

# ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

2020

## THE SECOND LOOK COMMISSION

The SLC reviews some of the worst incidents of recurring child abuse and neglect in Tennessee. The SLC reviews cases of children from across Tennessee who have experienced a second or subsequent incidence of severe abuse to identify ways to improve the system and help other children avoid a similar fate. The SLC publishes an annual report of their findings. This document outlines key information primarily contained in the 2020 annual report. Additional information is available in the 2020 annual report.

### Included Highlights

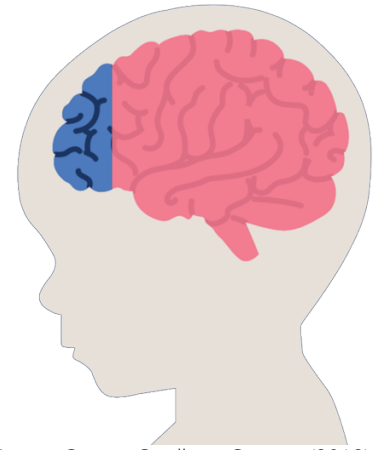
- Impact of Child Abuse
- Data
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Additional Concerns
- Actions Taken

# Impact of Child Abuse

Childhood is a crucial time for brain development. In the first few years of a child's life there are more than one million new neural connections forming each second. Every second counts, and every second a child is enduring severe abuse is drastically impacting the long-term health and development of both the child and their community.

# 90%

of a child's brain development happens before age 5.



Fresno County Cradle to Career . (2018). Retrieved from: <https://fresnoc2c.org/report>

## THE LIFETIME ESTIMATED COST OF CHILD ABUSE THAT OCCURED IN 2018 IN TENNESSEE

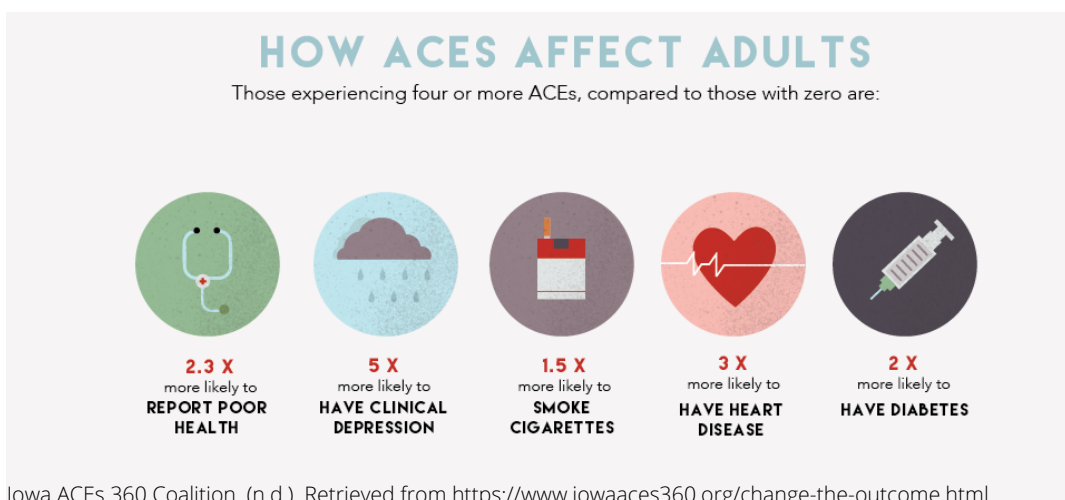
# \$8,413,818,350

Source: Klika, J.B., Rosenzweig, J. & Merrick, M. "Economic Burden of Known Cases of Child Maltreatment from 2018 in Each State." Child Adolesc Soc Work J (2020).

# Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events a child witnesses that have impacts on their development and well-being. All types of abuse reviewed by The Second Look Commission are categorized as ACEs.

ACEs can create "toxic stress" in a child's developing brain releasing harmful chemicals that can lead to lifelong difficulties in learning, memory, and self-regulation.



At least 60% of Tennesseans have one or more ACEs. Due to the rapid brain development in childhood the most important time to intervene and mitigate the effects of ACEs is during early development. The brain is more easily able to adapt at a young age. If we focus our efforts on early prevention and intervention we can decrease the rate of ACEs across Tennessee.

# 2018-2019 CASE DATA



Department of Children's Services reported 517 children experienced a second or subsequent incident of severe child abuse in FY 2019.



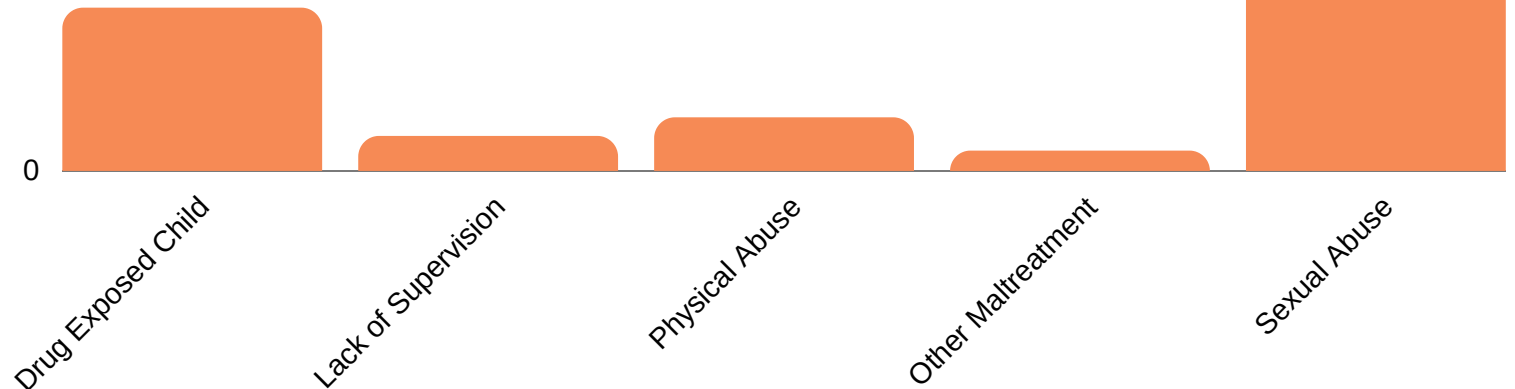
75

## TYPES OF MALTREATMENT

50

For FY 2019:

25





# Findings

## Investigations

- During investigations, SLC members suggest that hair follicle drug testing should be the preferred method of drug screening outside the setting of acute ingestion since it can detect drug usage for longer periods of time than urine tests.
- SLC members questioned when potential perpetrators should be drug tested in drug exposure cases. SLC members favor testing as early as reasonably possible without violating the rights of the potential perpetrator.
- Looking for parents who do not want to be found can tax DCS and law enforcement resources.
- The violation of an Immediate Protection Agreement for supervised contact resulted in the death of a child.
- Relatives continue to fail to report child abuse.
- SLC members are concerned about the requirements or qualifications necessary to homeschool a child, or lack thereof.

# Recommendations

## Investigations

- DCS should consider using hair follicle drug tests in place of or in addition to urine tests as hair follicle drug tests can detect drug use in the previous 4-6 months as opposed to the previous 2-4 days for urine tests.
- Drug testing should align with a comprehensive, collaborative approach and a clear purpose for using drug testing should be identified.
- In all child abuse training provided to law enforcement, the mandatory duty to report should be emphasized. Additionally, extraordinary efforts must be made to never knowingly leave a child in a potentially dangerous environment.
- In cases when parents do not want to be found, DCS and law enforcement should explore all leads, interview friends and family members, and connect with other law enforcement teams as needed.
- DCS should make every reasonable effort to be aware of changes in child's location and supervision. Caregivers should have the responsibility to immediately notify DCS or law enforcement if the terms of an Immediate Protection Agreement are violated.
- The general public needs to be educated about Tennessee's mandatory reporting requirements. Tennessee has one of the strongest child abuse reporting statutes in the nation.
- Along with education about Tennessee's mandatory reporting requirements, educate family members on the importance of reporting abuse, and the negative potential outcomes associated with child abuse and neglect.

# Findings

## Services & Supports

- The need to provide relative caregivers the proper resources continues to be an opportunity for improvement. There is still an opportunity to provide additional and needed resources to family placements. The lack of resources may result in a change in placement.
- DCS, law enforcement, service providers and other child abuse prevention stakeholders often need additional resources to adequately work with parents and children with behavioral health issues.

# Department of Children's Services

## Improvements & Best Practices

### SLC members observed the following improvement and best practices in cases reviewed during 2020 –

- DCS did a good job in making needed services available to the perpetrators and children.
- DCS representatives provided good case work and coordination with other agencies and entities.
- DCS case management and investigations continue to improve.
- In general, DCS made excellent efforts to locate and engage the parents.
- In general, DCS and law enforcement continue to work together well.
- DCS continues to improve in the area of case documentation.

# Recommendations

## Services & Supports

- In line with best-practice, child abuse prevention stakeholders should utilize community resources to connect relative caregivers with adequate supports. DCS should maintain open communication with relative caregivers about where they may need extra support.
- Consistent with a multidisciplinary approach, child abuse prevention stakeholders should make referrals to behavioral health specialists when these issues arise.
- Funding from the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFSPA) could also be utilized for programs such as Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams (START).

# ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

- Drug addiction continues to be a primary contributor to the abuse of children in Tennessee. Continuing to improve how Tennessee responds to and reduces drug exposure of children is imperative
- There continues to be an opportunity to share family planning information with parents involved with DCS. When appropriate, child abuse prevention stakeholders should be familiar with community resources and help parents access family planning
- The SLC recommends the General Assembly form a committee to review the information provided to the judiciary committee of the senate and the committee of the house of representatives having oversight over children and families, along with the progress reports on the teams and any recommendations for enhancement of the child sexual abuse plan and program as mandated by T.C.A. §37-1-607.
- In some instances, the exact mechanism of how the child was abused and perpetrator of physical abuse cannot be identified. It is difficult for DCS, the court and other child abuse prevention stakeholders to make safety decisions when the mechanism and perpetrator of the abuse cannot be identified.
- SLC members questioned whether it was appropriate to transport children to a family placement prior to receiving final approval of the placement, including the walkthrough. For child safety and in the case that the placement is not approved, children should not be transported to family placement prior to the placement being approved.

# ACTIONS TAKEN

Based on recommendations from previous SLC reports and actions taken by Department of Children's Services and other child abuse prevention stakeholders we have seen improvement childhood well-being in Tennessee.

# 75%

**DECREASE SINCE 2014 IN CASES OF SECONDARY OR SUBSEQUENT SEVERE ABUSE RESULTING FATALITY**



# 172

**FEWER CASES OF SECONDARY OR SUBSEQUENT SEVERE ABUSE THAN IN 2016**