

3 Realms of ACEs

Adverse childhood and community experiences (ACEs) can occur in the household, the community, or in the environment and cause toxic stress. Left unaddressed, toxic stress from ACEs harms children and families, organizations, systems and communities, and reduces the ability of individuals and entities to respond to stressful events with resiliency. Research has shown that there are many ways to reduce and heal from toxic stress and build healthy, caring communities.



PACes Connection thanks **Building Community Resilience Collaborative and Networks** and the **International Transformational Resilience Coalition** for inspiration and guidance. Please visit PACesConnection.com to learn more about the science of ACEs and join the movement to prevent ACEs, heal trauma and build resilience.

ACE Study — Five Important Findings

- 1 ACEs are surprisingly common — 64% of the 17,000 in the ACE Study had one of the 10 ACEs; 12 percent had four or more.
- 2 There's an unmistakable link between ACEs and adult onset of chronic disease, mental illness, violence and being a victim of violence.
- 3 The more types of childhood adversity, the direr the consequences. An ACE score of 4 increases the risk of alcoholism by 700%, attempted suicide by 1200%; it doubles heart disease and lung cancer rates.
- 4 ACEs contribute to most of our health problems, including chronic disease, financial and social health issues.
- 5 One type of ACE is no more damaging than another. An ACE score of 4 that includes divorce, physical abuse, a family member depressed or in prison has the same statistical outcome as four other types of ACEs. This is why focusing on preventing just one type of trauma and/or coping mechanism isn't working.

ACEs are just ONE PART of ACEs science. The Five Parts of ACEs Science:

- The ACE Study and other ACE surveys (epidemiology).
- How toxic stress from ACEs damages children's brains (neurobiology).
- How toxic stress from ACEs affects our short- and long-term health.
- How we pass ACEs from parent to child through our genes (epigenetics).
- And how resilience research shows our brains are plastic, our bodies can heal.

We're Not Doomed!

Our brains are plastic. Our bodies want to heal. To reduce stress hormones in our bodies and brains, we can meditate, exercise, sleep and eat well, have safe relationships, live and work in safety, ask for help when we need it.

We can build resilient families. Educating parents about their own ACEs helps them understand their lives and motivates them to become healthy parents to prevent passing their ACEs on to their kids.

For resilient families, we need healthy organizations, healthy systems and healthy communities. The frontier of resilience research lies in creating communities and systems that prevent childhood adversity, stop traumatizing already traumatized people, and build resilience.

Many people, organizations and communities are integrating trauma-informed and resilience-building practices based on ACEs science, including pediatricians, schools, juvenile detention facilities, businesses, social services, people in the faith-based community, health clinics, etc. For examples, go to <https://acestoohigh.com/aces-101/>.

Understanding ACEs

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are serious childhood traumas that can result in toxic stress. Prolonged exposure to ACEs can create toxic stress, which can damage the developing brain and body of children and affect overall health. Toxic stress may prevent a child from learning or playing in a healthy way with other children, and can cause long-term health problems.

Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.

Increases problems with learning and memory.

Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Asthma
- Depression
- Heart disease
- Intimate partner violence
- Liver disease
- Sexually-transmitted disease
- Smoking
- Suicide

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.

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

May cause lasting health problems.

Reduces the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.

*I can't hear you!
I can't respond to you!
I am just trying to be safe!*

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) can include:

- Abuse: Emotional / physical / sexual
- Bullying / violence of / by another child, sibling, or adult
- Homelessness
- Household: Substance abuse / mental illness / domestic violence / incarceration / parental abandonment, divorce, loss
- Involvement in child welfare system
- Medical trauma
- Natural disasters and war
- Neglect: Emotional / physical
- Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
- Violence in community

! SURVIVAL MODE RESPONSE

Toxic stress increases a child's heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension. Their thinking brain is knocked off-line. Self-protection is their priority.

Parents and caregivers can help. **Turn over to learn about resilience.**



Help children identify, express and manage emotions.



Create safe physical and emotional environments. (home, school, community, systems).



Understand, prevent and respond to ACEs.



“...One of the biggest myths that we have to bust is that if you have experienced childhood adversity, there’s nothing we can do about it.”

– Nadine Burke Harris, MD, MPH, FAAP, Surgeon General of California

What is resilience?

Research shows that if caregivers provide a safe environment for children and teach them how to be resilient, that helps reduce the effects of ACEs.

What does resilience look like?

Having resilient parents and caregivers who know how to solve problems, have healthy relationships with other adults, and build healthy relationships with children.

Building attachment and nurturing relationships:

Adults who listen and respond patiently to a child in a supportive way, and pay attention to a child’s physical and emotional needs.

Building social connections.

Having family, friends, neighbors, community members who support, help and listen to children.

Meeting basic needs:

Provide children with safe housing, nutritious food, appropriate clothing, and access to health care and good education, when possible. Make sure children get enough sleep, rest, and play.

Learning about parenting, caregiving and how children grow:

Understand how caregivers can help children grow in a healthy way, and what to expect from children as they grow.

Building social and emotional skills:

Help children interact in a healthy way with others, manage emotions, communicate their feelings and needs, and rebound after loss and pain.

Resources:

[National Parent Helpline](#)
1-855-4A PARENT
(1-855-427-2736)

[Number Story](#)
[ACEs Too High](#)

[PACEs Connection](#)
[Resource Center](#)
[Parenting with PACEs](#)



Parenting to prevent and heal ACEs

(Adverse Childhood Experiences)



Donna Jackson Nakazawa, *Childhood Disrupted: How Your Biography Becomes Your Biology & How You Can Heal*

"The main point is this: No matter how old you are – or how old your child may be, there are scientifically supported and relatively simple steps that you can take to reboot the brain, create new pathways that promote healing, and come back to who it is you were meant to be."

NURTURE & PROTECT KIDS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE



Be a source of safety and support.

MOVE AND PLAY

Drum. Stretch. Throw a ball. Dance. Move inside or outside for fun, togetherness and to ease stress.

MAKE EYE CONTACT

Look at kids (babies, too). It says, "I see you. I value you. You matter. You're not alone."

SAY, "SORRY"

We all lose our patience and make mistakes. Acknowledge it, apologize, and repair relationships. It's up to us to show kids we're responsible for our moods and mistakes.



GIVE 20-SECOND HUGS

There's a reason we hug when things are hard. Safe touch is healing. Longer hugs are most helpful.



SLOW DOWN OR STOP

Rest. Take breaks. Take a walk or a few moments to reset or relax.

HUNT FOR THE GOOD



When there's pain or trauma, we look for danger. We can practice looking for joy and good stuff, too.

BE THERE FOR KIDS

It's hard to see our kids in pain. We can feel helpless. Simply being present with our kids is doing something. It shows them we are in their corner.

HELP KIDS TO EXPRESS MAD, SAD & HARD FEELINGS

Hard stuff happens. But helping kids find ways to share, talk, and process helps. Our kids learn from us.



KEEP LEARNING

Understand how ACEs impact you and your parenting.

More tips & resources for parents on back.



Support for parents with ACEs

"The best thing we can do for the children we care for is to manage our own stuff. Adults who've resolved their own trauma help kids feel safe." —Donna Jackson Nakazawa

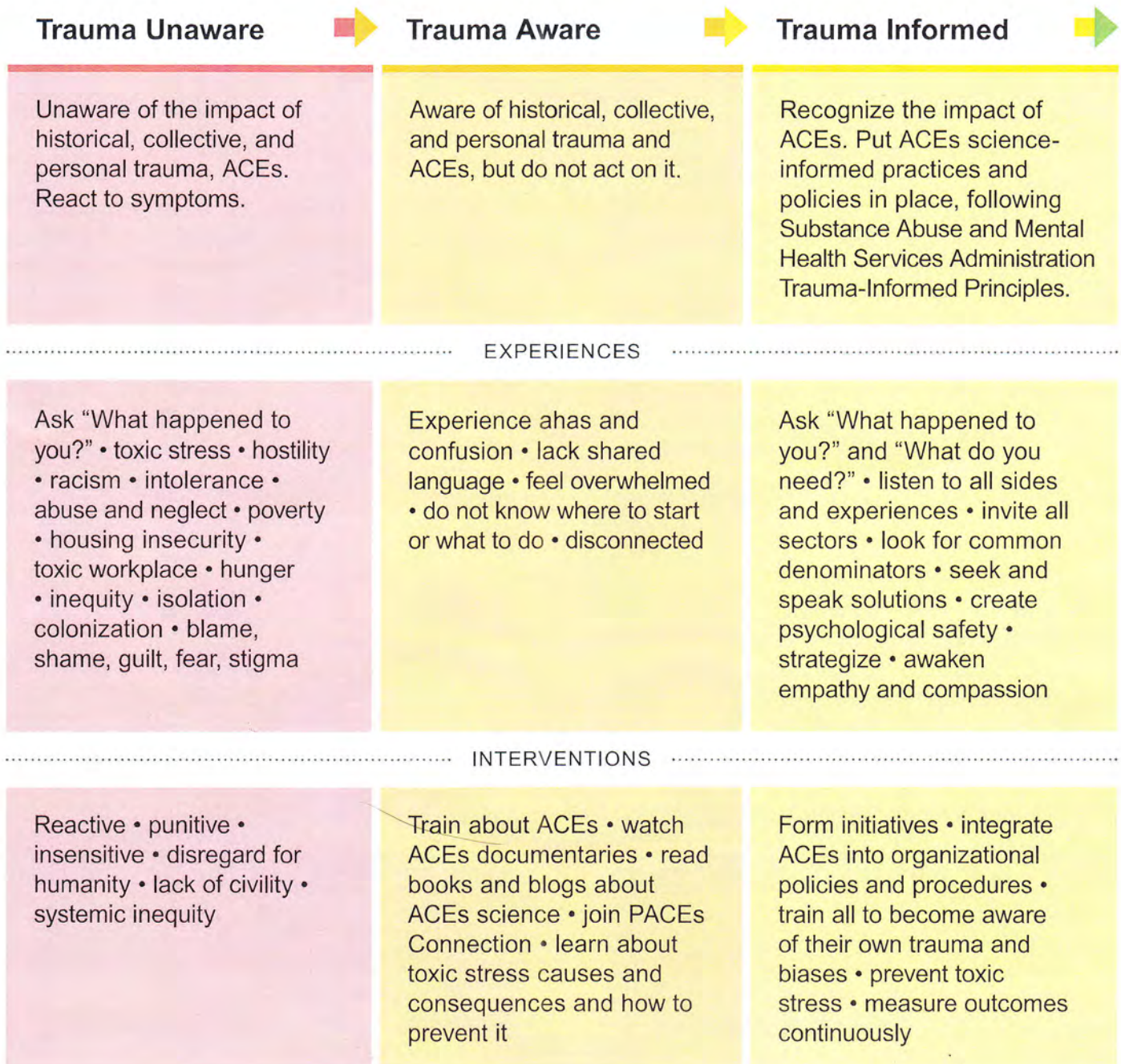


"Learning about ACEs is a start but sometimes we need more. Many people with ACEs have never had their pain validated. Understanding that there exists a biological connection between what they experienced in childhood, and the physical and mental health issues they face now, can help set them on a healing path, where they begin to find new ways to take care of themselves, and begin new healing modalities."

—Donna Jackson Nakazawa

Path to a Just Society

What can we do to create a world in which all feel safe, valued, and loved? We can learn about, prevent, and heal adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and create more positive childhood experiences (PCEs) in our communities. We can start or join a positive and adverse childhood experiences (PACEs) initiative to accelerate change. Join us on the path to creating a just society!



PACEs Informed



Healing Centered



Just Society

Aware of the significance of Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences (PACEs) and their interaction (e.g., PCEs act as buffers against ACEs).

Work to prevent and heal trauma. Foster nurturing relationships, restorative processes, and positive experiences.

A self-actualized, equitable, beloved society in which all thrive, belong, and feel loved.

EXPERIENCES

Aware of PCEs and their significance • know about historical trauma and cultural healing efforts • know social determinants of health are drivers of inequities and health disparities

Feel heard, valued, respected, engaged, activated, honored, courageous, empathetic, included, compassionate, trusted and trustworthy, informed, self-aware, self-compassionate, accepted, and playful • diversity, equity, and inclusion are the norm • promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments • allow growth from positive and tolerable stress

Feel safe, hopeful, worthy, joyful, cared for, celebrated, playful • live with ease, belonging, dignity, and love • breathe, eat, drink, and play knowing our environment nurtures our bodies • enjoy a long, healthy life • celebrate our individual and cultural uniqueness • thrive and fulfill our collective potential

INTERVENTIONS

Train about PACEs • watch PACEs documentaries • read books and blogs about PACEs science • integrate PACEs into organizational policies and procedures • consciously create culturally appropriate and community-led positive experiences for children and their caregivers • identify and build on strengths of the individual

Co-operatives and collective efforts • restorative justice to repair harms • accountability • universal basic income • policies and systems that support families and promote prevention, equity, and health • equitable implementation • all actively address personal trauma and biases • data informs programs

Power is shared • reparations • when lack is observed, action is taken • abundance—everyone has what they need

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire

Finding your ACE Score ra hbr 10 24 06

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household **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** ...
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 **ever**...
Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
or
Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
4. Did you **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** feel that ...
You didn't 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 or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?
or
Ever repeatedly hit over 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