

# ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACEs)

## Information for Home Visitors



### WHAT ARE ACEs?

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

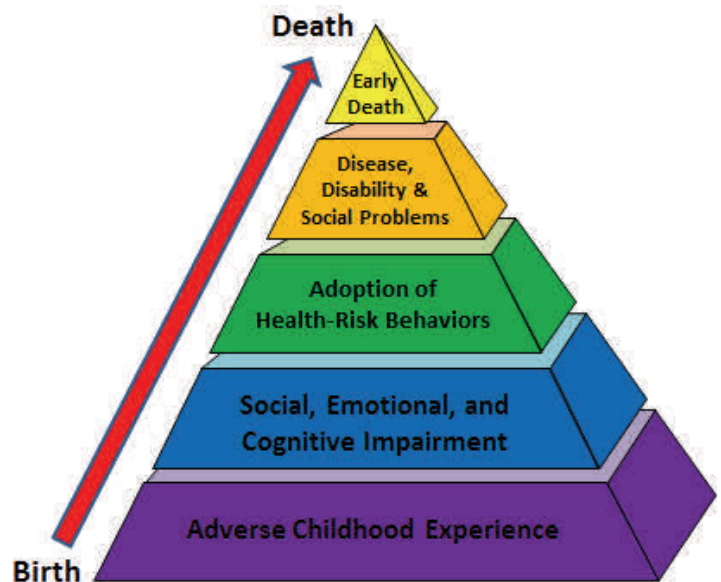
Examples include:

- Abuse or neglect
- Bullying or exclusion
- Poverty or homelessness
- Discrimination or bullying
- Drug or alcohol abuse in the home
- Witnessing violence
- Household mental illness
- Divorce, deportation or other family separation



**Toxic stress response** is a result of a child experiencing frequent adversity without adequate adult support. Toxic stress disrupts the development of the brain and has long-term effects on learning, behavior and health.<sup>1</sup>

**THE ACE STUDY** is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess the connection between childhood trauma and adult health and well-being. More than half of the 17,000 participants reported exposure to at least one traumatic experience before age 18.<sup>2</sup> The study proved that childhood traumatic experiences are associated with risk factors for illness and early death.



### HAVE OUR CHILDREN BEEN EXPOSED?

In Oregon, 51% of parents reported that their child had been exposed to at least one traumatic experience.<sup>3</sup> As the child aged, the likelihood of experiencing at least one ACE also increased.



1. [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key\\_concepts/toxic\\_stress\\_response/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key_concepts/toxic_stress_response/)  
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>  
3. <http://www.childhealthdata.org/>

## EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Younger children and infants are more vulnerable to trauma and unable to communicate their feelings of stress or fear. A younger child may experience behavioral as well as physical symptoms as the result of a traumatic experience.



## 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.
- ◆ Develop learning disabilities.
- ◆ Show poor skill development.
- ◆ Have a poor appetite or low weight.



Safe, stable, nurturing relationships (SSNRs) between a child and his caregiver positively influence a child's physical, emotional and social development. SSNRs decrease the negative impact of ACEs.<sup>4</sup>



## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR HOME VISITORS

Home visitors can ask parents about how they were parented and what they want to do differently for their children. The ACE questionnaire can also serve as a tool to help parents understand their own lives and how their parenting can affect their child's health and development. Education and reflection can help prevent the intergenerational transmission of trauma and motivates parents to make better choices for their children.

## WHAT HOME VISITORS CAN DO

- ◆ Become trauma-sensitive and recognize trauma-related behavior.
- ◆ Foster resiliency by building on strengths and creating an encouraging atmosphere.
- ◆ Encourage caregivers to safely address issues that generate household stress.
- ◆ Offer resources to ensure that safety, security and other basic needs are met.

### Resources:

**Washington County Educational Resources - Coming Soon**  
<http://www.co.washington.or.us/HHS/>

**Child Trauma Academy**  
[www.ChildTrauma.org](http://www.ChildTrauma.org)

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network**  
<http://www.nctsn.org/>

**Center on the Developing Child**  
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

**The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>

**The Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health**  
<http://www.childhealthdata.org/home>

4. [http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/CM\\_Strategic\\_Direction--Long-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/CM_Strategic_Direction--Long-a.pdf)