauma-responsive culture throughout Montgomery County.



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2. Identifying ACEs and risk of toxic stress and incorporating this information into their case plan will begin in summer of 2023 in certain departments within the three county agencies. Identifying a youth's exposure to traumatic events can help prompt conversation about how these events can influence health and well-being, and can inform linkages to community-based services.
3. Connecting youth, and families to community-based, cross-sector evidence-based services and supports. The goal is to establish a network of partners and services to support the prevention, treatment, and healing from the consequences of toxic stress.

Network of Care Partner Organizations



This initiative is funded by a three-year grant from the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as well as County funds. The grant helps support Montgomery County health and wellness policies aimed at improving Black youth mental health, including suicide prevention. For more information, contact Tristyn Ball at tball@mcadamhs.org.



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