



ACE Talk with Family and Friends Handout

This handout provides guidance and examples to accompany the slide presentation, ACE Talk with Family and Friends. The presenter will explain the use of each section for talking with family and friends about ACEs.

Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire for Adults

Our relationships and experiences, even those in childhood, can affect our health and wellbeing. Difficult childhood experiences are very common. Please tell us whether you have had any of the experiences listed below, as they may be affecting your health today or may affect your health in the future. This information will help you and your provider better understand how to work together to support your health and well-being.

Instructions: Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). From the list below, please place a check mark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday. Then, please add up the number of categories of ACEs you experienced and put the total number at the bottom.

• Did you feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect or take care of you?	
• Did you lose a parent through a divorce, abandonment, death, or other reason?	
• Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide?	
• Did you live with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs, including prescription drugs?	
• Did your parents or adults in your home ever hit, punch, beat, or threaten to harm each other?	
• Did you live with anyone who went to jail or prison?	
• Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?	
• Did a parent or adult in your home ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way?	
• Did you feel no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?	
• Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling, or oral/ vaginal intercourse/ penetration)?	
Your ACE score is the total number of checked responses	

Do you believe that these experiences have affected your health? Not Much Some A Lot

Experiences in childhood are just one part of a person's life story. There are many ways to heal throughout one's life.

Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Edwards, Koss, & Marks. (1998), Screening Tools Overview

<https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Provider-Toolkit-Screening-Tools-Overview.pdf>



Resilience Questionnaire

Please mark the answer that is the most accurate for each statement.	Definitely true	Probably true	Not sure	Probably not true	Definitely not true
1) I believe that my mother loved me when I was little.					
2) I believe that my father loved me when I was little.					
3) When I was little, other people helped my mother and father take care of me and they seemed to love me.					
4) I've heard that when I was an infant, someone in my family enjoyed playing with me and I enjoyed it too.					
5) When I was a child there were relatives in my family who made me feel better if I was sad or worried.					
6) When I was a child, neighbors or my friends' parents seemed to like me.					
7) When I was a child, teachers, coaches, youth leaders, or ministers were there to help me.					
8) Someone in my family cared about how I was doing in school.					
9) My family, neighbors, and friends talked often about making our lives better.					
10) We had rules in our house and were expected to keep them.					
11) When I felt really bad. I could almost always find someone I trusted to talk to.					
12) As a youth, people noticed that I was capable and could get things done.					
13) I was independent and a go-getter.					
14) I believe that life is what you make it.					



Continued Resilience Questionnaire

How many of these 14 protective factors did I have as a child or youth? (How many of the 14 were marked “definitely true” or “probably true”?) _____

Of the 14 that I marked “definitely true” or “probably true”, how many are still true for me? _____

Karatekin & Hill. (2019), Expanded Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire. Adapted from ACEs Too High <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>

Conversation Starters

“What are your thoughts about what might be the source of these feelings/difficulties/patterns if you look back for a moment at your childhood and adolescence? What are some facts that may relate to it? I’m wondering if you could talk a bit more about that. You don’t need to share with me details about these facts, just some headlines of events (I don’t want to open up these memories for you) so I can understand how to be helpful.” (If needed, explain why you are asking not to share details: To avoid making you feel too overwhelmed by narrating and perhaps reliving these events without proper preparation, time, and place to do so)”

“It seems that these types of experiences can really stay with you. How does it impact your life today? What do you notice in yourself as you talk about it right now? (..) Here is some information that may help you better understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences/trauma/toxic stress/difficulties such as these. Would it be helpful if we go over it now to better understand how what happened to you may be affecting you in the ways you were describing?”

“It may not look like that at first, but some of the issues/problem behaviors you are describing may have developed as an attempt to adapt or cope with some life adversities/stress/difficulties that could have happened a long time ago. If you allow me, I would like to ask you some specific questions to understand a little bit more and if that’s the case, I will share with you some resources and referrals that can be helpful to you.”

“Do you see a link between what is happening now and the things that you are telling me that happened then? Would it be ok if we talk about it a little bit more?”

“What was going on around you or in your life at that time?”

“When you filled out this questionnaire you marked that you have been through some difficult things. Many people in our community have been through a lot” (if you feel ok, and it is true, you can say, even me/or even in my community or family). “Is it possible that there is a link between these past experiences and the present stressors you/your family are facing now?”

“What is the most important thing (related to these experiences) that I can help with?”



Using Informational Material

“Because of what your child/family/community has experienced, I am concerned that this may be contributing to some of the problems we have been discussing. Do you share my concern? Do you think differently? Let’s look at this information here...”

“ACEs are difficult or stressful times in our lives. There are some examples on this sheet. Is it ok if we go over it right now?”

“I am about to ask you some questions about your life from 0-18 y/o to know if you have experienced adversities growing up that may be affecting you and your family today. This information will help me to better help you right now. Please let me know if you would rather not answer these questions, but if you would like to proceed you can simply say yes or no and nothing else. You may share a few details if you would like.”

“Having a lot of stress over a long time, can contribute to these problems. Do you think this could be happening in your family? Are you comfortable talking about it for a moment?”

“I see that you are holding some of our fact sheets, is there anything there that speaks to you?”

Troubleshooting

“I have to pause you for a moment (debrief, explain why, use a tone of voice and manner for co-regulation: either energizes or calms the person down). After the person is calmer, you may say, “There is a safe way for you to share and reprocess these memories and manage the natural overwhelm that talking about it triggers. I would like to help you to connect with the resources available for that. For now, I can help you with....how does that sound to you?”

“I am noticing that when we started talking about...we lost the focus on...would it be ok if we pause for a moment and continue at another time/practice some deep breathing/grounding/ or switch to another very important topic we have to cover (lighting it up, something mild, or positive)?”

“How can I help you now? What needs to happen to help you feel more under control now? Let’s take some deep breaths together.”

“I can see this is a more complex topic and I am afraid we won’t have time to finish...would it be ok if we switch topics... Also, I want to make sure that when you finish, you are feeling well, and we end on a positive/hopeful note.”

“I can see now that I didn’t communicate well/didn’t give you clear instructions, etc. Would you allow me to reframe/try again please?”

* “You can just say yes or no in the questionnaire, and I will ask you not to share details with me yet; although this is very important information about you, I want to avoid your body re-experiencing the trauma all over again. I don’t want you to leave here feeling overwhelmed. We can do that at another time.”



TIPs: How to Introduce the ACEs Talk

- Use the same words used by the family/person to describe the situations
- “I will ask you not to tell me all the details now (explain why*)”
- Observe the person/family tolerance or readiness to talk about ACEs and pace yourself; decide if you should continue or not.
- It may be helpful to ask about parent’s ACEs and children’s ACEs
- Be purposeful about the the use of ACEs, PCEs, and resilience. Determine the need first, i.e., raising awareness, instilling hope, or giving comfort.
- Self-regulation: Create a balanced flow in the conversation that allows for recovery from more intense emotions and use positive engagement to reduce or distract from distress
- If you have time, use the Resilience Questionnaire or the PCEs after the ACEs talk
- Evaluate your own tolerance for certain topics and respect your limits
- Become aware of your own biases. Refrain from using judgmental or shameful comments if you have difficulty understanding certain behaviors as attempts to adapt and survive
- Give choices to recover their sense of control
- Debrief!
- Give advice only with permission and always start with: “would it be ok if I ask you to talk about...”
- Validate, recognize, respond, and affirm
- Facilitate referrals as needed