

# ACES - TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE

Workbook on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Resilience



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# Overview

When a child grows up in an environment where abuse is constant and ever present they endure high amounts of stress that are toxic. Living with high levels of stress for long periods of time can affect a child's physical health and mental health when they reach adulthood.

This booklet will give a short history of the ACES study (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and the two surveys associated with it. At the end of the booklet is a list of resources for those that would like to learn more about this topic. If you feel that you need more help in contacting a mental health specialist, please call our office and ask for one of our Employment Specialist who can help you.



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# History Behind ACES

The ACES Survey was based on a study completed by Dr. Vincent Felitti, Dr. David Williamson, and the CDC in 1998. It was developed after Dr. Felitti saw a correlation between his patient's inability to lose and keep weight off and the abuse they endured in childhood.

The study concluded that:

- Childhood trauma was very common, even in employed white middle-class, college-educated people with great health insurance.
- There was a direct link between childhood trauma and adult onset of chronic disease, as well as depression, suicide, being violent and a victim of violence.
- More types of trauma increased the risk of health, social and emotional problems.
- People usually experience more than one type of trauma – rarely is it only sex abuse or only verbal abuse." (<https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/got-your-ace-resilience-scores>)

Out of the study was the development of a 10 question assessment called the ACES Survey. Each question on the survey is given one point. The higher your ACES score the more likely for a person to have medical, social, and/or emotional problems. Those with an ACES score of 4 or above significantly increases the development of chronic illnesses, addictions, and/or mental health issues.

When something scary or dangerous happens to a person their physical response is to "fight or flight". Their adrenaline spikes which allows them to make quick decisions to save their life. When this happens to a child over and over in the span of a day, as in a household with an alcoholic, it can damage a child's developing brain.

*"If you're in a forest and see a bear, a very efficient fight or flight system instantly floods your body with adrenaline and cortisol and shuts off the thinking portion of your brain that would stop to consider other options. This is very helpful if you're in a forest and you need to run from a bear. The problem is when that bear comes home from the bar every night,"*

Nadine Burke Harris

There is hope. Resiliency. When children have positive people in their lives, activities they can focus on, and determination they can overcome terrible situations. For adults that have survived traumatic childhood experiences and need more support, counseling and continued learning can increase their ability to overcome.

<https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/got-your-ace-resilience-scores>,  
<https://acestoohigh.com/2012/10/03/the-adverse-childhood-experiences-study-the-largest-most-important-public-health-study-you-never-heard-of-began-in-an-obesity-clinic/>



# ACES Survey

Prior to your 18th birthday:

- Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very 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?  
No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured? No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- 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 Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?  
No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Did you often or very 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?  
No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Did you often or very 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? No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Were your parents ever separated or divorced? No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? 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? No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?  
No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?  
No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_
- Did a household member go to prison? No\_\_\_ Yes \_\_

Now add up the number of your "Yes" answers: \_\_\_\_\_ This is your ACE Score



# Resiliency

To have resilience is to be able to recover from or adjust easily from adverse conditions. When it comes to the ACES score and the trauma many children face, resiliency is their ability to survive and overcome.

*It certainly includes various properties like being optimistic, having confidence in yourself, or belief in yourself to overcome things, to have the skills you need, social support, ability to find some meaning or purpose in life. Probably one of the most important or critical things of all is something called hardiness," which is thought to be a mix of commitment, control and challenge.*

[https://acestoohigh.com/2017/02/05/\\_\\_trashed-4/](https://acestoohigh.com/2017/02/05/__trashed-4/)

In 2006 two psychologists, Mark Rains and Kate McClinn, developed the resiliency survey after seeing the ACES study. The intent of the resiliency survey is to provide questions that will encourage the taker to think about their childhood and what supports were there and what were absent.

[https://acestoohigh.com/2017/02/05/\\_\\_trashed-4/](https://acestoohigh.com/2017/02/05/__trashed-4/)



Resiliency is a combination of many different aspects in a child's life and it won't look the same for each child. Resiliency can include:

- An future forward attitude and hope that things will get better
- Personal supports at school or extended family (teacher, coaches, friends, grandparents)
- An engagement with sports, music, art, etc. that provides an outlet for stress, creativity.

# Resiliency Survey

RESILIENCE Questionnaire - This survey is a tool to help you as you think about what supports, attitudes, and activities you had or didn't have in your childhood.

Please circle the most accurate answer under each statement:

1. I believe that my mother loved me when I was little.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

2. I believe that my father loved me when I was little.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

3. When I was little, other people helped my mother and father take care of me and they seemed to love me.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

4. I've heard that when I was an infant someone in my family enjoyed playing with me, and I enjoyed it, too.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

5. When I was a child, there were relatives in my family who made me feel better if I was sad or worried.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

6. When I was a child, neighbors or my friends' parents seemed to like me.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

7. When I was a child, teachers, coaches, youth leaders or ministers were there to help me.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

8. Someone in my family cared about how I was doing in school.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

Continued on next page...

# Resiliency Survey

9. My family, neighbors and friends talked often about making our lives better.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

10. We had rules in our house and were expected to keep them.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

11. When I felt really bad, I could almost always find someone I trusted to talk to.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

12. As a youth, people noticed that I was capable and could get things done.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

13. I was independent and a go-getter.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

14. I believed that life is what you make it.

Definitely true    Probably true    Not sure    Probably Not True    Definitely Not True

How many of these 14 protective factors did I have as a child and youth? (How many of the 14 were circled "Definitely True" or "Probably True"?)

# Resources

## Online Resources



Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

The CDC has many resources available to learn more about ACES.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>



ChildWelfare.gov

This site has several resources to download.

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/ace/>

## Clark County Resources



Columbia River Mental Health (CRMH)

CRMH offers child, adult and family counseling.

<https://crmhs.org/>



ACES Alliance

The alliance work together to promote a trauma-informed, resilient Clark County. The alliance meets monthly.

<https://acesactionalliance.org/>



# NOTES