

UNDERSTANDING ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Information for Families

WHAT ARE ACES?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that occur before the 18th birthday.

Examples include:

- Abuse or neglect
- Discrimination or bullying
- Poverty or homelessness
- Drug or alcohol abuse in the home
- Witnessing violence
- Divorce, deportation or other family separation
- Natural disasters or war



ARE ACES A BIG DEAL?

ACEs can cause a child's brain to be wired differently. They can affect current physical and mental health by way of bruises, broken bones, and burns or problems with learning and behavior. They can also affect health and outlook later in life.

THE IMPACT OF ACES

When something happens to a child that makes them feel unsafe or scared, their body will go into survival mode. All they are thinking about is how to protect themselves. Their heart starts to pound, their blood pressure rises, their breathing increases, and their muscles tense up. When a child is constantly put into survival mode, their brain suffers. Survival mode releases stress hormones that can disrupt the development of the brain and other organs.



ACEs MAY CAUSE A CHILD TO

- Be afraid of new places, people or things.
- Be violent or act childish.
- Have problems eating or sleeping.
- Have problems expressing their feelings.
- Wet the bed or self after being trained.
- Have trouble reading and writing.
- Have trouble learning or with schoolwork.
- Have trouble making friends.
- Injure themselves.
- Smoke, drink or abuse drugs.



THERE IS HOPE

Children who have supportive people in their lives can recover and be healthy and happy after traumatic experiences.



PARENTS CAN HELP BY

- Staying positive!
- Limiting stress.
- Spending time playing with your child.
- Taking parent education courses.
- Setting clear limits for bad behavior.
- Encouraging and supporting your child.
- Helping other families who are in need.
- Asking for help if you have trouble getting health care, buying food, or finding shelter.
- **Dialing 211** and asking about local resources for children and families.

Resources:

Washington County Educational Resources - Coming Soon

<http://www.co.washington.or.us/HHS/>

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

Essentials for Childhood Framework

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<http://www.nctsn.org/>

The Center for Parenting Education

<http://centerforparentingeducation.org/>

Zero to Three

<http://www.zerotothree.org/>

