

# ACES & Childhood Trauma

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# What is trauma?

Psychology Today defines trauma as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

Events which can be considered **traumatic** are wide ranging indeed - from what might be considered the stuff of ordinary life such as divorce, illness, accidents and bereavement to extreme experiences of war, torture, rape and genocide.





*"I'm right there in the room, and no one even acknowledges me."*

# Trauma



# What is childhood trauma?

When we talk about childhood trauma, we refer to the impact that a potentially traumatic situation has generated or is generating in a child. **This state of trauma can affect the child in his or her...**

**Development**

**Learning**



# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

& Childhood  
trauma



**UNDERSTANDING ACEs**

# WHAT ARE ACEs?

**WATCH NOW**

OFFICE OF THE CALIFORNIA SURGEON GENERAL

The banner features a yellow background on the left with the text 'UNDERSTANDING ACEs' in a rounded rectangle, 'WHAT ARE ACEs?' in large bold letters, and 'WATCH NOW' in a dark blue button. On the right, a 3D illustration shows two stylized figures, one green and one blue, standing in a room with a lamp and a desk. A large, faint watermark of the University of California seal is visible in the background.





**Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that happen between ages 1 and 18.**



**These negative experiences affect a child's brain and health as they grow into adults.**

**ACEs can lead to mental health or chronic health conditions that affect an entire lifetime.**

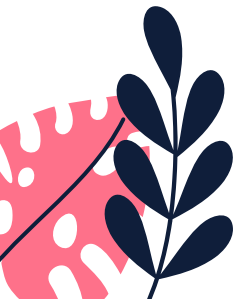


# ★ ACES...

A child's brain is like a sponge. They learn from their experiences and absorb knowledge from the world around them.

For example, they learn how to hold a spoon or ride a bicycle. If a negative experience happens, like falling off a bicycle, a child will learn from that experience. They may go slower or take safety precautions.

Sometimes, negative experiences are out of a child's control and they're unable to slow down or protect themselves from mental or physical harm. The loss of a loved one, sexual abuse and physical abuse, among others, are adverse childhood experiences.

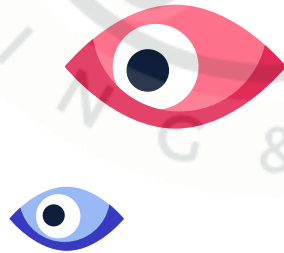






Discussion:

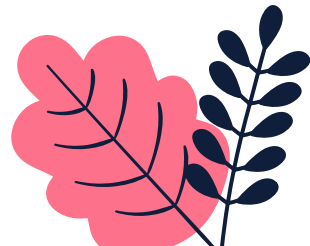
# What are Possible causes?





Take the Quiz...

What's Your Score?  
(for your eyes only!)





As the number of ACEs increases,  
so does the risk for negative health outcomes.





**Remember, ACEs is a tool to measure exposure to traumatic experiences prior to age 18.**

**A high ACEs score does not mean that later social, emotional or health problems are inevitable.**

**Some children develop resilience - the ability to overcome serious hardships while others do not.**

**While a high ACES score may lead to poor mental and physical outcomes, it is not a definitive indicator.**



# Impact of Childhood Trauma

## Cognition

- Impaired readiness to learn
- Difficulty problem-solving
- Language delays
- Problems with concentration
- Poor academic achievement

## Brain development

- Smaller brain size
- Less efficient processing
- Impaired stress response
- Changes in gene expression

## Physical health

- Sleep disorders
- Eating disorders
- Poor immune system functioning
- Cardiovascular disease
- Shorter life span

## Impact of Childhood Trauma

## Behavior

- Poor self-regulation
- Social withdrawal
- Aggression
- Poor impulse control
- Risk-taking/illegal activity
- Sexual acting out
- Adolescent pregnancy
- Drug and alcohol misuse

## Emotions

- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Trouble recognizing emotions
- Limited coping skills
- Increased sensitivity to stress
- Shame and guilt
- Excessive worry, hopelessness
- Feelings of helplessness/lack of self-efficacy

## Mental health

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Negative self-image/low self-esteem
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Suicidality

## Relationships

- Attachment problems/disorders
- Poor understanding of social interactions
- Difficulty forming relationships with peers
- Problems in romantic relationships
- Intergenerational cycles of abuse and neglect



# Impact of Childhood Trauma

CHILDREN MAY BE MISSING A SENSE OF:

- Basic Trust
- Self-regulation
- Ability to delay gratification
- Causal thinking (poor if/then thinking)
- Ability to focus or concentrate
- Relationship skills
- Often have altered stress response

MANY CHILDREN EXPOSED TO TRAUMA HAVE:

- Decreased perception of safety (misperceive threats)
- Poor impulse control
- Decreased self regulation
- Decreased self concept
- Are withdrawn or aggressive
- Struggle with transitions





# How Can I Help My Child?

Given the overall impact of trauma on learning, it is important for parents and caregivers to:

- 01.** Become trauma informed (understand trauma & behavior, establish safety, build trust, model positive coping skills)
- 02.** Be curious and engaged. Use active listening skills, be attentive
- 03.** Be a source of peace and predictability for your child (safe space)
- 04.** Be empathetic and understanding, and offer the your child the support he or she needs





# How Can I Help My Child?

**05.**

Practice Self Care

**06.**

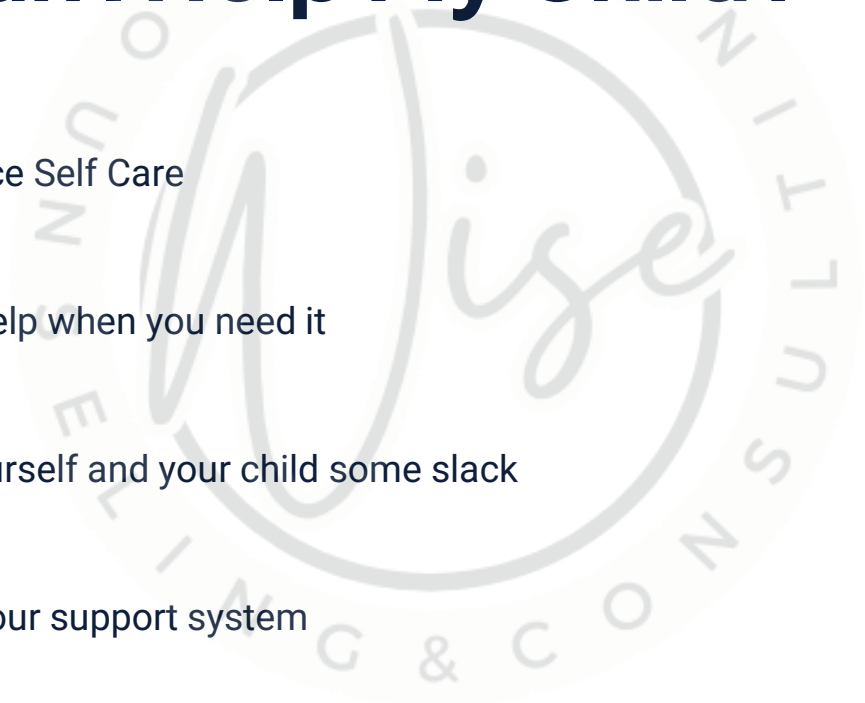
Seek help when you need it

**07.**

Cut yourself and your child some slack

**08.**

Find your support system

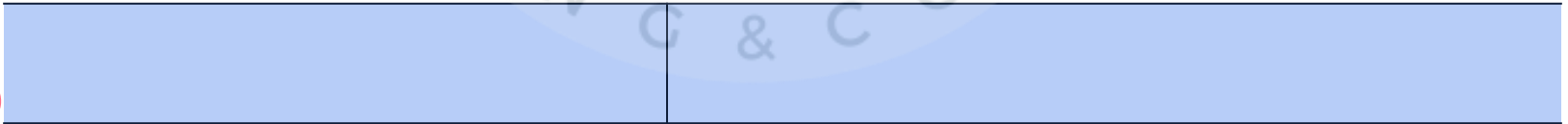




# Last Note:

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- ★ A caregiver's mental well-being is one of the best predictors of a child's outcomes, not only for parents who have experienced trauma but also for other caregivers who have not experienced trauma themselves.
- ★ Resiliency is a major factor in overcoming traumatic experiences. It is the ability to adapt to challenging life experiences. Especially through mental, emotional and behavioral flexibility. It is simply your ability to recover from hard stuff.
- ★ Research shows that connection to a caring adult is a protective factor to healing childhood trauma.





# Thanks for Listening!

Feel free to reach out with any questions  
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