

ACE

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is the term given to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences that occur to individuals under the age of 18.

The landmark Kaiser ACE Study examined the relationships between these experiences during childhood and reduced health and well-being later in life.

What's My ACE Score? and What can I do now?

What's Your ACE Score?

There are 10 types of childhood trauma measured in the ACE Study. Five are personal — physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect. Five are related to other family members: a parent who's an alcoholic, a mother who's a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death or abandonment. Each type of trauma counts as one. So a person who's been physically abused, with one alcoholic parent, and a mother who was beaten up has an ACE score of three.*

Prior to your 18th birthday:

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?
 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?
 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?
 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?
 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?
 No If Yes, enter 1 ____
6. Was a biological parent ever lost to you through divorce, abandonment, or other reason ?
 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 over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
 No If Yes, enter 1 ____
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
 No If Yes, enter 1 ____

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9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?

No If Yes, enter 1 ____

10. Did a household member go to prison?

No If Yes, enter 1 ____

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

Questions provided by acestoohigh.com and the ACE Study.

*Note: There are, of course, many other types of childhood trauma — watching a sibling being abused, losing a caregiver (grandmother, mother, grandfather, etc.), homelessness, surviving and recovering from a severe accident, etc. The ACE Study included only those 10 childhood traumas because those were mentioned as most common by a group of about 300 Kaiser members; those traumas were also well studied individually in the research literature. The ACE score is meant as a guideline: If you experienced other types of toxic stress over months or years, then those would likely increase your risk of health consequences.

Now that you have your score, what can you do?

Start by understanding that there are ways to build resilience in yourself, and to prevent impact on you, your family and those around you. Let's start with three basic, yet most profound steps.

1. **Make sure that children don't experience toxic stress.**
2. **Don't further traumatize already traumatized children or adults.**
3. **Prevent trauma by building resilience skills in individuals, families and communities.**

What you'll find is that you will become "trauma informed" and by doing so, you'll be able to help not only yourself, but loved ones who are suffering or have the potential to suffer from toxic stress and trauma.

"Becoming trauma-informed is a process that involves striving towards a new way of understanding people and providing services and supports. This process involves a gradual integration of trauma concepts and trauma sensitive responses into daily practice."

How Can I Begin to Build Resilience?

Resilience is your capacity to confront and cope with life's challenges; to maintain your well being in the face of adversity. Key factors that affect resilience:

- **Activities that promote well being**
- **Building social capital**
- **Developing psychological coping strategies**

What does that mean?

How can I improve my health?

We can all begin by building what's known as protective factors. Protective factors like the ones listed here can strengthen us emotionally, ward off stress and for our children, help make their brains ready to learn.

- **Parental resilience**
- **Social connections**
- **Knowledge of parenting and child development**
- **Concrete support in times of need**
- **Children's social and emotional development**

**Don't
go it alone.**

It's important that you reach out for help in this process. Talk to your provider. Ask your provider for a referral. Talk to your family. Join a support group focused on ACEs. More information can be found at BuncombeACEs.org or by calling **211**.