











Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Children's Wellbeing

As a parent, you can help to identify and provide the right support to help your child adapt to big challenges and adversities. Providing the right support at an early age will help your child to reach their full potential and thrive.

What are ACEs?

The term Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is used to describe stressful events or circumstances that children may experience throughout their childhood. The term comes from a study that was conducted in the United States in the 1980's that found a significant link between a person's exposure to ACEs and their physical and mental health throughout their lives. It found that the more ACEs a person has experienced, the greater the risk of them experiencing a range of issues such as chronic disease, depression and anxiety throughout their lifetime.

The original ACEs that were recorded are detailed below:

ABUSE	NEGLECT	HOUSEHOLD CHALLENGES	
 Physical	 Physical	 Mental illness	 Incarcerated relative
 Emotional	 Emotional	 Mother treated violently	 Substance abuse
 Sexual		 Divorce	<small>*Adapted from the 'original ACEs' graphic. Source: Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation</small>

Additional ACEs can also have a significant impact on children and families. They include:

- loss of a parent or caregiver due to death, or separation due to deportation or immigration
- living in out-of-home-care, such as foster care or kinship care
- experiencing harassment, bullying, racism, prejudice or other forms of discrimination
- having a serious medical procedure or life-threatening illness
- community violence.

Why is it helpful to know and talk about ACEs?

All families experience stressful events at times, such as grief, loss, parent separation or divorce and even violence. Knowing about ACEs can help you to identify and provide the support your child needs to adapt to these kinds of big challenges. With the right support at an early age, it is possible for children to reach their full potential and thrive, even if they have experienced multiple ACEs and difficult social circumstances.

As adults we all have our own experiences of adversity from childhood or other stages in our lives. We bring these experiences into our parenting, for better and at times, for worse. Understanding the impact of exposure to ACEs on ourselves, and on our children, can help ensure that our children can thrive despite adversity.

Whilst ACEs are challenging to experience, there is a lot we can do as parents and community members to buffer their negative effects. Just knowing a little about what ACEs are, and how they can impact kids is a great start.

This resource was co-produced with:



The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (NWC) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program. The NWC is led by Emerging Minds and is delivered in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), the Parenting Research Centre (PRC), the Australian National University (ANU) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP).

Visit our web hub today!

**Emerging
minds.
com.au**

January, 2020

Knowing and talking about ACEs can help you:

- strengthen your relationship with your child
- make sense of behaviours that you see in your child
- understand how your experiences as a child may influence your parenting
- break free from cycles of trauma and help your child live a healthier life
- support resilience in the face of adversity.

The importance of relationship

Parenting is the hardest job you will ever have and difficult social circumstances or inequalities can make the job even harder. Even in the best of circumstances it is often hard to know how to best help your child. There is no training manual for being a parent but we do know from research that by far the most protective and influential factor in a child's life is safe, caring and supportive relationships. Nurturing and loving relationships form the basis of all learning and even how a child's brain develops. Within this safe relationship, you can help your child develop the skills and responses needed to adapt to the big challenges life can bring.



What can help?

It has been shown that just one positive caring relationship can have a big impact on a child's healing and recovery from stressful life events.



Many adults who experience significant adversity in their childhood have gone on to have amazing lives full of adventures, achievements and happy relationships. These adults have identified that this resilience was helped from having at least one caring relationship in their life. It could be one person, or a number of different people – a parent, sibling, relative, teacher, librarian, neighbour or coach. This caring relationship gave them:

- an emotionally supportive person in their life...
someone they could lean on
- someone who saw them as unique and interesting...
someone who was interested in them
- someone who supported their ideas or dreams...
someone who believed in them

Ways you can strengthen your relationship with your child:

- Make time for play: even five minutes a day can make a huge difference to a child.
- Praise your child for things you notice about them and what they do – this builds self-esteem.
- Learn skills together – like naming feelings or slow breathing – so you can support each other to use them when needed.

For more information about how to support children who have experienced ACEs, visit:

www.emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/adverse-childhood-experiences-toolkit

This resource was co-produced with:



The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (NWC) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program. The NWC is led by Emerging Minds and is delivered in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), the Parenting Research Centre (PRC), the Australian National University (ANU) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP).

Visit our web hub today!

**Emerging
minds.
com.au**

January, 2020