

# REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS



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## Adverse Childhood Experiences

They can last a lifetime, but they don't have to

Most people intuitively know that childhood experiences shape adult lives. But groundbreaking new research is greatly expanding our understanding of this issue—documenting how nurturing, stable environments help children develop the cognitive and emotional skills and robust sense of self they need to thrive as adults. Research also shows how negative experiences can derail those processes, leading to a host of health problems and risk behaviors in adulthood.

### What are ACEs?

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are incidents during childhood that harm social, cognitive and emotional functioning. Frequent or prolonged exposure to such events creates toxic stress that damages the developing brain. The negative outcomes later in life are serious, such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, depression, morbidity and early death.

\*\*Evidence shows that the more ACEs a person experiences, the more likely poor health outcomes become.

While adverse childhood experiences don't guarantee bad outcomes for adults, they increase the odds of future health problems. And they are largely preventable.

Adverse Experiences include:

1. Recurrent physical abuse
2. Recurrent emotional abuse
3. Contact sexual abuse
4. Alcohol and/or drug abuser in the household
5. Incarcerated household member
6. Someone in the household who is chronically depressed, mentally ill,

7. Institutionalized or suicidal
8. Mother is treated violently
9. One or no parents
10. Emotional neglect
11. Physical neglect

### Impact of ACEs

Adverse childhood experiences have been linked to some of today's most costly medical, psychiatric, social and educational issues. The likelihood of adopting risky behaviors or having poor health outcomes increases substantially as the number of ACEs increase. As the number of ACEs increases so does the likelihood a child will struggle in school. Students with higher ACE scores are more likely to be designated to special education, fail a grade, score lower on a standardized test, have language difficulties, be suspended or expelled and have poorer health.

### Preventing ACEs

Interventions are proving effective in preventing or mitigating the effects of childhood trauma.

1. **Prevention.** Helping parents have the knowledge, resources and support they need to provide safe, stable, nurturing and healthy environments for their children reduces the likelihood of abuse and neglect, including working with families to manage stress, strengthen connections, access resources and gain parenting skills.
2. **Resiliency.** Children who develop supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults as early in life as possible can more easily overcome the effects of constant stress and adversity.

This includes developing good peer relationships, active coping strategies, positive self-esteem, and other factors shown to reduce trauma's damage.

3. **Trauma-informed care.** This approach to all types of health care, physical and behavioral, recognizes trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role trauma plays in someone's life. When healthcare professionals are trained in trauma-informed approaches, they are able to identify and treat trauma-related symptoms and conditions.

### Support

It is important that we recognize that adverse childhood experiences are very common. The emerging ACEs research and attention to these issues provides valuable opportunities for us to change the experiences of children today, and respond differently to the impacts of childhood trauma in adults. This research is helping all of us to identify connections between childhood experiences and our current health and functioning. If you or your family have concerns about how ACEs may be impacting your life, the EAP is available to help you and provide guidance and support, 24 hours a day.

Sources: Iowa ACEs 360 <http://www.iowaaces360.org/>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/>; Gallup [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com/); Fairleigh Dickinson University [www.fdu.edu](http://www.fdu.edu)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being. The study is a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego.

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