

Engaging Communities to Support Our Youth

TOOLKITS AND EDUCATION FOR SUCCESS



Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) play a significant role in the overall development of children. When children experience one or more ACE, they are more likely to participate in risky behaviors such as smoking, alcohol use, and violence. Preventing ACEs can help children thrive and lower the risk of chronic health conditions such as depression, cancer, suicide, diabetes, and substance use disorder.⁸ By addressing ACEs, we as a community, can increase protective factors and provide stable and nurturing environments for children to succeed.

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This series will consist of six toolkits released throughout the 2023-2024 school year.



This toolkit is supported through grant funding provided by CUMAC and New Jersey Department of Children and Families, Office of Resilience

Purpose

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are common. In 2016, more than 40 percent of children in New Jersey, more than 782,000 children, had experienced at least one ACE, and 18 percent experienced multiple ACEs. 33% of children five years or younger reported having experienced one or more ACEs throughout New Jersey. It is evident that ACEs affect long-term health and must be addressed as they directly correlate to increased substance misuse.

ACEs can play a significant detrimental role in the overall development of children; However, **experiencing adversity and trauma during childhood does not determine an individual's life course**, as ACEs can be prevented. To do so, it is up to us as a community to address adverse experiences in our schools, at home, on the playground, and whenever we possibly can in hopes of making a difference.

The Center for Prevention & Counseling (CFPC) has been working for nearly fifty years to provide a solid foundation for youth to thrive and become resilient adults through school and community prevention programs. Thanks to grant funding provided by CUMAC and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Office of Resilience: The Center for Prevention and Counseling proudly offers our *Toolkits and Education for Success Initiative* to further address the association between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and youth substance use in Sussex County.

Funding for CFPC's *Toolkits and Education for Success* initiative will help our agency increase **protective factors** for youth. This will be done by further developing prevention curriculum to incorporate asset building in the classroom, at home and other settings. To do so, CFPC will work closely to educate youth, parents, and school personnel, including nurses, counselors, teachers, administrators, school resource officers, and bus drivers.

This collaboration will allow CFPC to educate and encourage community members to utilize the 40 Developmental Assets Framework to instill protective factors and mitigate the effects of ACEs by building up assets and creating resilient children.

This toolkit series aims to provide an understanding of ACEs and resources for educators, parents, and the community we live, work, and play.



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events that occur before age 18.³ Physical abuse, substance misuse, divorce, neglect, or having an incarcerated parent are a few examples of Adverse Childhood Experiences. These negative experiences affect how the brain develops and functions by triggering the stress response system in our body. While not all stress is bad, it's important to understand that undergoing an adverse experience throughout childhood can induce toxic stress and put that child at risk for serious, long-term health issues.¹

What are the different types of stress?

Positive stress is everyday and essential for a child's proper growth and development.⁵ This type of stress is often short-lived and rare. Through this, children gain a sense of motivation and nurture resiliency. **Examples:** *making new friends or learning a new skill.*

Tolerable stress occurs more frequently and may be considered more severe compared to positive stress.¹¹ Once the stress is removed, the body fully recovers. **Examples:** *divorce or death of a loved one.*

Toxic Stress results in a continuous release of stress response chemicals where the body fails to recover.¹¹ **Examples:** *Abuse, extreme poverty, violence, food insecurity, or household dysfunction.*



61% of adults experience at least one ACE¹

Our brains are designed to encounter thousands of positive and negative stressors a day to keep us safe. Our fight-or-flight response indicates to our body when we are in harm and is used to protect us from danger. When experiencing ACEs, our body struggles to recover from this response and reset its hormone levels.² As a result, toxic stress may occur. Toxic stress occurs over an extended period, resulting in a cumulative effect on a child's health and well-being.² When a child does not receive the help they need, their body cannot naturally turn off the stress response, resulting in long-term consequences.⁹

Building Blocks of Life

The childhood years are between the ages of 0-17. These "building block" years help set the stage for adult relationships, behaviors, health, and social outcomes.⁶ Changes due to toxic stress disrupt the brain's development and ability to process new information.



Image source: Preventing ACEs, 2019⁶

The original ACEs study was published in 1998 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente. The study highlighted 10 key experiences that, if children encountered, would put them at a higher risk for negative health-related outcomes.

However, the original ACEs study (1998) was limited by the need for demographic and economic diversity. Although the study showed that Adverse Childhood Experiences are a problem, the results are not generalizable.

Over 1,500 replications of the ACEs study within diverse populations resulted in the discovery of additional categories of ACEs.

Additional ACEs include:

*Bullying, community violence, family death, natural disasters, racism, food insecurity, frequent moving, and other forms of unfair treatment.*¹

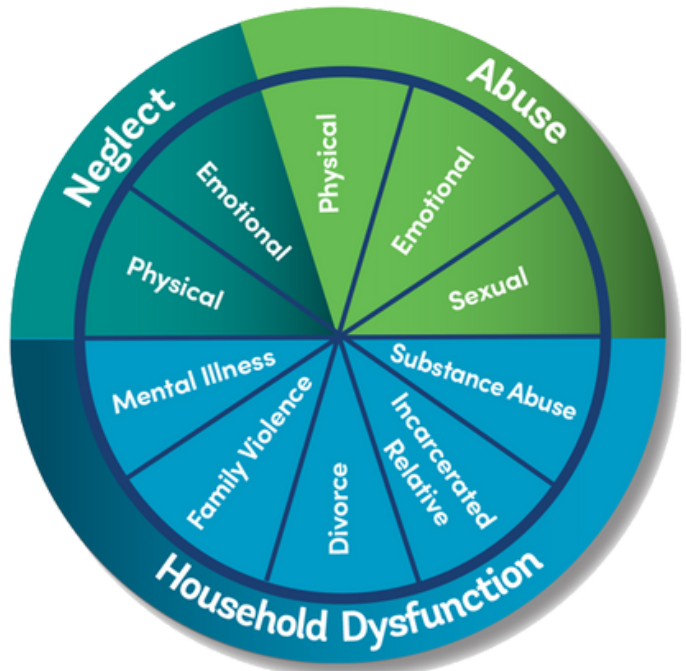


Image source: Spring Board Community Services, 2023¹³

Adversity in Communities

Further research has proved that **Adverse Childhood Experiences** are also found outside the home. Our community has a substantial impact on whether ACEs occur to begin with. Communities that struggle with substance use, poverty, and food insecurity are called **Adverse Community Environments**. These types of environments foster the opportunity for ACEs to take place.

Think of a tiny seed just planted; what does it need to grow into a beautiful, tall, healthy tree? Clean soil, free from weeds, and plenty of water.



Similarly, children need a safe, stable, and nurturing environment to flourish into resilient adults. Further research has expanded our understanding of how stressors throughout a communities environment may also impact a child similarly to the original ACE study.²

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Divorce
- Substance misuse
- Incarceration
- Homelessness
- Mental illness
- Domestic violence
- Emotional & sexual abuse¹⁰

Adverse Community Environments

- Community disruption
- Violence
- Poverty
- Physical & emotional neglect
- Lack of opportunity, economic mobility & social capital
- Poor housing quality and availability¹⁰

Ellis and Dietz, 2017⁴

ACEs Lasting Impact

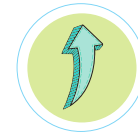
If left unaddressed, ACEs can have a profound and lifelong effect on not only the child, but families and communities as well.² Adverse Childhood Experiences work as a "dose-response," meaning the more adversity an individual experiences, the greater their chance of developing a chronic health problem, mental illness, substance use disorder, or other negative consequences throughout adolescence and adulthood.⁹



Adverse Childhood Experiences



Risk for negative outcomes



ACEs alter the body's cardiovascular, endocrine, immune, and neurological systems, resulting in various health consequences.² Unfortunately, these effects occur during the most crucial time of a child's life. Children with adverse experiences struggle to sit still, pay attention, and often behave impulsively. A child may also experience growth and developmental delays throughout adolescence.⁹

5 of 10 leading causes of death are associated with ACEs⁸



Children who experience 2 or more ACEs are **3x more likely** to repeat a grade.²



Juvenile offenders are **4x more likely** to experience multiple ACEs.²



Children who experience 4 or more ACEs are **4x more likely** to develop lung disease.¹

Adversity is Costly

When a child experiences ACEs, the consequences are physical, emotional, and financial. Adverse Childhood Experiences produce negative health outcomes that need to be addressed by professionals. Due to the nature of these services, the cost of health care and social services has risen as they are needed more. The estimated annual U.S. population economic burden of child maltreatment, a subset of ACEs, is 428 billion dollars.² Preventing and reducing the number of children with ACEs in North America alone could result in a 10% reduction, or annual savings of \$56 billion.³



\$428 Billion economic burden of child maltreatment



20 year reduction life expectancy

Finances are not the only costly item. ACEs may cost a person their life. The life expectancy of a person who has experienced 6 or more ACEs is nearly 20 years shorter than someone who has experienced zero ACEs.⁷

Moving Forward by Building Resilience

Fortunately, ACEs can be prevented. With the help of our community and other surrounding organizations, we can mitigate the harmful effects of adverse experiences among youth by working together to increase protective factors, thus ensuring our children thrive and succeed in Sussex County. Check out the community resources below to help address child maltreatment here in Sussex County.



*The Sussex County Prevention Hub is a one stop shop for local resources, toolkits, and prevention programs. The Prevention Hub's goals are to **support the members of our community** by providing a direct link to evidence-based support services, educational programs and resources for all sectors.*

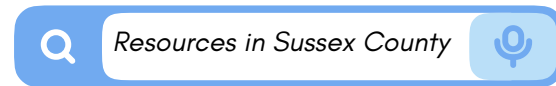
[Learn more here!](#)

“

Nine times out of 10, the story behind the misbehavior won't make you angry, it will break your heart.”

-Annette Breaux

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Website: www.ginnieshouse.org
Phone Number: (973) 579-0770

Website: www.dasi.org
Phone Number: (973) 300-5609



Website: www.projectsselfsufficiency.org
Phone Number: (973) 940-3500

Website: www.centerforprevention.org
Phone Number: (973) 383-4787



Working as a community to address Adverse Childhood Experiences can improve the overall health and wellness of the youth who live and play among us. Join us throughout this six-part series as we dive deeper into Adverse Childhood Experiences and what we can do as a community to reduce toxic stress throughout our children's lives.

Toolkits and Education for Success is a six part series.

For additional information regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), 40 Developmental Assets, or other prevention programming within Sussex County, contact Michaela McKernan at michaela@centerforprevention.org. We would love to hear from you! **[Click here](#)** to join our ACEs Toolkits and Education for Success distribution list to receive news and updates regarding future toolkits and resources.

End Notes

1. <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/documents/NJ.ACEs.Action.Plan.2021.pdf>
2. <https://aces-report.burkefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-NJ-ACEs-Opportunities-Report.pdf>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28865665/>
5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4928741/#:~:text=Toxic%20stress%20results%20in%20prolonged,%2C%20reassurance%2C%20or%20emotional%20attachments.> Franke H. A. (2014). Toxic Stress: Effects, Prevention and Treatment. *Children (Basel, Switzerland)*, 1(3), 390–402. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children1030390>
6. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingACES.pdf>
7. <https://www.acesaware.org/ace-fundamentals/the-science-of-aces-toxic-stress/>
8. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces/index.html>
9. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>
10. <https://www.ncsl.org/health/adverse-childhood-experiences>
11. <https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2-What-is-Toxic-Stress-English.pdf>
12. <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/polaris/healthtopics/ace/index.html#:~:text=ACEs%20are%20costly.,t> o%20ACEs%2C%20was%20%24428%20billion.
13. <https://www.springboardmd.org/adverse-childhood-experiences-interface-training/>



The Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency in Newton, NJ. Our mission, since 1973, has been to promote hope, health, and recovery among all people by creating an environment that is safe and free from the effects of substance use and addiction. The Center provides substance use prevention, evaluation, counseling, and recovery support services to Sussex County children, teens, adults, and families regardless of cultural background, socioeconomic status, age, gender, or sexual orientation. www.centerforprevention.org



The Office of Resilience was created in June 2020, led by an executive on loan which is funded by the New Jersey ACEs Collaborative, an alliance of three NJ philanthropic organizations, the Burke Foundation, The Nicholson Foundation and the Turrell Fund, in partnership with the NJ Department of Children and Families. The purpose of the office is to host, coordinate and facilitate statewide initiatives related to raising awareness of and creating opportunities to eradicate Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, through grassroots and community-led efforts, technical assistance, and strategic support for organizations already pursuing this work.



CUMAC's mission is to fight hunger, and its root causes through a holistic, trauma-informed approach that provides fresh and healthy groceries and basic necessities to low- and moderate-income individuals and families who need them. CUMAC's and its Trauma-Informed Community Building (TICB) strategy aims to combat inequitable systems that perpetuate hunger and poverty by providing individuals and families with the power they need to secure vital resources, including jobs, housing, food, healthcare, and other supportive services. By providing resources and referrals to supportive services for our guests through sustainable community partnerships, CUMAC decreases barriers to accessing services, and the amount of toxic stress guests face. Reducing toxic stress in combination with supportive services is a vital part of our restorative process that builds on the existing resiliency of guests, decreases the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and breaks the cycle of poverty.