



## **Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Recent work in child development and neuroscience increasingly suggests that children require safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments to thrive. Evidence shows that stress and trauma, especially when prolonged, can interrupt healthy child development, putting them at risk for lifelong health issues.

**HOW CAN WE GO FROM THE INNOCENCE OF A BABY TO A LIFE OF SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?**





## WHAT ARE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)?

Childhood trauma and adversity, such as **ACEs**, including abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence in the home or community, can lead to **toxic stress**, prolonged or excessive activation of the stress response system.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF ACES

Researchers have identified how high-stress levels **and trauma can change a child's brain chemistry**, brain architecture, and even gene expression. While nearly everyone experiences stress at some point, chronic stress sustained over time can damage the body and the brain, especially for children, because early childhood is critical for development.

Toxic stress interferes with developing healthy neural, immune, and hormonal systems and can alter our DNA expression. Over time, multiple ACEs—especially without adequate adult support—can affect the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems and have lasting effects on attention, behavior, decision-making, and response to stress throughout a lifetime.

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There are decades of research linking ACEs to an increased risk of developing chronic diseases and behavioral challenges, including obesity, autoimmune disease, diabetes, heart disease, poor mental health, alcoholism, and even reduced life expectancy by as much as 20 years.

Multiple ACEs also put individuals at a **greater risk** for adverse outcomes, including poor school performance, unemployment, and the development of high-risk health behaviors, such as smoking and drug use. New **research** has also uncovered a correlation between ACEs and an increased risk for prescription opioid misuse.<sup>i</sup>

### **Additional Resources on ACES**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_life\\_time?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_life_time?language=en)

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<sup>i</sup> [https://preventchildabuse.org/latest-activity/long-term-effects-of-child-abuse-and-neglect/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI4d2SiY678wIVTZyzCh0Cag4FEAAyAAEgJd4fD\\_BwE](https://preventchildabuse.org/latest-activity/long-term-effects-of-child-abuse-and-neglect/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI4d2SiY678wIVTZyzCh0Cag4FEAAyAAEgJd4fD_BwE)