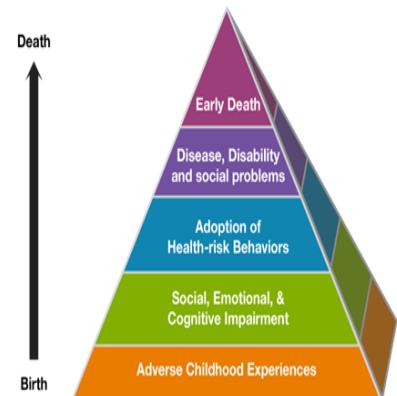


ACEs – What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

The term Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is used to describe a wide range of stressful or traumatic experiences that children can be exposed to whilst growing up. ACEs range from experiences that directly harm a child (such as suffering physical, verbal or sexual abuse, and physical or emotional neglect) to those that affect the environment in which a child grows up (including parental separation, domestic violence, mental illness, alcohol abuse, drug use or incarceration).

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How common are ACEs?

ACEs are unfortunately all too common. The figures below are from the English ACE's population study (18-69 year olds)

- 53% Had experienced 0 ACEs
- 23% Had experienced 1 ACE
- 15% Had experienced 2-3 ACEs
- 9% Had experienced 4+ ACEs

[The original ACEs study](#), which was conducted in the USA, found that around two thirds (64%) of the 17,000 individuals included in the study reported at least one ACE, with over a quarter (26%) suffering physical abuse and a fifth experiencing some form of sexual abuse. Around one in eight individuals (13%) had experienced four or more ACEs



What impact can ACEs have?

When exposed to stressful situations, the "fight, flight or freeze" response floods our brain with corticotrophin-releasing hormones (CRH), which usually forms part of a normal and protective response that subsides once the stressful situation passes. However, when repeatedly exposed to ACEs, CRH is continually produced by the brain, which results in the child remaining permanently in this heightened state of alert and unable to return to their natural relaxed and recovered state. Children and young people who are exposed to ACEs therefore have increased – and sustained - levels of stress. In this heightened neurological state a young person is unable to think rationally and it is physiologically impossible for them to learn.

ACEs can therefore have a negative impact on development in childhood and this can in turn give rise to harmful behaviours, social issues and health problems in adulthood. There is now a great deal of research demonstrating that ACEs can negatively affect lifelong mental and physical health by disrupting brain and organ development and by damaging the body's system for defending against diseases. The more ACEs a child experiences, the greater the chance of health and/or social problems in later life.

ACEs research shows that there is a strong relationship between ACEs and poor physical and mental health, chronic disease (such as type II diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; heart disease; cancer), increased levels of violence, and lower academic success both in childhood and adulthood

Evidence from recent ACEs research showed that there was increased risk (adjusted odds ratio) of having health and social problems in adulthood for those individuals who had experienced 4+ ACEs, compared to those with no ACEs. Individuals with 4 or more ACEs were:

- 4.5 times more likely to have become pregnant or got somebody pregnant under 18 years of age
- 30.6 times more likely to have had a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- 1.8 times more likely to be morbidly obese
- 2.3 times more likely to have liver or digestive disease
- 1.5 times more likely to have stayed overnight in hospital in the last 12 months
- 3.7 times more likely to a regular heavy drinker
- 3.9 times more likely to be a current smoker
- 9.7 times more likely to be a heroin or crack user
- 5.2 times more likely to have been hit in the last 12 months
- 7.9 times more likely to have hit someone in the last 12 months
- 8.8 times more likely to have been in prison or cells

What are the protective factors

Personal, structural and environmental factors that are protective include:



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