



ACEs

(Adverse Childhood Experiences)*

are traumatic events that a person encounters before their 18th birthday.

1. Experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
2. Witnessing violence, abuse, or neglect
3. Family member attempting or committing suicide
4. Living in a household with someone with substance abuse issues
5. Living in a household with someone who struggles with mental health (depression, anxiety, etc.)
6. Instability due to parental separation
7. Food insecurity
8. Frequently moving to different living situations
9. Living in an under-resourced or racially segregated neighborhood

*CDC website:

https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facestudy%2Ffastfact.html

Your ACE "score" is on a scale of 1-10, based on how many of these factors you experienced before turning 18. Link to the ACE Quiz:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/media-coverage/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean/>

The higher your ACE score, the more likely you are to have chronic physical and mental health problems throughout your life. Above a 3

is considered high. The CDC website states that "ACEs can have lasting, negative effects on health, well-being, as well as life opportunities such as education and job potential. These experiences can increase the risks of **injury, sexually transmitted infections, maternal and child health problems** (including teen pregnancy, pregnancy complications, and fetal death), **involvement in sex trafficking, and a wide range of chronic diseases and leading causes of death such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and suicide.**"

As if that list isn't scary enough, "Toxic stress from ACEs can **change brain development** and affect such things as **attention, decision-making, learning, and response to stress.** Children growing up with toxic stress may have difficulty forming healthy and stable relationships. They may also have unstable work histories as adults and struggle with finances, jobs, and depression throughout life. These effects can also be passed on to their own children. Some children may face further exposure to toxic stress from historical and ongoing traumas due to systemic racism or the impacts of poverty resulting from limited educational and economic opportunities."

But here's the **good news**:

*Scientific studies have proven that, regardless of your ACE score, **you** have the ability*

*to address your ACEs and **reverse** these negative trends.*

Addressing your ACEs means paying attention to your own mental health and resisting the urge to push away or ignore feeling negative emotions. You **can** learn how to process your emotions & past traumas healthily. **It is possible to rewire your brain.** To learn more, please see LTK's "Youth Mental Health" handout, look around on our website: www.listentokids.org, and follow us on social media.

#hope

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