

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES) TOOLKIT



Adverse Childhood Experiences, also known as ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-18 years). Traumatic events can result in the body going into survival mode. This toxic stress can harm a child's brain and may interfere with learning, making it difficult for them to have healthy relationships, and can result in long-term health problems. ACEs can also affect health and outlook later in life. This combination of long-term effects makes ACEs the leading determinant of health and social well-being. This toolkit will review ACEs, their potential impact and how protective factors can create a balance in the quality of lives.

THE THREE TYPES OF ACES INCLUDE

ABUSE



Physical

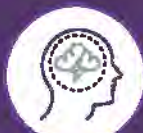


Emotional



Sexual

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Mother Treated Violently



Divorce



Incarcerated Relative



Substance Abuse

NEGLECT



Physical



Physical

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE Study) was a groundbreaking research study conducted by Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1998. The ACEs study revealed important findings that link early childhood traumas to lifelong negative physical and psychological outcomes, such as addictive behavior and chronic disease. It was the first large scale study to look at the relationship between ten categories of adversity in childhood and health outcomes in adulthood. ACE scores for individuals are determined through the use of a questionnaire.

The ACEs questionnaire consists of 10 questions, each of which is answered with a yes or no response. The sum of these responses is the ACEs score.

Major findings from the study:

- ACEs are common across the population.
- Some populations may be vulnerable to experiencing ACEs because of social and economic conditions where they live.
- There is a relationship between ACEs, negative health, and well-being outcomes. As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative health outcomes.

It is important to note that although someone has a high number of ACEs, they may not develop many negative health outcomes.

OTHER BURDENS AND ADVERSE EXPERIENCES

Other forms of adversity have similar health and well-being effects on children. *The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child* expanded its definition of adversity to include community and systemic causes—such as violence in the child’s community and experiences with racism and chronic poverty.

Other forms of adversity (Recent ACE questionnaires may include the following):

- Witnessing a sibling being abused
- Spousal abuse (mother abusing father)
- Loss of family member (death, deportation)
- Involvement with the foster care system
- Bullying (by peer or adult)
- Natural disasters
- Refugee or wartime experiences (living in a war zone)
- Witnessing or experiencing acts of terrorism
- Community violence (living in an unsafe neighborhood)



SOME GROUPS ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED ACES



Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people



Black, Hispanic/Latino, or multiracial people



People with less than a high school education



People making less than \$15,000 per year



People who are unemployed or unable to work

HOW DO ACES AFFECT HEALTH?

Toxic stress can damage the developing brain and affect overall health.

Reduces ability to respond, learn, or process effectively which can result in problems in school.

Lower tolerance for stress can result in behaviors such as aggression, checking out, and defiance.



Increase stress hormones which affects the body’s ability to fight infection.

May have difficulty making friends maintain relationships.

Problems with Learning and memory can be permanent.

May cause lasting health problems.

The Center for Disease Control is an excellent source for information and resources. For an ACEs questionnaire and other ACEs resources, visit:



TYPES OF STRESS

Positive stress response is a normal and essential part of healthy development, characterized by brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in hormone levels.

A **tolerable stress** response is associated with exposure to experiences that present a greater magnitude of adversity or threat.

Toxic stress from ACEs can change brain development and affect how the body responds to stress. Toxic stress describes the effects of excessive activation of the stress response system on a child's developing brain, immune system, metabolic regulatory systems, and cardiovascular system.



The human body's stress response does not distinguish between threats from inside or outside of the home environment, it recognizes when there is a threat, and activates the body's stress responses.

The three kinds of responses to stress refer to the stress response systems' effects on the body not the stressful event or experience.

COVID AND ACEs

COVID-19 has highlighted the long-standing inequalities that affect the lives of children and families and exacerbated existing challenges to children's health and well-being. The health and well-being of a young child is inextricably tied to health and well-being of the adults who care for them. *'While all children are facing adversity, the immediate and long-term impacts of this crisis have not been evenly distributed and may have substantial consequences for the most vulnerable children.'* *'Poverty rates are rising, as well as food insecurity, housing insecurity, and school closures put kids at greater risk for abuse and neglect and widening the achievement gap.'*

<https://ninhcm.org/publications/protecting-our-children-covid-19s-impact-on-early-childhood-and-aces>

IMPACT ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ACEs research shows that experiencing a higher number of ACEs is associated with many of the leading causes of death and chronic diseases. For coalitions, this directly ties to mental health and risk behaviors. ACEs can have lasting effects on:



HEALTH

Obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, heart disease, cancer, stroke, broken bones



BEHAVIORS

Smoking, alcoholism, drug use, missed work



LIFE POTENTIAL

Graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time from work

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are positive attributes that strengthen all families, not just those at risk. When families are strengthened and the number of protective factors rise, the likelihood for abuse goes down. What could happen if we prevent ACEs? Environments and experiences could be created that support healthy childhood development and will have lasting impacts for everyone.

Healthy childhoods have benefits throughout life.
What could happen in adult lives if ACEs are prevented?



Protective factors have been linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect. Protective factors are critical for all parents and caregivers, regardless of the child's age, sex, ethnicity or racial heritage, economic status, special needs, or whether the child is raised by a single, married, or divorced parent or other caregivers. The following factors work together to reinforce each other:

- Knowledge of parenting skills and child and youth development
- Social and emotional competence of children
- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Supports for parents

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In families who create safe, stable, and nurturing relationships, children have a consistent family life where they are safe, taken care of, and supported. A few examples of positive factors:

FAMILIES

- Food, shelter, and health services for children basic needs are met
- Caregivers engage in parental monitoring, supervision, and consistent enforcement of rules
- Caregivers work through conflicts peacefully

CHILDREN

- Have positive friendships and peer networks
- Do well in school
- Have caring adults outside the family who serve as mentors/role models

COMMUNITIES

- Families have access to medical care, mental health services and stable housing
- Families have access to safe, engaging after school programs and activities
- Violence is not tolerated or accepted

RESILIENCY AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In relation to ACEs, resiliency happens when positive childhood experiences encourage health, functioning, and quality of life outcomes. Resiliency includes building individual, family and quantifiable differences in peoples lives.

Positive childhood experiences happens to children within the context of the family unit. The family unit (parents, foster families, guardians, extended family) facilitates the childhood experiences that influence development. However, the family unit's ability to buffer ACEs grows from cultural, policy, and environmental factors that impact the family.

Quantifiable differences in people's lives happens by:

- Supporting responsive relationships with children and adults
- Straightening core life skills
- Reducing sources of stress in the lives of children and families
- Developing social and emotional competencies in children
- Providing a safe, stable, protective and equitable environment in which children are able to develop, play, and learn
- Developing nurturing and supportive relationships

There are specific campaigns, programs, and other prevention materials that are examples of concepts being implemented and promoted in communities. A few examples:

The Kansas Power of the Positive (KPoP) is a statewide coalition that is committed to all Kansas children growing up in safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. The coalition focuses on societal level interventions to prevent adverse childhood experiences and believes the conditions in which families live, including influence of family friendly workplace policies and practices, are key. For more information visit: <http://www.kansaspowerofthepositive.org/>



Division of
Public Health

Essentials for Childhood

*Creating Safe, Stable, Nurturing
Relationships and Environments
for All Children*

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Violence Prevention



CREATING POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES



**Strengthen families'
financial stability**



**Promote social norms
that protect against
violence**



**Help kids have a
good start**



**Teach healthy
relationships skills**



**Connect youth with
activities and caring
adults**



**Intervene to lesson
immediate and
long-term harms**

RESOURCES

CDC Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

<https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces/>

Dars Resilience Survey

<https://ispri.ng/BJYKv>

Positive Childhood Experiences Questions

<https://ispri.ng/9xVvk9>

ACEs Questionnaire

<https://ispri.ng/qKVrN>

Violence Prevention - ACEs

cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/

Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment

Prevent Child Abuse America

<https://preventchildabuse.org/?s=aces>

Kansas Power of the Positive

<https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1211/Kansas-Power-of-the-Positive>

Kansas ACES Report

<https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1215/ACE-Reports>



For a more thorough look at ACEs, check out DCCCA's Understanding the Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Webinar: <https://ispri.ng/kpJlx>

The Kansas Prevention Collaborative and DCCCA have created a variety of free toolkits, e-learning modules, webinars, YouTube videos and other resources that are available to all communities and coalitions working with prevention. Many of these resources are available in both English and Spanish. Follow any of these links to access this toolkit and other prevention resources:

<http://www.kansaspreventioncollaborative.org>

<http://www.dccca.org/prevention-resources>

<https://ispri.ng/mxVY1>



Or scan here: