

# CDC Vitalsigns™

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Preventing early trauma to improve adult health



Want to learn more?  
[www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces)

**1 in 6**

1 in 6 adults experienced four or more types of ACEs.

**5 of 10**

At least 5 of the top 10 leading causes of death are associated with ACEs.

**44%**

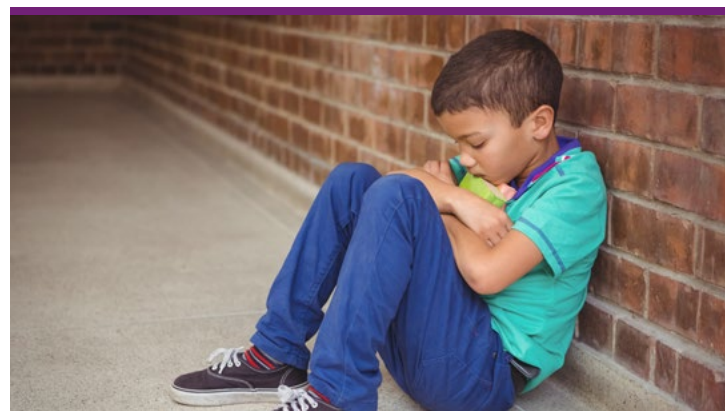
Preventing ACEs could reduce the number of adults with depression by as much as 44%.

### Overview:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. ACEs can include violence, abuse, and growing up in a family with mental health or substance use problems. Toxic stress from ACEs can change brain development and affect how the body responds to stress. ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. However, ACEs can be prevented.

### Preventing ACEs can help children and adults thrive and potentially:

- Lower risk for conditions like depression, asthma, cancer, and diabetes in adulthood.
- Reduce risky behaviors like smoking, and heavy drinking.
- Improve education and job potential.
- Stop ACEs from being passed from one generation to the next.



### PROBLEM:

## Adverse Childhood Experiences impact lifelong health and opportunities.

### ACEs are common and the effects can add up over time.

- 61% of adults had at least one ACE and 16% had 4 or more types of ACEs.
- Females and several racial/ethnic minority groups were at greater risk for experiencing 4 or more ACEs.
- Many people do not realize that exposure to ACEs is associated with increased risk for health problems across the lifespan.



**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

## Preventing ACEs could reduce a large number of health conditions.



UP TO

**21 MILLION**  
CASES OF  
DEPRESSION



UP TO

**1.9 MILLION**  
CASES OF  
HEART DISEASE

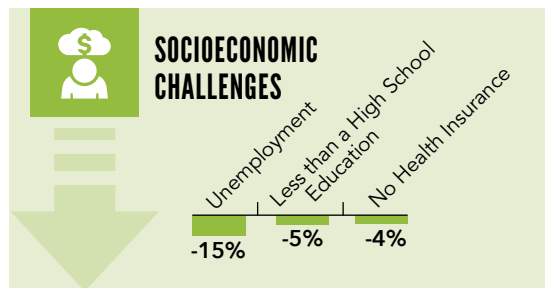
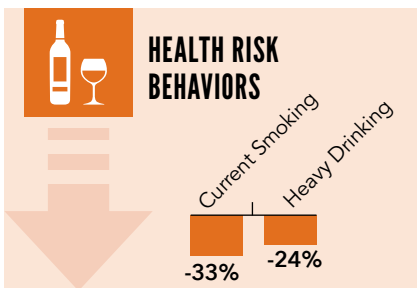
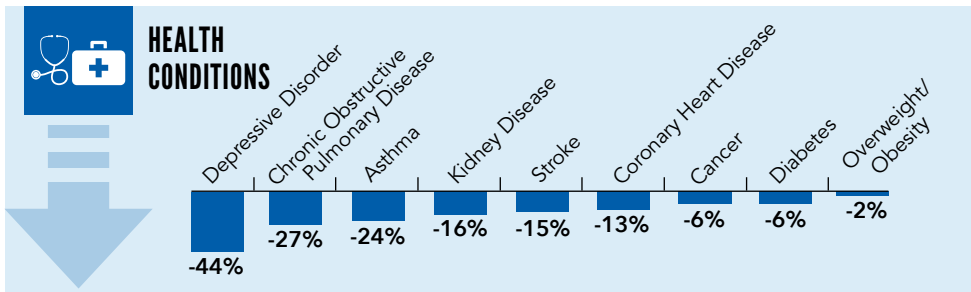


UP TO

**2.5 MILLION**  
CASES OF  
OVERWEIGHT/OBESITY

SOURCE: National Estimates based on 2017 BRFSS; Vital Signs, MMWR November 2019.

## Potential reduction of negative outcomes in adulthood



SOURCE: BRFSS 2015-2017, 25 states, CDC Vital Signs, November 2019.



## Raising awareness about ACEs can help:

- Change how people think about the causes of ACEs and who could help prevent them.
- Shift the focus from individual responsibility to community solutions.
- Reduce stigma around seeking help with parenting challenges or for substance misuse, depression, or suicidal thoughts.
- Promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments where children live, learn, and play.

## THE WAY FORWARD

### HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS CAN:

- Anticipate and recognize current risk for ACEs in children and history of ACEs in adults. Refer patients to effective services and support.
- Link adults to family-centered treatment approaches that include substance abuse treatment and parenting interventions.

### EMPLOYERS CAN:

- Adopt and support family-friendly policies, such as paid family leave and flexible work schedules.

### STATES AND COMMUNITIES CAN:

- Improve access to high-quality childcare by expanding eligibility, activities offered, and family involvement.
- Use effective social and economic supports that address financial hardship and other conditions that put families at risk for ACEs.
- Enhance connections to caring adults and increase parents' and youth skills to manage emotions and conflicts using approaches in schools and other settings.

### EVERYONE CAN:

- Recognize challenges that families face and offer support and encouragement to reduce stress.
- Support community programs and policies that provide safe and healthy conditions for all children and families.

<http://go.usa.gov/xVvqD>

### For more information

1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | Web: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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# WHY DO WE TALK ABOUT CHILDHOOD TRAUMA?

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white sleeveless top and a long black skirt, stands with her back to the camera in a vast, arid desert landscape. In the background, a large, conical pile of rubble or sand dominates the horizon under a clear sky. The ground is cracked and uneven, suggesting a harsh, desolate environment.

We can't change the past, so why are we focusing on it?

Every child you will meet in your cases will have already experienced the trauma of abuse or neglect, removal from their families, and placement in foster care. Why, then, must we spend time learning that childhood trauma can impact a person for life? It can feel frustrating to learn how important it is to prevent something that has already happened!

However, the life stories of these families are not yet complete.

Understanding the impacts of childhood trauma will provide you important insight into the behaviors and needs of children in foster care, allowing you to make good choices and recommendations that support their resilience and recovery moving forward. It will also help you make choices and recommendations that help prevent children from experiencing further trauma while in care.

We also have the opportunity to impact the lives of these children through their parents. Most of the parents you will meet at reviews are adults who have had adverse childhood experiences themselves and are now facing at least one of the negative life outcomes that those early experiences tend to predict. Understanding parents' behaviors and needs will allow you to make good choices and recommendations that support resilience and recovery for them too, and by extension, their families and their children.

And that has a lasting impact on the future for all of us.



## Finding Your ACE Score

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

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often or very 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 or very 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**  
Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?  
Yes                      No                      If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did you **often or very 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 or very 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?  
Yes                      No                      If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_
7. Was your mother or stepmother:  
**Often or very often** pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?  
**or**  
**Sometimes, often, or very often** kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?  
**or**  
**Ever** repeatedly hit 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.

Adapted from: [http://www.acestudy.org/files/ACE\\_Score\\_Calculator.pdf](http://www.acestudy.org/files/ACE_Score_Calculator.pdf), 092406RA4CR

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