

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events, including abuse and neglect. They also include household dysfunction such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with family members who have substance use disorders. ACEs are strongly related to the development and prevalence of a wide range of health problems throughout a person's lifespan, including those associated with substance misuse.

ACEs include:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Intimate partner violence
- Mother treated violently
- Substance misuse within household
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member

Subsequent ACE surveys include:

- racism
- witnessing violence outside the home
- bullying
- losing a parent to deportation,
- living in an unsafe neighborhood
- involvement with the foster care system
- being homeless
- living in a war zone
- being an immigrant
- moving many times
- witnessing a sibling being abused
- witnessing a father or other caregiver or extended family member being abused
- involvement with the criminal justice system

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in partnership with Kaiser Permanente, conducted a landmark ACE study from 1995 to 1997 with more than 17,000 participants. The study found a strong relationship between ACEs, substance use disorders, and behavioral problems. When children are exposed to chronic stressful events, their brain development can be disrupted. As a result, the child's cognitive functioning or ability to cope with negative or disruptive emotions may be impaired. Over time, and often during adolescence, the child may adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as substance use or self-harm. Eventually, these unhealthy coping mechanisms can contribute to disease, addiction, disability, and social problems, as well as premature mortality.

- The study's researchers came up with an ACE score to explain a person's risk for chronic disease. Think of it as a cholesterol score for childhood toxic stress. You get one point for each type of trauma. The higher your ACE score, the higher your risk of health and social problems. (Of course, other types of trauma exist that could contribute to an ACE score, so it is conceivable that people could have ACE scores higher than 10; however, the original ACE Study measured only 10 types.

What is your ACES Score?

Prior to your 18th birthday:

1. 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 If Yes, circle 1
2. 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 If Yes, circle 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 Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
No If Yes, circle 1
4. 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 If Yes, circle 1
5. 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 If Yes, circle 1
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
No If Yes, circle 1
7. 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 If Yes, circle 1
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
No If Yes, circle 1
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
No If Yes, circle 1
10. Did a household member go to prison?
No If Yes, circle 1

Now add up your "Yes" answers: _____ This is your ACE Score.

Dr. Sumrok helps people uncover their ACES and discover the coping behavior they adopted because they weren't provided with a healthy alternative when they were young. He explains the science of adverse childhood experiences to them, and how their addictions are a normal - and a predictable - result of their childhood trauma. He explains what happens in the brain when they experience toxic stress, how their amygdala is their emotional fuse box. How the thinking part of their brain didn't develop the way it should have. How it goes offline at the first sign of danger, even if they're not connecting the trigger with the experience.

- "After I explain all this to them, many of them stare at me and say: 'You mean I'm not crazy?'" says Sumrok. "I tell them, 'No, you're not crazy'." Sometimes he yells out the door to his nurse: 'Patsy! Where's my not-crazy stamp? I need to stamp this person's chart.'"

Letting Go of Shame and Guilt is the of Way of Healing

To understand what happened to your brain is first part of the process. Learning to let go of your shame, guilt and resentments is the next part. In Recovery Dojo we train our brains to focus on the inner goodness and practice being kind and loving to ourselves in our own minds. You have to learn to be your own best friend in your own head rather than an enemy. You learn to stop beating yourself up with negative self-talk that is full of shame, guilt and resentment. Once you discover that the ways you learned to cope as kids were understandable you then practice forgiving yourself for past mistakes or unskillful behavior that you still use to get your needs

To heal from addiction we have to recognize and resolve the weight we've been carrying from unhealed trauma and shame. Fill out the ACES and Resilience score sheets on the following pages. Consider how your life can be without the weight of your wounds or the addictive habits you've been using to cover them up? After you complete the ACES and Resilience scales complete these three tasks to finish your Finding Peace of Mind Plan

1. Write a list of skills/techniques you can use to ground yourself when current anxiety or past trauma is triggered.
2. Write a schedule of times to practice these skills daily
3. Write a schedule of therapy sessions to address and heal the deeper trauma wounds (talk to staff about referrals for counseling).

What's Your Resilience Score?

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

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"?) _____

Of these circled, how many are still true for me? _____

Write a list of ways to have Fun:

What helps your mind rest or find peace?

When/where/how do you feel content, feel ease, feel flow?

What helps you Focus and clear your mind?

Empty your mind of all thoughts and let your heart be at peace. ~ Lao Tzu

Write a list of skills you can use to ground yourself or soothe yourself when current anxiety or past trauma is triggered:

Schedule for practicing Grounding/Soothing Skills

	DAY	DAY	DAY	DAY	DAY
WHAT					
WHERE					
HOW LONG					