



Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for Children and How to Build Resilience

Most children have positive experiences with people who care for them. This helps them feel secure and confident. Knowing people care about them helps children get through rough spots while growing up. But some children don't have safe, stable nurturing relationships (SSNR). They can suffer emotional and physical harm that can continue to affect them as adults.

What are ACEs?

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic experiences or situations. ACEs can cause severe, ongoing stress that can affect a child's developing brain and physical health. This is called toxic stress.

ACEs are very common. Two out of every three adults have had one or more ACE. A child who's had four or more ACEs is at higher risk for emotional or physical health problems. These can occur in childhood or later in life.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Abuse	Neglect	Household Stressors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Physical Sexual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional Physical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child is separated from parent or caregiver due to divorce or parent imprisonment, for example Child sees parent, brother, or sister being abused Member of the household has a mental illness or misuses alcohol or drugs Family or child experiences homelessness

Toxic stress and children's responses

Children's physical responses to toxic stress can include increases in heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, and muscle tension. This can lead to health problems, over time. Also, children with ACEs may not be able to learn or play with other children in healthy ways.

ACEs can increase health risks in childhood or later in life. Risks include:

- Heart, liver, and lung disease
- Stroke and cancer
- Problems with mental health, substance use, and disordered eating
- Social, occupational, and emotional challenges
- Unhealthy sexual practices, such as unprotected sex
- Other chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, and obesity

Children can be affected by other traumatic experiences. This can include bullying, racism, sexism, and other experiences that can limit their opportunity and self-confidence. Living through war, neighborhood violence, and natural disasters can also be traumatic.

Helping children learn resilience can bring back health and hope!

It's important to know that ACEs are only part of the story. When a child has even one caring, supportive adult in their life, it helps protect them from being harmed by ACEs. These children become more resilient.

They're able to return to health and hope after bad things happen, including traumatic experiences.

Parents, teachers, and caregivers can help by caring for your own health and relationships. Also, learn what you'll need to do to meet your child's needs. It's important to understand:

- How to solve problems and have supportive relationships with your partner, family members, friends, and other adults.
- How to create a safe, stable, nurturing relationship (SSNR) with your child, from birth onward. Babies and children attach (bond) with adults who patiently respond to their physical and emotional needs. This builds trust.
- What to expect from babies and children at different stages, and how to help them grow in healthy ways.

Parents, caregivers, and teachers can help children become resilient by:

- Understanding how ACEs happen and taking steps to protect children from toxic stressors.
- Creating environments that are physically and emotionally safe at home, in school, and in the community.
- Taking time to listen and respond.
- Guiding children to understand their feelings and express them in healthy ways.
- Teaching skills that build resilience.

Children's resilience grows when they:

- Have their basic needs met, including safe housing, adequate clothing, healthy food, regular health care and quality education.
- Can build connections with family, friends and neighbors who support, listen to, and help them.
- Have opportunities to focus on their strengths.

What's next

Think about ACEs and how you can help your child be resilient. We encourage you to:

- Talk to your doctor and supportive family members.
- Call your local Health Education Department. Ask about classes, wellness coaching, support groups, and community services.

Other resources

ACES 101: acestoohigh.com/aces-101

Resilience Trumps ACEs: resiliencetrumpsACEs.org

Healthy Children.org:

healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx

myStrength and Calm apps: kp.org/selfcareapps

Triple-P Parenting: triplep.net/glo-en/home/

CDC: cdc.gov/parents/index.html

CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences

Study: cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html

Zero to Three Guides for Parents:

zerotothree.org/about-us/areas-of-expertise/free-parent-brochures-and-guides/

National Fatherhood Institute: fatherhood.org

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.