

Adverse Childhood Experiences
Impact and Intervention in Work
with Child Clients

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F * * K
THIS,
F * * K
THAT

Swearing

Hitting

Kicking

Spitting

Throwing

Threatening

Harassing

Lying

Stealing

Bullying

Disrupting

Absconding

Rule violation

Property damage

Unsafe behavior

Manipulating

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WE
HAVE
TO
STOP
BLAMING
CHILDREN

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Paradigm shift

Communication &
connection

Case strategy

... for their own trauma: for actions that are the result of circumstances over which they have no control.

ACEs STUDY



- Original ACEs study: Kaiser Permanente 1995-1997.
- 17,337 participants.
- One of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect & household dysfunction & later-life health & well-being.



The QUESTIONNAIRE

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire

Finding your ACE Score ra hbr 10 24 06

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often** ...
Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?
or
Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often** ...
Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?
or
Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you **ever**...
Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
or
Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
4. Did you **often** feel that ...
No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?
or
Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
5. Did you **often** feel that ...
You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?
or
Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
6. Were your parents **ever** separated or divorced?
If yes enter 1 _____
7. Was your mother or stepmother:
Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?
or
Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?
or
Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____
10. Did a household member go to prison?
Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

Now add up your "Yes" answers: _____ This is your ACE Score

ABUSE

Emotional abuse: A parent, stepparent, or adult living in your home swore at you, insulted you, put you down, or acted in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt.

Physical abuse: A parent, stepparent, or adult living in your home pushed, grabbed, slapped, threw something at you, or hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured.

Sexual abuse: An adult, relative, family friend, or stranger who was at least 5 years older than you ever touched or fondled your body in a sexual way, made you touch his/her body in a sexual way, attempted to have any type of sexual intercourse with you.

NEGLECT

Emotional neglect: Someone in your family never or rarely helped you feel important or special, you never or rarely felt loved, people in your family never or rarely looked out for each other and felt close to each other, or your family was never or rarely a source of strength and support.

Physical neglect: There was never or rarely someone to take care of you, protect you, or take you to the doctor if you needed it, you didn't have enough to eat, your parents were too drunk or too high to take care of you, or you had to wear dirty clothes.

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

Mother treated violently: Your mother or stepmother was pushed, grabbed, slapped, kicked, bitten, had something thrown at her, was hit with a fist, hit with something hard, or repeatedly hit for over at least a few minutes, or ever threatened or hurt by a knife or gun by your father (or stepfather) or mother's boyfriend.

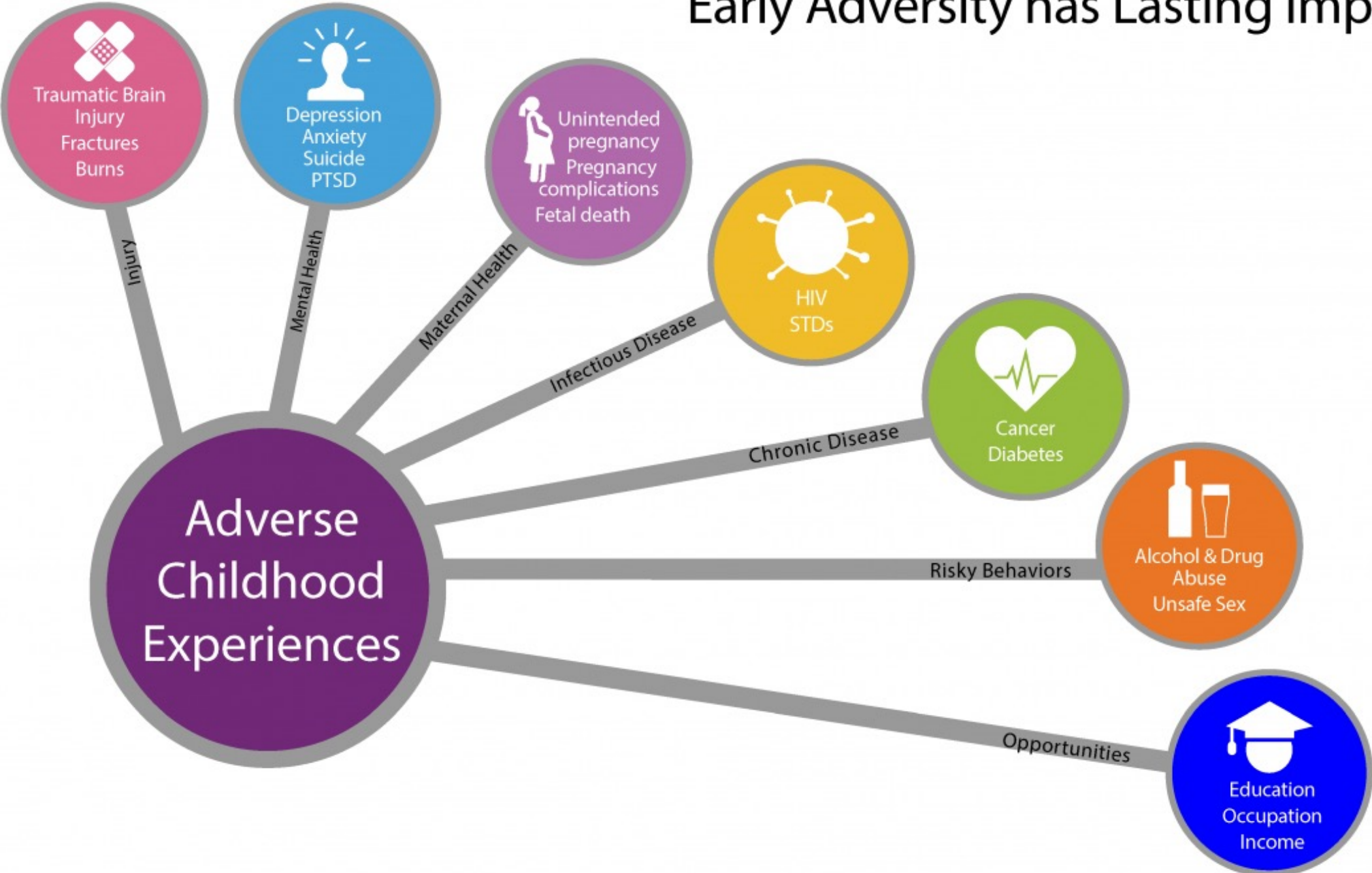
Substance abuse in the household: A household member was a problem drinker or alcoholic or a household member used street drugs.

Mental illness in the household: A household member was depressed or mentally ill or a household member attempted suicide.

Parental separation or divorce: Your parents were ever separated or divorced.

Incarcerated household member: A household member went to prison.

Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts



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STATS

1 in 6 = 4+ ACEs

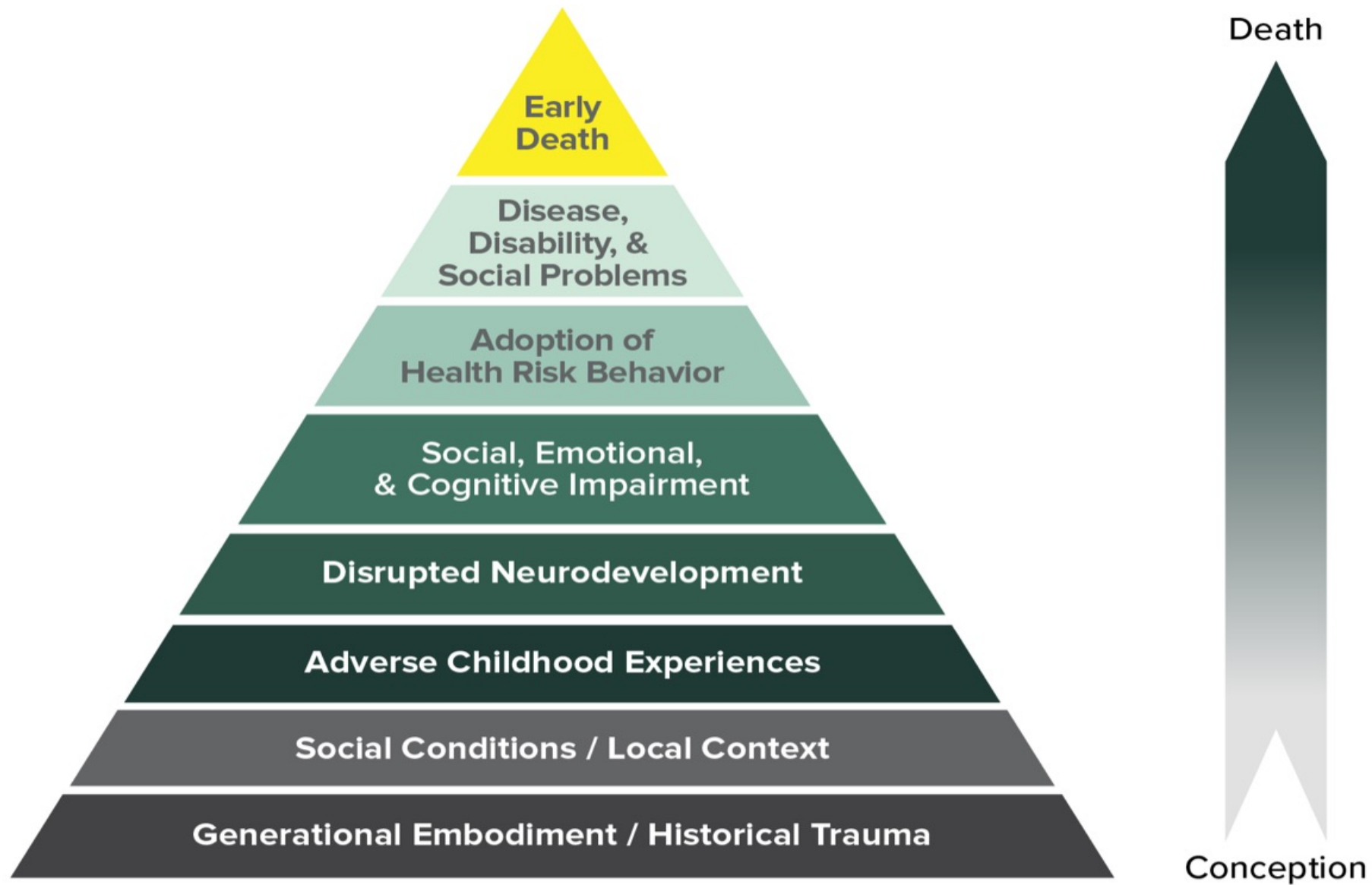
Dose response relationship
between ACEs score and bad
outcomes

If 4+ ACEs:

- 2x more likely to be obese
- 4¹/₂x more likely to have depression
- 12x more likely to experience suicidality
- 32.6x more likely to have been diagnosed with learning and behavioral problems.

If 6+ ACEs:

- Life expectancy is **20 years shorter** than for people with no ACEs.



Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

CAUSATION



Nadine Burke Harris: TedMed
Talk 2014

https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime

6:21 – 9:22

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TOXIC STRESS

Dysregulated stress response: When the stress response is activated too frequently or if the stressor is too intense, the body will continue to blast cortisol through the body.

Toxic stress: “Chronic dysregulation of the stress-response system, which inhibit[s] the prefrontal cortex, overstimulates the amygdala, and short-circuit[s] the stress thermostat.”

Toxic stress disrupts the stress response.

Early adversity activates the brain pathways that are associated with **vigilance, poor impulse control, increased fear, and inhibition of executive functioning.**

When the amygdala is repeatedly triggered by chronic stressors, it becomes overactive, and what we see is an **exaggerated response to a threatening stimulus.** An over-triggered amygdala will start sending false alarms to other parts of the brain.

Prefrontal cortex: confers faculties of reason, judgment, planning, and decision-making – the seat of executive functioning, which is **the ability to differentiate among conflicting thoughts and inputs, consider future consequences of current activities, work toward a defined goal, and exhibit “social control.”**

For kids with toxic stress, the activity of the prefrontal cortex is inhibited in two ways: First, the overactive amygdala sends messages to the PFC **telling it to decrease its function.** Second, the locus coeruleus floods the brain with noradrenaline, **compromising the ability to override impulses and instincts.**

Why does ACEs matter?

More than 80% of juvenile justice-involved youth report experiencing trauma... This exposure places them at risk for emotional, behavioral, developmental, and legal problems.

Unresolved posttraumatic stress symptoms can lead to serious long-term consequences across the entire lifespan, such as problems with interpersonal relationships; cognitive functioning; and mental health disorders including PTSD, substance abuse, anxiety, disordered eating, depression, self-injury, and conduct problems—all of which can increase the likelihood of involvement in delinquency, crime, and the justice system. *NCTSN.*

Additional research shows that “90 percent of juvenile offenders in the United States [have experienced] some sort of traumatic event in childhood, and up to 30 percent of justice-involved American youth...meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder due to trauma experienced during childhood.” *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Crime (FBI, 2019)*.


Compared to their non-delinquent peers, youth involved in the juvenile justice system tend to have higher rates of early adverse experiences such as child maltreatment, community violence, and loss. Like their peers involved with dependency court, nearly all youth who enter the juvenile justice system have histories of exposure to trauma, with many justice-involved youth reporting exposure to chronic trauma **across childhood and adolescence.** *Assessing Trauma for Juvenile and Family Court Judges: From Development to Implementation, 2013-2017.*

POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES





EXAMPLES

- Counseling (CBT-TI; DBT)
 - Executive functioning skill builders
 - Big Brother Big Sister
 - Call lists
 - School/community sports
 - Religious or civic involvement
 - Equine therapy
 - Teen centers
 - Sleep apps
 - Homeopathic sleep aids
 - Necessities: food, clothing, WiFi
 - Parenting education
 - Financial assistance
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CHANGE THE PARADIGM

Paradigm shift

- From “what is wrong with you?” to “what has happened to you?”
- From what the child needs to change to what changes the **adults** can make
- Understand the behavior that has served the child: helped them cope, helped them get their needs met, protected them
- Unconditional positive regard
- Focus on the child’s strengths

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FLIP THE SCRIPT

Communication & connection

- Thinking about the language you use will help build trust
- Talking about the case: “How did that make you feel in your body”?
- Language: “Emotional/behavioral dysregulation,” not “behaviors”
- Not an adult criminal legal process
- What “trauma” means to kids
- State rules on reporting. Talk with lawyer on case.
- See your role through their eyes

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TURN THE SHIP

Case strategy

- Review the case with an eye toward assessing ACEs impact
- Mens rea defense
- Expert for adjudication, mitigation
- ADHD/ODD, or PTSD or unspecified trauma or stressor-related disorder?
- Protective-factor supports

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Resources

ACES score sheet: <https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ACE-Questionnaire-for-Adults-Identified-English-rev.7.26.22.pdf> ;
<https://www.theannainstitute.org/Finding%20Your%20ACE%20Score.pdf>

Nadine Burke Harris TedMed Talk:
https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime

<https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/adverse-childhood-experiences-and-crime>

<https://wwdemonatrat.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>

https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/NCJFCJ_Assessing_Trauma_Final.pdf

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Resources

NCTSN: <https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/trauma-informed-systems/justice/essential-elements>

Set of resources from the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-executive-function/>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/video-building-core-capabilities-life/>

<https://harvardcenter.wpeninepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Activities-for-Adolescents.pdf>

Animated series on trauma is targeted at a child audience: <https://www.youtube.com/c/ConnectOurKids>; https://www.youtube.com/@all_connected

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Resources

Positive childhood experiences:

<https://www.acesaware.org/ace-fundamentals/principles-of-trauma-informed-care/>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/recognizing-and-treating-child-traumatic-stress#treatment>

<https://www.acesaware.org/ace-fundamentals/clinical-assessment-and-treatment/>

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//effective_treatments_youth_trauma.pdf