

Safeguarding and Child Protection Training ACES: Adverse Childhood Experiences

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What are ACEs?











- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events occurring before age 18. ACEs include all types of abuse and neglect as well as parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence.
- A landmark study in the 1990s found a significant relationship between the number of ACEs a person experienced and a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood, including poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, and risky behaviours.
- The more ACEs experienced, the greater the risk for these outcomes. By definition, children in the child welfare system have suffered at least one ACE.
- Recent studies have shown that, in comparison to the general population, these children are far more likely to have experienced at least four ACEs (42 percent vs. 12.5 percent).

What are ACEs?

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** come in many forms, from physical and mental abuse to neglect and household dysfunction. In 1998, CDC-Kaiser Permanente published a groundbreaking study that investigated the impact of ACEs on physical and mental health problems in over 17,000 adults.
- During the study, the adults were given a survey asking about 10 different types of ACEs and if they had experienced them prior to the age of 18. The study showed a direct correlation between ACEs and future health complications.
- Since this study, we've not only learned more about the psychological effects of ACEs on young minds, but also the long-term health complications that can come from recurring exposure to ACEs.
- Now that we understand how toxic stress affects the minds and bodies of children, we can interrupt these changes by providing safe, stable, nurturing environments, while helping children build social-emotional skills and resilience.

What are ACEs?

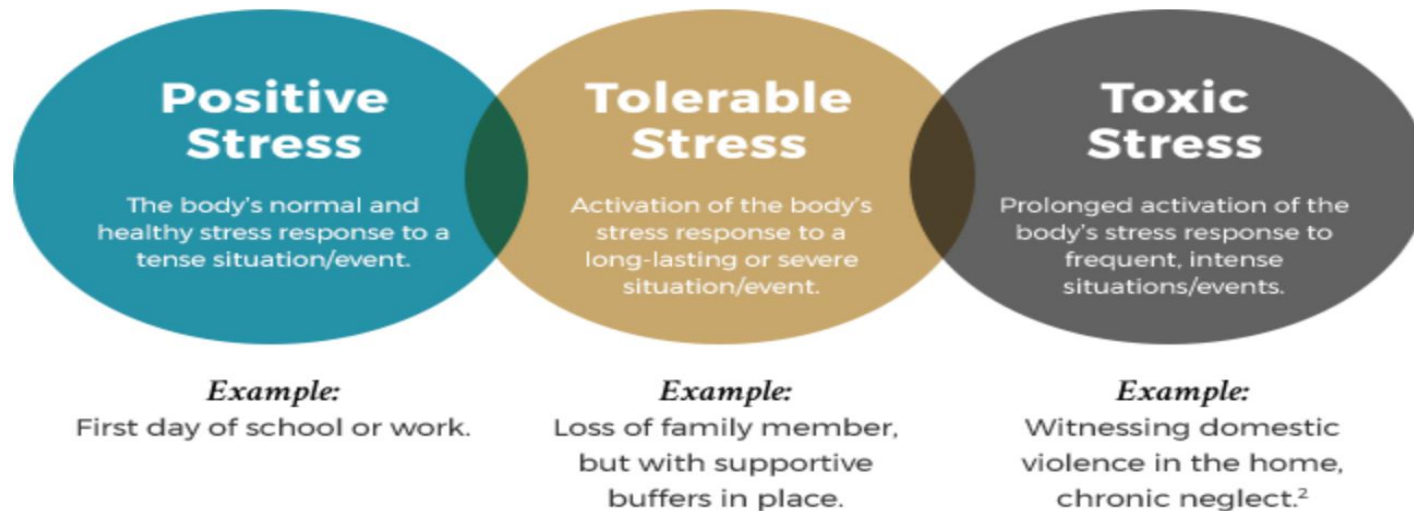
10 ACEs, as identified by the CDC-Kaiser study:

ABUSE	NEGLECT	HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION	
 <i>Physical</i>	 <i>Physical</i>	 <i>Mental Illness</i>	 <i>Incarcerated Relative</i>
 <i>Emotional</i>	 <i>Emotional</i>	 <i>Mother Treated Violently</i>	 <i>Substance Abuse</i>
 <i>Sexual</i>		 <i>Divorce</i>	

What is the impact of ACEs?

ACEs can get under our skin, impacting health through toxic stress.

Not all stress is bad. Some stress is healthy and positive because it prepares us to respond to temporary challenges in our lives, such as running a race, public speaking, or starting a new job. Our stress response activates and then quickly returns to baseline. **More intense or longer lasting stressors can be tolerable if we have support systems in our lives to help us cope. If we don't have supports, severe or frequent exposure to certain types of stress can have a 'toxic' effect on the body and brain.**



It is this toxic stress that, when not properly addressed and reduced, can lead to long-term behavior issues, health complications, and diseases that are caused by ACEs.

What is the impact of ACEs?

The lifelong (and generational) risks of toxic stress.

Toxic stress also affects children as they grow older, and leads to many common health and behavioral issues later in life.⁴ **The CDC-Kasier ACE study found that adults with an ACE score of 4 or more were at significantly greater risk for many behavioral, physical, and mental health issues later in life.**

ACES

ACE Score, for information purposes. The questionnaire should only be used by a trained professional.

Finding Your ACE Score



While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often or very often**...
Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?
or
Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often or very often**...
Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?
or
Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you **ever**...
Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
or
Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
4. Did you **often or very often** feel that ...
No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?
or
Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
5. Did you **often or very often** feel that ...
You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?
or
Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
6. Were your parents **ever** separated or divorced?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
7. Was your mother or stepmother:
Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?
or
Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?
or
Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
10. Did a household member go to prison?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

Now add up your "Yes" answers: _____ This is your ACE Score.

Adapted from: http://www.acesstudy.org/files/ACE_Score_Calculator.pdf, 092406RA4CR

The long term impact of ACEs:

Behavioral



Smoking



Alcohol Abuse



Lack of Physical Activity



Drug Abuse



Missing Work

Physical & Mental Health



Severe Obesity



Depression



Diabetes



Suicide Attempts



STDs



Chronic Lung Disease



Stroke



Cancer



Heart Disease



Broken Bones

How to support young people:

Ways to prevent toxic stress:

- Provide a nurturing, safe and stable environment.
- Help children learn to cope with adversity.
- Reduce a child's ACE exposure.

ACEs work through experience, not just exposure. Exposure alone doesn't necessarily mean a child is affected. **If the ACE is prevented from causing toxic stress, the harm should not occur.** With a caring and nurturing environment, **we can build children with the resilience to protect them from ACEs.**

Resilience: our brains are malleable

Resilience is the ability to thrive, adapt and cope despite tough and stressful times, and is an ideal counterbalance to ACEs.⁶

Developing Resilience:



Resilience tips the scale toward healthy

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, one way to understand the development of resilience is to visualize a balance scale. Protective experiences and coping skills on one side counterbalance significant adversity on the other. Resilience is evident when a child's health and development tips toward positive outcomes — even when a heavy load of factors is stacked on the negative outcome side.

How to develop resilience:

Additional ways to promote resilience:

- **Acknowledge the child's experience of ACEs and how it may be influencing their behavior – reframing “What's wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”**
- Help children identify their emotions, talk about them, and express them appropriately.
- Empower children to problem solve and work through their issue/problem.
- Promote healthy coping habits of meditation and mindfulness, exercise, and sleep routines.

Build my understanding and empathy

When working with others who may have experienced ACEs, consider the following:

- What ACEs have you possibly experienced?
- How have ACEs impacted your life (physically, emotionally, professionally)?
- What internal and external support helped you deal with your ACEs?
- How have your ACEs impacted your ability (both positively and/or negatively) to help others as they cope with their own ACEs?

Video

- <https://www.wavetrust.org/what-are-adverse-childhood-experiences>

