

What are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)?

ACEs are traumatic or stressful experiences that affect human development and were investigated in a landmark study called “The ACE Study”. ACEs include the following categories (ACE Study prevalence):

1. Physical abuse (28%)
2. Sexual abuse (21%)
3. Emotional abuse (11%)
4. Physical neglect (10%)
5. Emotional neglect (15%)
6. Incarceration of a family member (6%)
7. Having an alcoholic or drug addicted care giver (27%)
8. Being exposed to violence against a parent (13%)
9. Having a suicidal, depressed or mentally ill person in the home (17%)
10. Being exposed to parental conflict, as indicated by parent separation or divorce (23%)

ACE Score

Accumulation of ACE categories matters. Scientists studied accumulation by creating an ACE Score: each category experienced before the 18th birthday counts one point. ACE scores range from 0 to 10. Higher ACE Scores in a population predict higher rates of problems, as well as greater numbers of co-occurring problems.

The ACE Study

- Very large study (Over 17,000 participants); findings can be generalized to our population.
- Impressive study quality; over 100 peer-reviewed journal articles; now replicated world-wide.
- Revealed the common drivers of population health and wellbeing; ACEs are the most powerful determinant of public health.

ACEs are common.

Why are ACEs important?

1. ACEs are the most powerful determinant of public health and social functioning.
2. Findings from The ACE Study create a powerful framework for making dramatic improvements to health, education, workforce, justice, and family and community wellbeing.
3. ACEs affect childhood brain development and the expression of genetic code. Adversity and trauma cause a biological stress response in the body; that response sculpts the brain as we develop and causes adaptations that help the species survive in dangerous times. But those same adaptations can have a down side for health across the life course.

ACEs are highly interrelated; most people who experienced one category of ACE, also experienced others.

Lower ACE Scores reliably predicts lower rates and costs of health, social, and productivity problems.

What is the Promise of ACE Prevention?

The figure at the right shows (with the darkened area in the center) the percent of each of the problems that is caused by ACEs. As we lower ACE Scores in the next generation, we will reduce all of these problems concurrently. We are the first generation with this information – with the power to change the trajectory of public health and wellbeing.

