

# What are ACEs and Why Do They Matter?



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful events in a child or adolescent's life. They are very common, and most Americans have at least one. ACEs can happen to anyone and may have lasting effects on health.

## Types of ACEs

ACEs include experiences like abuse, neglect, and other major stressors such as divorce, a parent's substance abuse, or witnessing violence in the home. Listed below are 10 ACEs that are linked to a child's current and future health. Other kinds of difficulty, including community violence, bullying, and poverty, can also lead to health issues without the right support.

## Exposure to ACEs may cause harm

Children have both good and bad experiences, and both can affect their health. Science shows that negative experiences can have long-term effects on children's brains and bodies. Stress from an ACE is different than the everyday stress that all children experience. This type of stress can lead to health problems such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease. It can also affect behavior, learning, and mental health.

## What do ACEs mean for you and your child?

A higher number of ACEs can mean a higher risk of health problems. Your child's primary care provider may ask about your child's ACEs. Your provider can use this information to guide medical decisions, improve your child's care, and connect you to helpful services.



Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2013

## The Good News

ACEs increase risk, but they don't have to lead to health problems. When adults consistently care for children and offer support, kids feel safe and secure. They trust their caregivers will lovingly meet their needs. This feeling of security is good for their brains and bodies. Other positive lifestyle factors for your child include eating healthy food, getting regular exercise, getting a good night's sleep, practicing mindfulness, and getting mental health support when needed. Together, all of these important things can help turn the stress response down and can reduce the potential negative effects of ACEs.

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