

ACEs SCORE: WHAT IT MEANS AND HOW YOU CAN HELP

Information included in Epic well-child visit after visit summary

This handout is given to parents/caregivers who would like more information about their child's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) score. ACEs are common and most Americans have at least one. This handout helps you learn about factors that can affect ACEs scores and ways to help lower the impact of stress in a child's life.

What are the effects of a high ACEs score?

A child with a high ACEs score is at an increased risk of health and behavior issues, developmental delays, and difficulty learning. A high ACEs score does not mean that the child will definitely have these problems, but it may mean they are more likely to have them.

Stress happens when children or teens experience something scary, troubling, or unsettling. ACEs or other highly stressful events cause some children get stuck in a "survivor brain", which can lead to negative changes in their health, behavior, mood, and ability to learn and grow. Children feel high stress when they are worried about their own safety or when their emotional and physical needs are not met.

What is an ACEs score?

Listed below are the 10 ACEs that research has shown affect a child's current and future health. Other sad, scary or bad events can also effect a child's health. For example, bullying, community violence, medical illness and loss of a close relative or friend.

The 10 ACEs are:

1. Physical abuse
2. Sexual abuse
3. Emotional abuse
4. Physical neglect
5. Emotional neglect
6. Parental separation or divorce
7. Violence in the home (domestic violence)
8. Household member who served time in jail or prison
9. Household member with depression or other mental illness
10. Household member who has a problem with drinking alcohol or using drugs

How can I help a child with a high ACEs score?

There are lots of things that adults can do to help build a child's resiliency and lower the impact of ACEs in their life. You play an important role in helping your child. Here are some things that you can do:

- **Comfort, encourage, and provide love.**

Children need to feel loved and a sense of belonging. Safe and caring relationships are some of the biggest factors that can improve your child's emotional and physical health.

- **Create a safe home setting.**
Making your home setting secure and safe will allow children to learn and grow. Talk to your child's healthcare provider about ways to help keep your home safe.
- **Create routines and predictability.**
Children thrive when they know what to expect. Pick a time to read a book with your child every day. Go to bed at the same time each night.
- **Spend quality time together.**
Play, explore, hug, sing, read, and do projects together. This will help to increase your child's self-esteem and improve their coping skills.
- **Boost new opportunities.**
Guide children through new opportunities. Offering praise and positive feedback as they learn new skills will help your child feel like they belong and are appreciated.
- **Work together to fix problems.**
Guide and support children as they learn to manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a healthy way. Model and coach the behaviors and skills you want your child to learn by showing them how to share, be kind, and use words to share feelings.
- **Talk about your feelings.**
It helps children to see how adults handle stress. Model talking about your own fears, feelings and needs so your child can see what it looks like to do this in a healthy way.
- **Take deep breaths.**
Teaching children mindfulness strategies early on can help them to focus, manage stress, and regulate emotions. One of these strategies is deep breathing. Practice taking slow, deep breaths with your child.
- **Self-care.**
Take care of yourself. We are all better parents and caregivers when we are rested, fed, and calm. Teach children how important self-care is.

Support for parents & caregivers

We know that it can be stressful to learn about your child's ACEs scores, and help them cope with challenges, and lower the stress in their lives. Please talk with us, or any member of your child's health care team, about any questions or concerns that you have. We can provide direct access to resources and professionals who can help families heal and thrive after stressful events.

- **Childhelp Hotline: 1-800-422-4453**
All parents and caregivers need support sometimes. Childhelp is dedicated to preventing child abuse. The hotline is confidential and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The hotline provides help in 170 languages. Their crisis counselors are trained to help when you are feeling frustrated or angry at your child.
- **Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-866-834-4357**
Domestic violence and intimate partner violence happens to so many people and their families. The hotline is confidential and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Their motto is "Love should not hurt."