

Childhood Trauma: Understand and Minimize the Impact

God has wired us as relational beings made in the image of a triune God. As mammals, nurturing parents are not only needed for survival but for optimal brain and social-emotional development.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire*

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? 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? 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? 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? 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? 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? If yes, enter 1 _____
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs? If yes, enter 1 _____
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide? If yes, enter 1 _____
10. Did a household member go to prison? If yes, enter 1 _____

Now add up your "Yes" answers to find your ACE Score: _____

Almost two-thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE, and more than one in five reported three or more ACEs. As the number of ACEs increase, so does the intensity of risk for the following and more:

- Alcoholism and drug use
- Financial stress
- Depression
- Obesity
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Autoimmune disease
- Poor work performance
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Suicide attempts
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Poor academic achievement
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

ACE studies have also shown that:

- ACEs are the best predictor of health, school attendance and behavior
- Educational success is more related to ACEs than income
- The risk of heart attack is greater if you have 3 ACEs than if you smoked 2 packs of cigarettes a day

All 10 ACEs are indicators of relational traumas – traumas occurring in the context of and to the nature of relationships. Notice that some items don't even measure what happened to the child directly, but what happened to his or her parents, such as in the case of depression or drug use. Such events result in the disruption of human connection and attachment, which is particularly detrimental to young children whose brains have not yet fully developed. The lack of nurture and prolonged fear/anxiety flood the body with stress hormones and negatively impact brain development leading to social, emotional and cognitive impairment. For a fuller report, see the CDC website: [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/cestudy](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/cestudy/).

What can we do as caregivers?

The good news is that when children who experienced 4 or more ACEs said, “As a child, there was an adult I trusted and could talk to about my problems,” it reduced the risks of negative outcomes by half. Relationships heal relational trauma! And we have a relational God who loves and cares for us. So, you can:

- Be that caring, nurturing adult to a child with ACEs
- Prevent ACEs by fostering and keeping intact safe, stable, and nurturing relationships
- Provide social support and parent training for families
- As you love them well, lead them to experience the comfort and safety of a loving Heavenly Father

*The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire is a 10-item self-report measure developed by the CDC and Kaiser Permanente ACE study, linking childhood experiences of abuse and neglect and later-life health and well-being.