

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Information for Caseworkers

WHAT ARE ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur before age 18.

Examples include:

- Abuse or neglect
- Bullying or exclusion
- Poverty or homelessness
- Discrimination
- Household substance abuse
- Witnessing violence
- Household mental illness
- Divorce, deportation, other family separation

HAVE OREGONIANS EXPERIENCED ACEs?

In Oregon, 65% of adults¹ and 51% of children² have been exposed to at least one traumatic experience. As a child ages, the likelihood of experiencing at least one ACE also increases.



The ACE Study found that childhood trauma is associated with increased health-risk behaviors, mental health disorders, substance abuse, suicide attempts, criminality, violence, chronic disease and early death.³



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CASEWORKERS

Many families involved in the child welfare or court system have already been exposed to a range of traumatic experiences. These events can affect a parent's ability to parent effectively or maintain family stability. Past and present trauma in a parent's life can also impact the way a parent interacts with staff and the system.



HOPE FOR FAMILIES WHO HAVE ACEs

Caseworkers help families overcome challenging situations by promoting resilience. Resilience is a buffer against the negative impact of ACEs. Resilient people are able to overcome adversity due to their emotional strength, or because they have come across people or activities that encouraged the development of their resilience. Caseworkers can assess a family's resiliency by evaluating their protective and risk traits.

1. <http://www.preventionlane.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ACEs-Brief-2014.pdf>
2. <http://www.childhealthdata.org/>
3. <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>

RECOGNIZING TRAUMA

The basics for trauma-informed work includes recognizing the impact of trauma as well as the signs and symptoms of trauma that may be manifested in the parents and children you serve on a daily basis.



A TRAUMATIZED PARENT MAY

- Be unable to make appropriate decisions.
- Be unable to regulate their emotions.
- Seem disengaged.
- Have poor self-esteem.
- Develop maladaptive coping strategies.
- Have difficulties maintaining relationships.



A TRAUMATIZED CHILD MAY

- Be clingy or fearful of new situations.
- Be aggressive or impulsive.
- Be difficult to console.
- Be anxious or frighten easily.
- Have difficulty sleeping or eliminating.
- Have difficulty regulating their emotions.
- Have self-injurious or sexualized behaviors.

WHAT CASEWORKERS CAN DO

- Become trauma-sensitive.
- Recognize symptoms of traumatic stress.
- Collect information regarding all traumas.
- Coordinate services and interviews with other agencies to prevent re-traumatization.
- Seek to understand how past trauma may affect functioning and parenting.
- Help parents understand the connection between past trauma and present behavior.
- Empower families by allowing them to choose where and how they will receive services.
- Refer families to trauma-informed services for treatment and follow-up care.



Resources:

Washington County Educational Resources

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

Child Trauma Academy

www.ChildTrauma.org

Child Welfare Information Gateway

<https://www.childwelfare.gov>

Children's Services Practice Notes

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

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

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

Resilience Trumps ACEs

www.resiliencetrumpsaces.org

