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## **PARENTING FUNDAMENTALS ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES**

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It is my hope that this booklet on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) will help you better understand your own childhood experience with both its positive and painful memories. After taking the ACE survey you may find that you have many ACEs. If this happens, know there is hope and help not only to heal, but also to replace the cycle of harmful parenting with a more nurturing and empathetic model. You have already taken the first step. Congratulations!

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The information provided in this booklet was excerpted from The Ace Study (<http://acestudy.org/>) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm>)

## WHAT ARE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES?

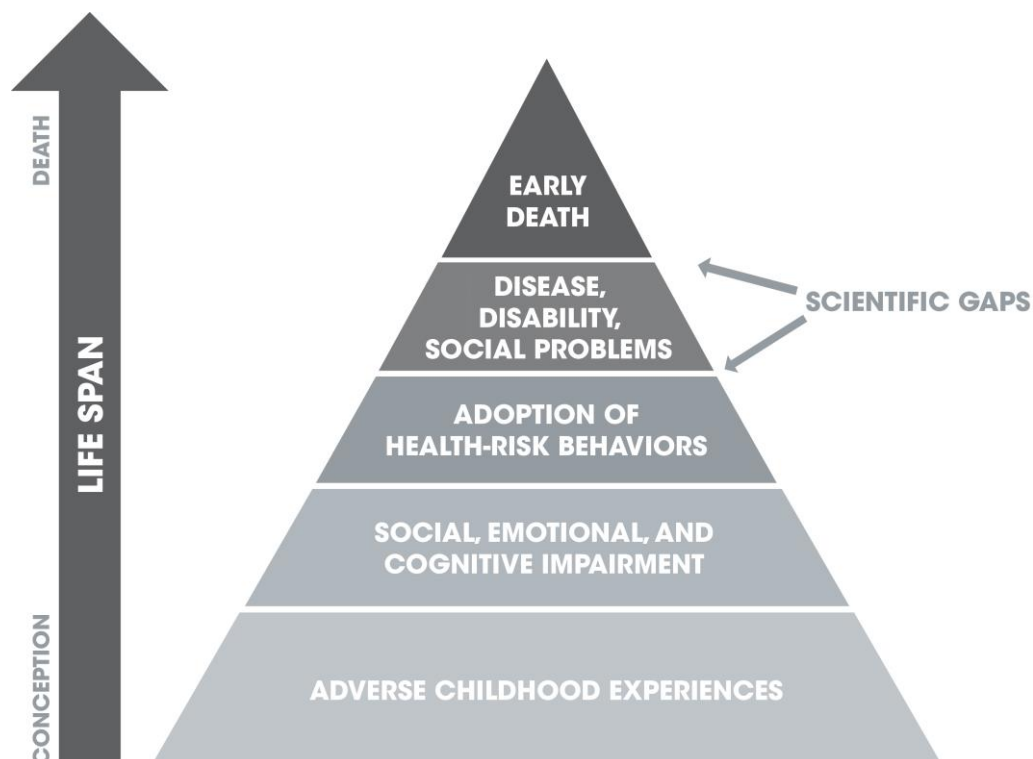
An Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) is the experience of any type of abuse or neglect during childhood. An ACE could be physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or witnessing domestic violence or substance abuse. Essentially, the more ACEs children have during their childhoods the more they are at risk for immediate and future danger to their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

### The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

The ACE Study was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the health care company Kaiser Permanente. Between 1995 and 1997, more than 17,000 people completed surveys asking questions about abuse, neglect or other family dysfunction they may have experienced as children. The surveys also inquired about their health status and behaviors. As a result, we are now finding that traumatic emotional experiences that have occurred in childhood later turn into legitimate disease.

### The ACE Pyramid

The pyramid represents the framework for how ACEs ultimately affect a child's life from conception until death. ACEs occur at the beginning of a child's life and set the groundwork for lifelong risks and poor decisions and behaviors.



## Types of Adverse Childhood Experiences

The three ACE categories include:

- **Abuse:** physical, psychological and/or sexual. Examples of abuse include hitting, spanking, shaking, name calling, yelling, swearing, etc.
- **Neglect:** emotional and/or physical. Examples include a child not being fed or not being fed properly, not receiving hugs, a lack of a warm environment or clothes, etc.
- **Household Dysfunction:** substance abuse in home, parental separation/divorce, mental illness, spousal abuse/battered mother, criminal behavior, incarcerated family member or loss of a parent.

Usually, children will have more than one ACE occur throughout their childhood. According to the study, almost two-thirds reported at least one ACE. More than one in five people reported three or more ACEs. These multiple ACEs increase risk factors.

## What are some risks linked to ACEs?

The more ACEs children have, the greater the risk of:

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Depression
- Fetal death
- Health-related quality of life
- Illicit drug use
- Ischemic heart disease (IHD)
- Liver disease
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Multiple sexual partners
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Smoking
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Suicide attempts
- Unintended pregnancies
- Early initiation of smoking
- Early initiation of sexual activity

### **Important Facts to Remember**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are common. ACEs tend to happen in multiples, rather than isolated incidents. For example, a parent who is abusive may also be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The ACE score can help determine the negative impact on a child's development.

The ACE score has a strong correlation with problems that can occur during someone's lifespan. Just like the ACEs themselves, the problems that result occur in multiples. Or, a problem may lead to more severe problems. For example, depression can influence alcohol or drug abuse, which can cause or worsen other physical health problems.

### **How Do ACEs Lead to Long-Term Health Problems or Early Death?**

People tend to develop behaviors as a way of coping with their traumatic or adverse experiences. The study implies that it is these coping mechanisms that link negative childhood experiences with health problems and early death.

For example, drinking, smoking, drug use and adverse sexual behaviors are all forms of coping mechanisms. People who have had a number of ACEs may feel depressed, anxious, or have low self-esteem. People will sometimes smoke to minimize those negative feelings.

While smoking may make someone feel better at first, we know it contributes to different types of cancer, emphysema, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), heart disease and often, early death. In a pregnant woman, smoking can also have a negative effect on the health of an unborn baby.

## HOW TO FIND 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:  
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 did not 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 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.**

## What Does My ACE Score Mean?

The ACE Score determines how many types of traumatic experiences a person had under the age of 18.

The types include:

- Recurrent physical abuse
- Recurrent emotional abuse
- Contact sexual abuse
- An alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
- An incarcerated household member
- Someone who is chronically depressed, mentally ill, institutionalized, or suicidal
- Mother is treated violently
- One parent or no parents
- Emotional or physical neglect

A score of “0” means that none of these types of ACEs occurred. A score of “9” means that all of the types of experiences occurred. The higher your score the more likely it is that you experienced mental, emotional or behavioral problems resulting from the Adverse Childhood Experiences you had as a child. Without meaning to, you could be causing Adverse Childhood Experiences for your child.

*Note: A longer version of this questionnaire can be found at [www.cdc.gov/ace/questionnaires.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ace/questionnaires.htm).*



## RESOURCES

To prevent ACEs from happening to your child or to find help in healing from your own ACEs contact:

**Metropolitan Family Services**  
312-986-4000

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**  
(800) 799-SAFE

**Alcoholics Anonymous**  
[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

**ChildHelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline**  
1-800-4-A-CHILD (422-4453)

**Illinois Poison Control**  
1-800-222-1222

**National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) Helpline**  
1-800-950-NAMI

**National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Hopeline**  
1-800-622-2255

**National Runaway Switchboard**  
1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

**National Youth Crisis Hotline**  
1-800-442-HOPE (4673)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**  
1-800-662-HELP (4357)

**Chicago Rape Crisis Hotline**  
888-293-2080

**Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago**  
312-341-1070  
TDD 312-265-2019

**Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Child Abuse Hotline**  
1-800-252-2873

## ABOUT PARENTING FUNDAMENTALS

Parenting Fundamentals recently became part of the education programs offered by Metropolitan Family Services. It was established in 1996 to prevent child abuse while taking into account the cultural diversity of the community.

The program is designed to provide opportunities for parents to learn effective parenting strategies that will allow them to improve their family's relationship and to encourage their children to lead healthy and responsible lives.

Parenting Fundamentals is designed as an eight- or ten-session program. In each session, different topics are covered that focus on improving parental knowledge of child development, strengthening family communication, child nurturance, problem solving, and using non-violent discipline strategies. Much of the learning will occur through discussions and activities, and through viewing videos.

You will be offered home visits to provide continued support and personal consultation. Referrals will be provided to help you link up with useful services.

The program also focuses on reducing parental stressors and building supportive networks for parents. Additionally, a parent support group meets to provide additional support and opportunities to meet and learn from other after classes end.

## ABOUT METROPOLITAN FAMILY SERVICES

Metropolitan Family Services empowers families to learn, to earn, to heal and to thrive. Part mentor, part motivator, part advocate, since 1857 it has been the engine of change that empowers Chicago-area families to reach their greatest potential and positively impact their communities.

Metropolitan has seven community centers and numerous sites throughout Chicago, suburban Cook County, and DuPage County that offer a wide variety of programs and services that promote education, economic development, emotional wellness and empowerment.

## PARENTS SLOGAN



There are seven essential practices for positive parenting. We call this the PARENTS Slogan.

**P**

**PATIENCE** Caring for children is hard work. It requires you to have a lot of patience and good will.

**A**

**AWARENESS** It is important to know your reactions and those of your children, to all types of situations. This will help you understand how to encourage good emotions and behaviors, and prevent negative ones.

**R**

**ROLE MODELING** Children learn from what adults say and do. An effective way to develop positive behaviors and skills in the child is to show them yourself.

**E**

**ESTEEM** One responsibility of parents is to develop healthy, confident children. This takes a confident parent who has good self-esteem.

**N**

**NURTURING** Giving your children a lot of love and attention helps them to grow into confident and caring people.

**T**

**TIMELY & CONSISTENT** Parenting requires you to be timely and consistent in your beliefs, actions, and discipline. Give timely and consistent messages on acceptable behaviors.

**S**

**SELF-CARE** For you to be the best parent you can be, you need to be physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy. You need to take care of yourself and take time for yourself.