

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Public Health Brief

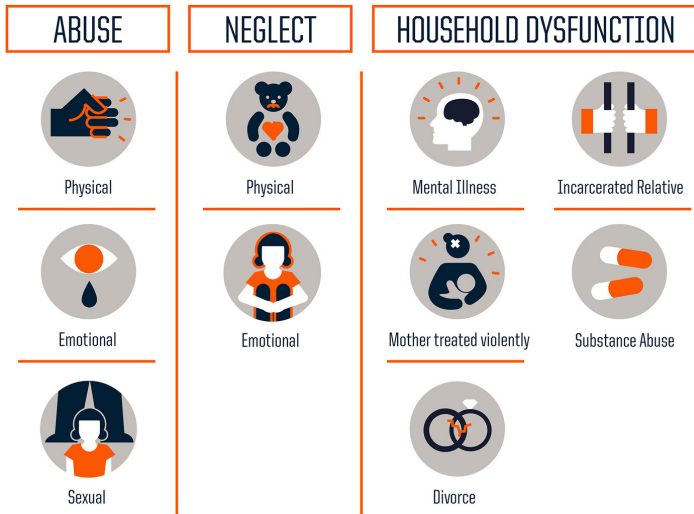
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What Are ACEs?

ACEs, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, are traumatic events that increase a person's risk for negative health outcomes. These experiences can include abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Such events trigger a stress-response that puts a tremendous burden on the child's developing brain and body. The effects are compounded when the child does not have access to a supportive adult to help them build resilience. The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely they are to be diagnosed with chronic diseases and behavioral health problems later in life. This is important because 64% of adults in the United States have experienced one or more ACEs in their childhood.

The Three Types of Aces Include



ACEs and Stress

Adverse Childhood Experiences can cause a great deal of stress for children. When this happens repeatedly, a biological reaction called toxic stress happens in the body. This long-lasting response strains the developing brain, immune system, metabolic regulatory systems, and cardiovascular system. Experiencing poverty, racism, and violence in the community all have a similar effect on the mind and body.

Harford County and Maryland Data (2015)*

	Harford	Maryland
0 ACEs	41.0%	40.2%
1 to 2 ACEs	32.0%	35.7%
3 to 8 ACEs	27.1%	24.1%
Household Mental Illness	20.5%	15.0%
Parental Separation or Divorce	29.2%	27.5%
Intimate Partner Violence	23.7%	17.4%
Emotional Abuse	36.1%	31.2%

Most Common ACEs in Harford County



How to Reduce the Impact of ACEs

Positive Relationships: The number one intervention for children with ACE's is having one positive adult relationship consistently in the child's life. Family members, pastors, teachers, and mentors can all be instrumental in helping a child navigate life and build resilience.

Trauma-Informed Care: Trauma-informed care should be used by social workers, first responders, educators, and medical staff that may have interactions with people dealing with toxic stress. This approach emphasizes awareness and empathy when handling an individual and can greatly reduce further stress in an unfamiliar environment.

ACE-Based Screening and Referral: A brief screening tool can be used to identify a person's ACE score and determine if treatment is appropriate. In this approach the level of care and potential benefits are variable and depend on the individual.

Prevention: Reducing stress, building responsive relationships, and strengthening life skills are strategies to prevent the long-term effects of ACEs. Each person is different in how they will respond to adversity and stress. Building resilience in children and teaching skills such as planning, focus, and self control are proven to improve mental and physical health throughout the life span.

Harford County Initiatives

1) Handle With Care Program: If a law enforcement officer encounters a child during a call, that child's information is forwarded to the school the next morning. Participating schools follow a model of individual, class, and whole school trauma-sensitive interventions.

2) Film Screenings: The films *Resilience & Paper Tigers* have been shown throughout the county to highlight the link between ACEs and the development of the child/adolescent brain.

3) Book/Materials Distributed: Over 50 books and materials focused on ACEs were distributed to the school system and public libraries.

*Sources: 2015 Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Maryland Department of Health 2013 The Truth About ACEs Infographic. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation