

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)


Presented by:




WHAT ARE ACES

“Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the incarceration of a parent or guardian.”

ACEs comes from CDC-Keiser Adverse Childhood Experience Study, and has expanded to over 70 research papers since 1998.



Adverse childhood experiences that harms a child's developing brain and leads to a misaligned response to stress and immune system



Causes much of the brain burden and can lead to chronic disease, depression, and other mental illness

“As the ACE study has shown, child abuse and neglect is the single most preventable cause of mental illness, the single most common cause of drug and alcohol abuse, and a significant contributor to leading causes of death such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, stroke, and suicide.”

— Bessel A. van der Kolk. *The Healing of Trauma*

ACEs Can Accumulate and Their Effects Last Beyond Childhood

The effects of ACEs can add up over time and affect a person throughout their life.



Children who repeatedly and chronically experience adversity can suffer from **toxic stress**.



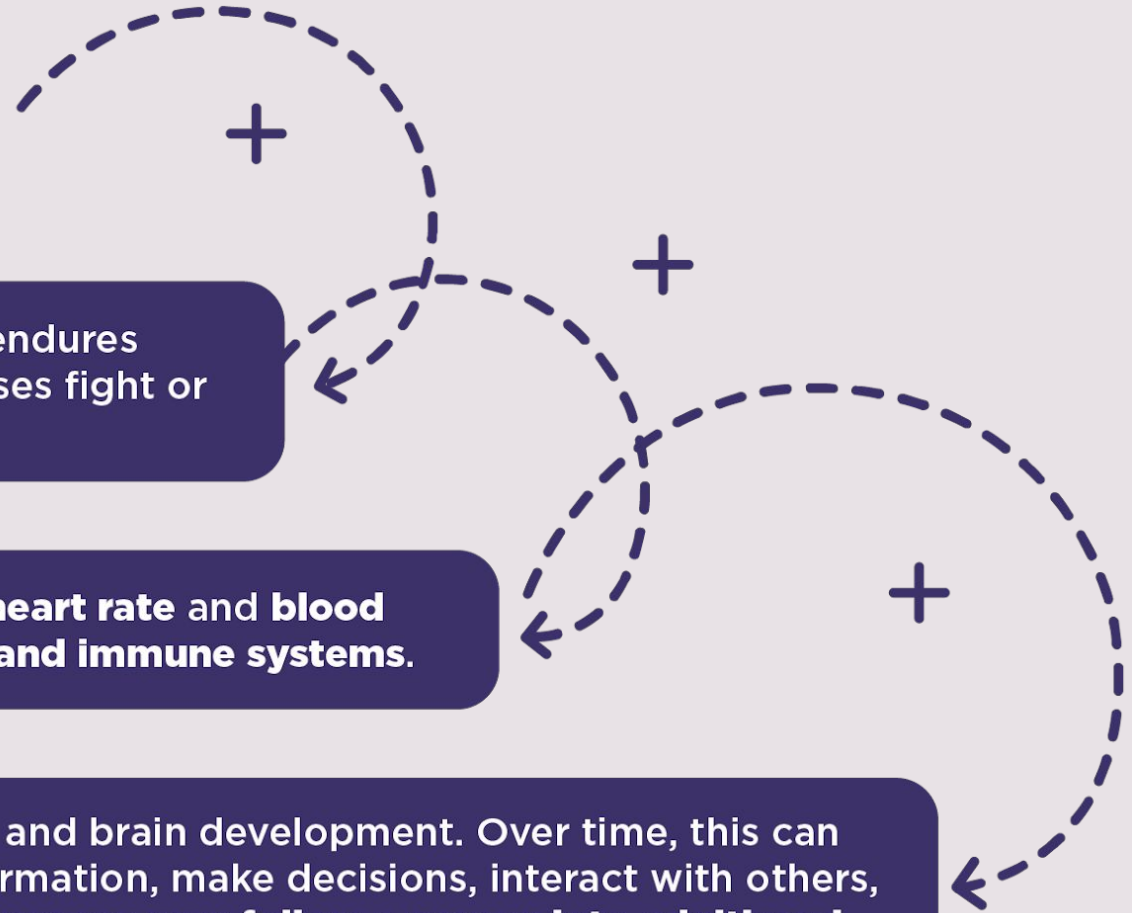
Toxic stress happens when the brain endures **repeated stress or danger**, then releases fight or flight hormones like cortisol.



This internal alarm system **increases heart rate and blood pressure** and **damages the digestive and immune systems**.



Toxic stress can disrupt organ, tissue, and brain development. Over time, this can limit a person's ability to process information, make decisions, interact with others, and regulate emotions. **These consequences may follow a person into adulthood.**



Some Groups Are More Likely to Have Experienced ACEs

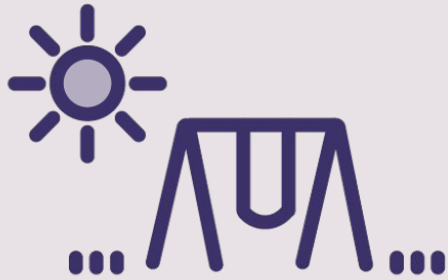
Multiple studies show that people who identified as members of these groups as adults reported experiencing **significantly more ACEs**:



GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND ACES

ACEs Can Echo Across Generations

The consequences of ACEs can **be passed down from one generation to the next** if children don't have protective buffers like...



positive
childhood
experiences

OR



a caring
adult in
their lives.

Also, when families experience **historical and systemic racism** or living in **poverty for generations**, the effects of ACEs can **add up over time**.

SO, *WHAT'S EVALUATED?*

ACEs is a measuring tool to evaluate, as a guideline, the behavioral risk factors that begin before the age of 18 years of age.

The 10 ACEs the researchers measured:

- Physical, sexual and verbal abuse.
- Physical and emotional neglect.
- A family member who is:
 - depressed or diagnosed with other mental illness;
 - addicted to alcohol or another substance; in prison.
- Witnessing a mother being abused.
- Losing a parent to separation, divorce or other reason.

<p>Did a parent, step-parent or other adult in the household often or very often...</p> <p>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?</p>	YES or NO	<p>Was your parent, step-parent or another adult who was helping to raise you:</p> <p>Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at them? or Sometimes, often, or very 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?</p>	YES or NO
<p>Did a parent, step-parent or other adult in the household often or very often...</p> <p>Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?</p>	YES or NO	<p>Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?</p>	YES or NO
<p>Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever...</p> <p>Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal or vaginal intercourse with you?</p>	YES or NO	<p>Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?</p>	YES or NO
<p>Did you often or very often feel that...</p> <p>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?</p>	YES or NO	<p>Did a household member go to prison?</p>	YES or NO
<p>Did you often or very often feel that...</p> <p>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?</p>	YES or NO	<p>Did you often, very often or sometimes feel that you were treated badly or unfairly because of your race or ethnicity?</p>	YES or NO
<p>Were your parents ever separated or divorced?</p>	YES or NO	<p>Did you see or hear someone being beaten up, stabbed, or shot in real life multiple times?</p>	YES or NO
		<p>Did you feel unsafe in your neighborhood some, most, or all of the time?</p>	YES or NO
		<p>Were you bullied by a peer or classmate all of the time or most of the time?</p>	YES or NO
		<p>Were you ever in foster care?</p>	YES or NO

The Philadelphia ACE Survey is used with permission from the Health Federation of Philadelphia and Philadelphia ACE Research and Data Committee. <http://healthfederation.org/ACEs>

Note: The Philadelphia ACE Survey responses were collected using a scale rather than simply yes or no answers. We have simplified this for our purposes to yes or no responses.

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.

ACES ARE VERY COMMON!

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of adults have at least one

ACEs don't usually occur alone; if an individual has one there is an 87% you may have two or more

- You can think of an ACE score as a cholesterol score for childhood trauma.
- On a population level, it doesn't matter which four ACEs a person has; the harmful consequences are the same. The brain cannot distinguish one type of toxic stress from another; it's all toxic stress, with the same impact.

ACES AND THE MILITARY

- Men during the all-volunteer era:
 - had a higher prevalence of all 11 ACE items than men without military service in this era
 - During this era, men with military service had more than twice the prevalence of experiencing 4 or more ACE categories (27% vs. 13%) compared to those without military service.
- Markedly fewer differences in ACE were found among women with and without military service histories across either era:
 - Women with military service histories from both eras had similar patterns of elevated odds for physical abuse, household alcohol abuse, exposure to domestic violence, and emotional abuse compared with women without military service.

ESCAPING THE PAST:

- Prevalence of higher ACE scores can be more prevalent due to individuals escaping violent, abusive, or dysfunctional home environments; getting away from home issues was a theme identified.
- Women had noted during a survey that abusive or distressing home relationships/environments were one of the prevalent reasons of joining the military.
- Such health consequences include PTSD, substance use, attempted suicide; health consequences include lung cancer, liver disease, and decreased life expectancy by 20 years.

Potential interventions

Prevention

- Recognizing risk factors in expectant parents
- Parenting programs
- Policies addressing social determinants (prevention of poverty IPV, teen pregnancy, substance use disorders; pre-school enrichment programs)

Key practices

- Securing medical homes for families
- Asking about ACEs
- Trauma-informed care
- Personalized treatment for chronic illnesses
- Promoting resilience
- Community resource referrals
- Social services referrals

Specialized care

- Mental health and substance use
- Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy
- Group-attachment based interventions for parents with high ACE scores
- Home-visiting services

NOTE: Maryland is a Mandatory Reporting State for Child abuse and neglect

6 principles of trauma-informed care

Safety

Trustworthiness and transparency

Peer support

Collaboration and mutuality

Empowerment, voice, and choice

Cultural, historical, and gender issues

Resilience can mitigate the impact of ACEs

- In this study, children were assessed by their teachers whether or not they exhibited the quality of resilience and then assessed for their school performance
- Comparisons were then made among children who scored 0, 1 or 2+ points on the ACE survey
- Increasing risks for emotional, mental health or behavioral issues were noted with increasing ACE scores across the board
- However, for each ACE score (0, 1 or 2+), resilient children demonstrated:
 - Less absenteeism
 - More classroom engagement
 - Less need to repeat a grade

Positive Stress Response

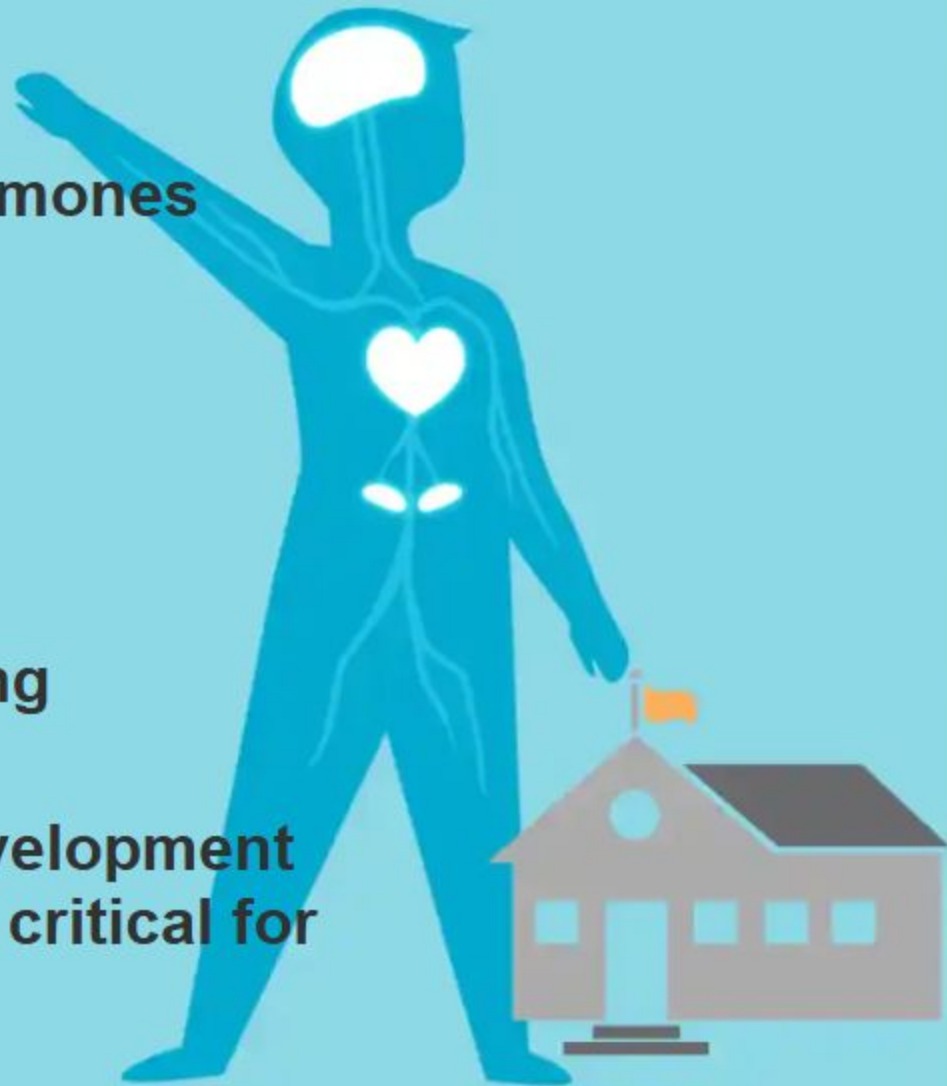
Brief increases in heart rate

Mild elevations of stress hormones

Examples:

- Dropping off at School
- Losing a football game
- Overcoming fear of swimming

Possible consequences: Development of a sense of mastery that is critical for healthy development



Tolerable Stress Response

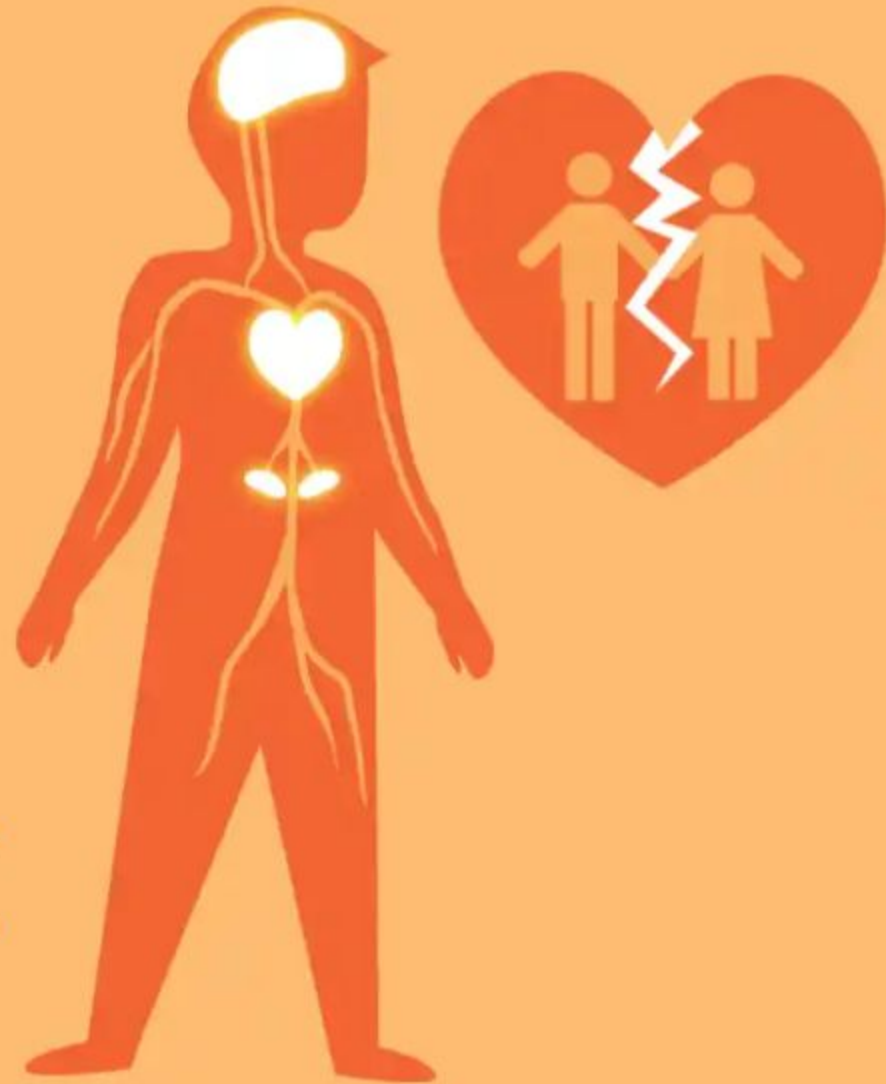
- More prolonged activation of the stress response system

- **Examples:**

- Exams
- Death of a loved one
- Persistent discrimination
- Frightening accident

- **Possible consequences:**

- Range from positive to harmful depending on relationships, the environment, prior experiences, and lack of emotional buffering



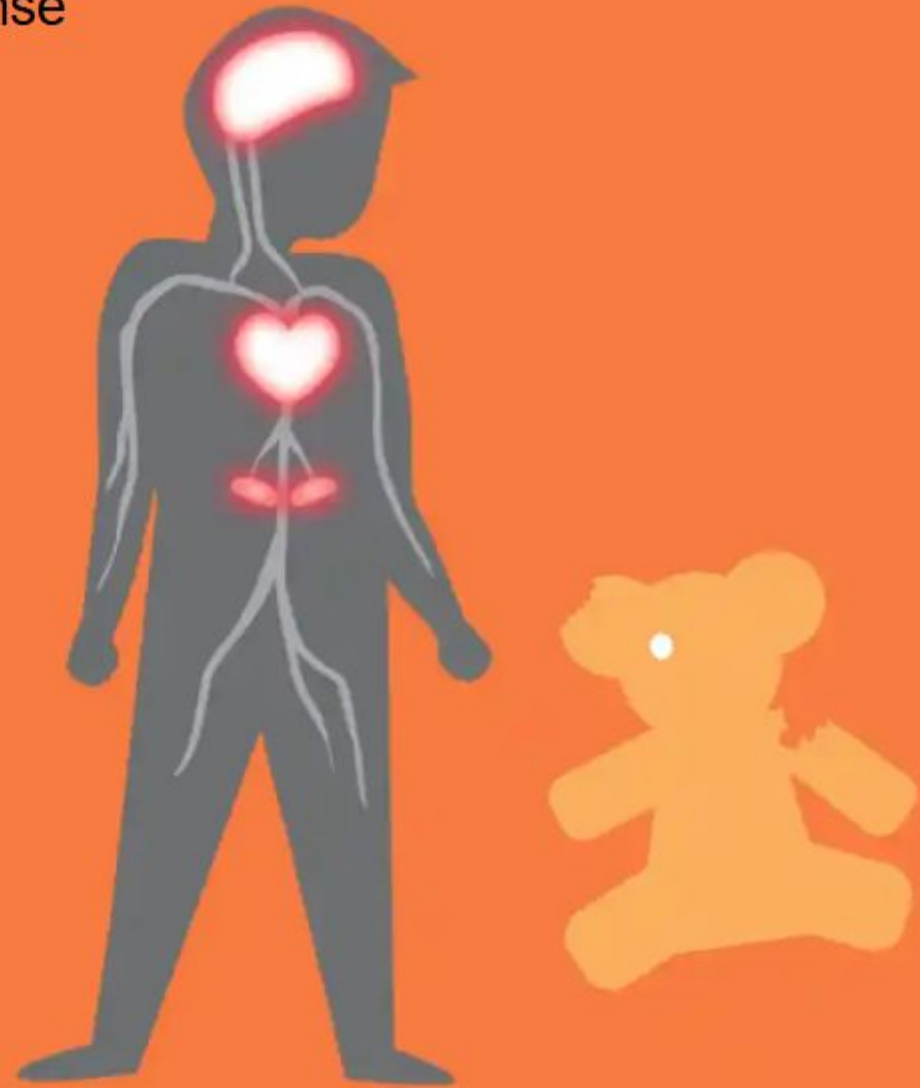
Toxic Stress Response

Prolonged activation of stress response systems

Examples:

- Physical or emotional abuse
- Chronic neglect
- Exposure to violence
- Extreme poverty

Possible consequences: lifelong impacts on brain architecture and other parts of the body's stress response system that increase the risk of stress-related physical and mental illness later in life



RESILIENCY

ADVERSITY

Taking care of yourself Self-care checklist:

- Physical fitness
 - Nutrition and hydration
 - Sleep and rest
 - Assertiveness skills
 - Centering and solitude
 - Creative activities
 - Fun and enjoyment
 - Support provided
 - Support received
 - Set and monitored goals
 - Meditation/Yoga/Pilates
 - What else?
- Emotional supervisor
- 

What can we learn from listening to the voices of people who have experienced trauma?

- ▶ That adversity is not destiny
- ▶ That recovery and healing is possible with the right support in the right environments (That's where our collective power lies as a society)
- ▶ That each individual is unique
- ▶ That trauma informed is a “way of being” in the world, it's not a qualification or a tick box exercise
- ▶ That trauma informed practice is not informed unless it's informed by survivors. If we are not doing it with them, then we are doing it to them. (A dynamic that breeds conflict, and damages trust in relationship)
- ▶ We are inside your organisations, there is “no us and them”. Share experience of people places and things that enabled resilience and recovery
- ▶ That trauma is a wound that can heal, but it leaves a scar! There's no fully moving on from a trauma wound. Life, smells, sounds, noises, people, and events always remind you... it was real!

We Can Create Positive Childhood Experiences



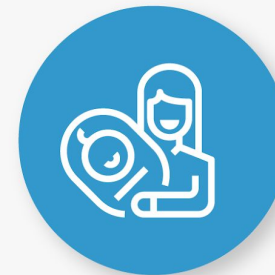
Strengthen families' financial stability

- Paid time off
- Child tax credits
- Flexible and consistent work schedules



Promote social norms that protect against violence

- Positive parenting practices
- Prevention efforts involving men and boys



Help kids have a good start

- Early learning programs
- Affordable preschool and childcare programs



Teach healthy relationship skills

- Conflict resolution
- Negative feeling management
- Pressure from peers
- Healthy non-violent dating relationships



Connect youth with activities and caring adults

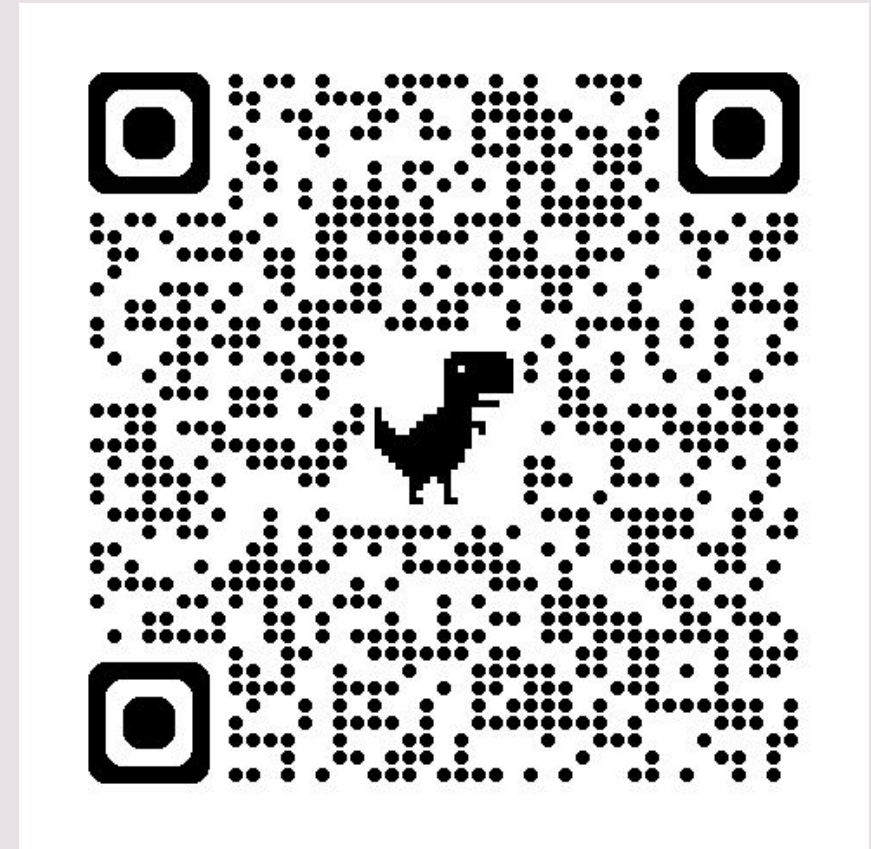
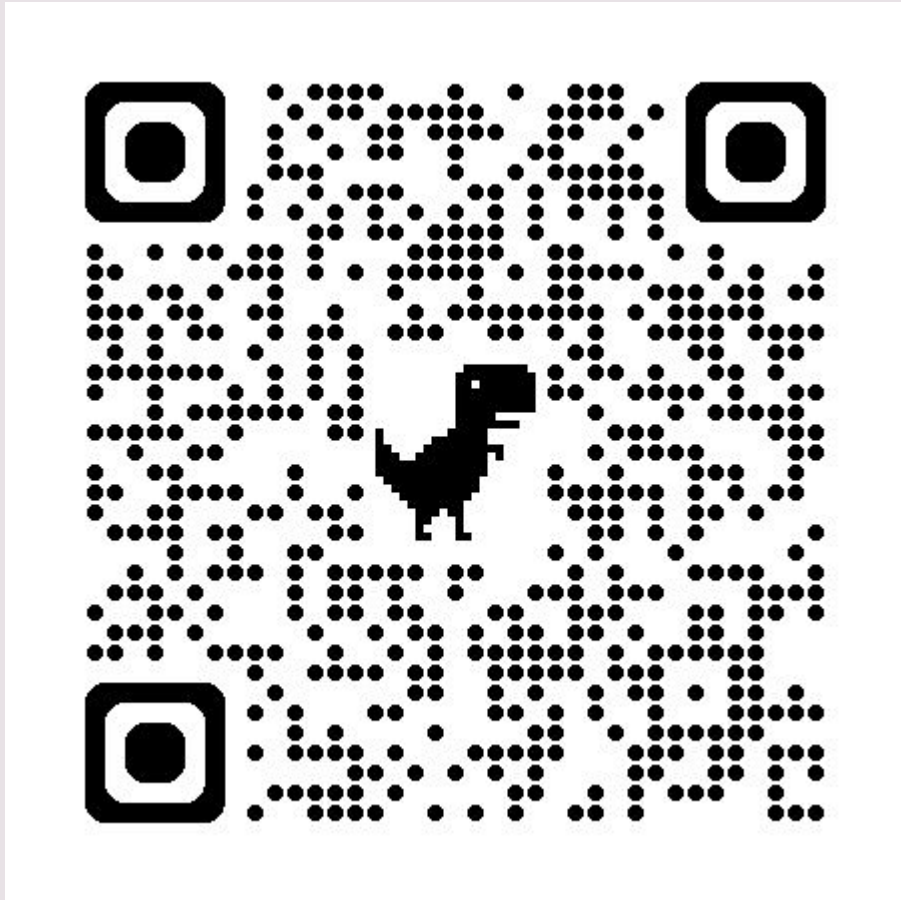
- School or community mentoring programs
- After-school activities



Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms

- ACEs education
- Therapy
- Family-centered treatment for substance abuse

CDC's Adverse Childhood Experiences Website



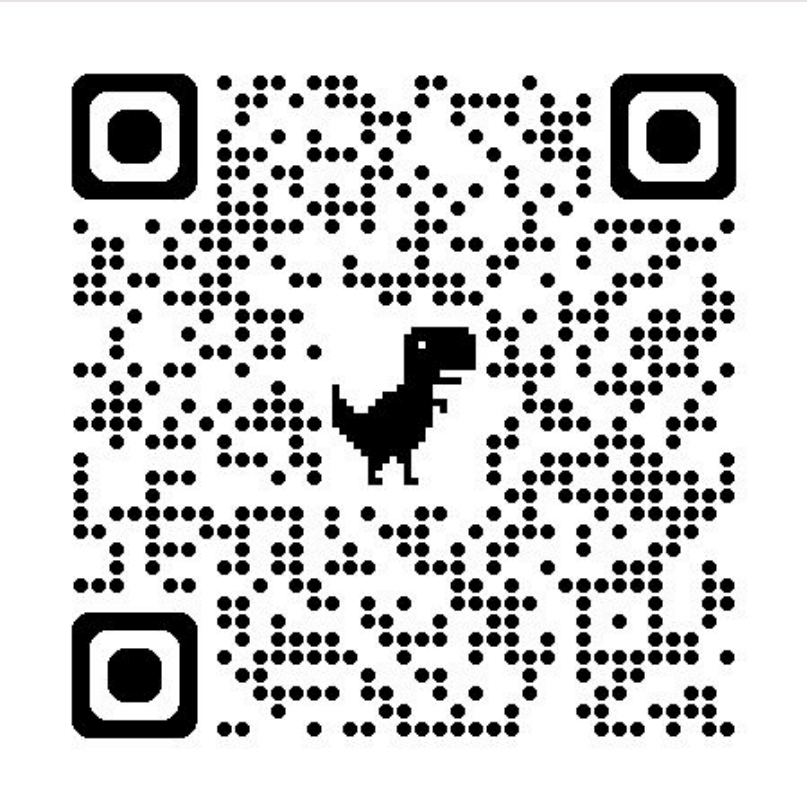
CDC's Violence Prevention Website

RESOURCES

ACEs TOOLKIT



ACEs AWARE



Summary

Professional Suggestion:

If you are a survivor of childhood trauma, it is recommended that you find a trauma-informed psychologist who can help you process your past, learn the emotional regulation and relationship skills that you may have missed out on, so that you can learn to break the patterns of your upbringing.

Equally, if you are a parent who has experienced ACES or you are the parent of a child who has experienced ACEs, it is equally important to seek professional help to mitigate the effects of this trauma.

- ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being across the lifespan
- Trauma-informed care focuses on recognizing the impact of trauma and avoiding retraumatization with a safe, trustworthy environment that encourages self-efficacy, collaboration, and empowerment
- Resilience can mitigate the potential impact of ACEs, and as more evidence accumulates about the power of resilience, additional resources may become available
- Check with your employer for specific supports