

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

HEALTH STARTS
AT HOME

What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are significant childhood traumas that can affect the way the brain develops. These changes cause toxic stress that may affect a child's learning ability, social skills, and can result in long-term health problems.

How do ACEs affect health?

Through stress. Frequent or prolonged exposure to ACEs can create toxic stress which can damage the developing brain of a child and affect overall health.

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

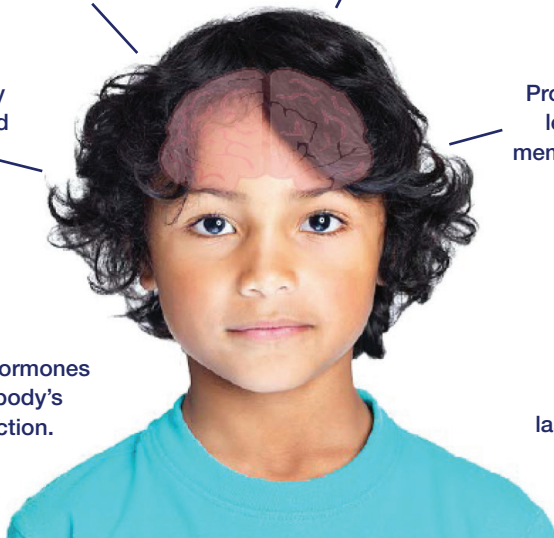
Lower tolerance for stress can result in behaviors such as aggression, checking out, and defiance.

May have difficulty making friends and maintaining relationships.

Problems with learning and memory can be permanent.

Increases stress hormones which affects the body's ability to fight infection.

May cause lasting health problems.



Courtesy of the Spokane Regional Health District

The Future Risks

Exposure to adverse childhood experiences or ACEs can increase the future risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Cancer
- Depression
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Health-related quality of life
- Illicit drug use
- Ischemic heart disease
- Liver disease
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts

Did you know?

A survival mode response to toxic stress increases the child's heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, and muscle tension.



Resilience can bring hope.

Resilience is the ability to adjust or bounce back when bad things happen. Research shows that resilience helps reduce the effects of ACEs.

Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.

Winston Churchill

What does resilience look like?

- Parents who know how to solve problems, who have healthy relationships with other adults, and who build healthy relationships with their children.
- Adults who listen and respond patiently to a child in a supportive way and pay attention to the child's physical and emotional needs.
- Having family, friends or neighbors who support, help, and listen to the family.
- Understanding how children grow and what to expect as they grow.
- Helping children interact in a healthy way with others, manage their emotions, and communicate their feelings and needs.

Resilience is strongly related to the deep belief that you mattered to someone; the deep belief that at one time you mattered to another human being.

Vincent Felitti, M.D.
Co-Principal Investigator
ACEs Study

What can be done?

Healthy relationships are the key to building resilience, which is the primary way to combat ACEs. It is in the context of safe relationships that we can invite children to feel like they matter.

- Look for opportunities to connect. Connection can be thought of as “being present with” another person. This can be as simple as sharing a smile, speaking a word of encouragement, doing an activity together or sitting with a child who is upset.
- Focus on encouragement. This is not the same thing as praise. Praise is focused on accomplishments while encouragement invites children to be their best selves by expressing belief in who they are. It is difficult to praise a child who is failing and this is when encouragement is most needed.
- Use mistakes as opportunities to teach children instead of taking punitive action.
- Focus on finding solutions rather than punishment.
- Helping a child think through and problem solve strengthens the “thinking” part of the brain.
- Balance respect for the child's needs, your needs and the needs of the current situation.
- Give each child a meaningful task to do, taking into account the child's age and developmental level. Completing a simple task such as cleaning up after a meal can make a child feel important.
- Take time for self-care and ask for help!

Find additional strategies at www.stresshealth.org