

The Effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Learning

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TOXIC STRESS

- ▶ Toxic stress refers to strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of the body's stress management system. Stressful events that are chronic, uncontrollable, and/or experienced without children having access to support from caring adults tend to provide these types of toxic stress responses. Studies indicate that toxic stress can have an adverse impact on brain architecture.
 - ▶ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2014), page 2

Possible causes of high stress

- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Immigration status
- ▶ Chronic stress
- ▶ Hostile parenting
- ▶ Low levels of emotional support from parents
- ▶ Repeated exposure to stressful life events (ACE)

Possible long term effects of high ACE scores

- ▶ Alcohol and drug abuse
- ▶ Self-injurious behavior
- ▶ Violence toward others
- ▶ Other criminal or antisocial behavior (stealing, drug dealing, etc.)
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Eating disorders
- ▶ Risky sexual behavior
- ▶ Obesity
- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Heightened risk of cancer

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- ▶ Take the test:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/03/02/387007941/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean>

Question #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?

Response to #1

- ▶ How do we help adults / parents / students communicate in a way that is positive, not sarcastic, realistic yet positive?
- ▶ How can we help monitor our physical presence in the classroom?
 - ▶ Non-threatening
 - ▶ Be aware of startle responses
 - ▶ Give warnings that you are approaching someone
 - ▶ Ask for permission to touch
 - ▶ Behavioral expectations in the classroom look like????

Question 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 has marks or were injured?

Responses to #2

- ▶ We are all mandated reporters...
- ▶ To whom, in your area do you report?
 - ▶ Police
 - ▶ Child protective services
 - ▶ THEN school administration
 - ▶ Who is your witness if you see marks and want to examine the child further?

Question 3

- ▶ Did any 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 to actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?

Responses to #3

- ▶ How are your touches perceived?
- ▶ How do we talk about sexuality in our classroom?
- ▶ Can we / should we touch a child?
- ▶ Where can we touch a child?
- ▶ Do we need to have permission to touch a child?
- ▶ Should we have a witness when we touch a child?

Question #4

- ▶ Did you often or very often feel that....
 - ▶ No one in your family love 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?

Responses to #4

- ▶ What can you do in your classroom to make each child feel special in a positive way?
- ▶ Think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs... how are you helping the student feel secure at those various levels
- ▶ What do your verbalizations and actions toward each student tell them about how you perceive them?
- ▶ What can you do to help students perceive themselves, as students in your classroom, feel special just because they are in your room?

Question #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?

Responses to #5

- ▶ Think again of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, what can you do, or your school, or church do to help meet some of these basic needs?
- ▶ Are there community agencies that your school can partner with to help meet the needs of the students?
- ▶ How do you access those community agencies?
- ▶ How does the student, or their family, access those community agencies?
- ▶ What facilities might you have in the school to help meet these needs?
 - ▶ Laundry
 - ▶ Showers
 - ▶ Extra food / clothing

Question #6

- ▶ Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

Responses to #6

- ▶ Can we assume that all parents are married?
- ▶ Do we assume that divorce or separation is necessarily bad / harmful?
- ▶ What language do we use when referring to a non-traditional family situation?
- ▶ Do we have a bias that we may not have addressed adequately?

Question #7

- ▶ Was your mother or stepmother:
 - ▶ Often or very often pushed, 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?

Responses to #7

- ▶ Can you even imagine these scenarios?
- ▶ What do you think this child is thinking about during school? - probably not your class
- ▶ Who can the child speak with in your school?
- ▶ How can we say ‘ I understand’ even though we really do not understand?
- ▶ How might we address violence in the classroom?

Question #8

- ▶ Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?

Responses to #8

- ▶ Given the state in which we live, do we have a different mindset about alcohol usage?
- ▶ What if the adult's profession is a dealer?
- ▶ Does it make a difference if the drugs are medicinal?
- ▶ What about over the counter medication or herbal medicine?
- ▶ How do we respond if the child is using and using at school?
- ▶ We are all mandated reporters remember?
- ▶ Which community agencies are available for education, prevention and intervention?
- ▶ How do we access those community agencies?

Question #9

- ▶ Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?

Response to #9

- ▶ Consider the stigma of mental illness and suicide
- ▶ Remember that 1 in 4 individuals can be identified as meeting criteria for a mental illness.....
- ▶ As Christians, how do we speak with students about suicide?
- ▶ Do we have any personal biases that we may need to deal with when discussing mental illness?
- ▶ Which community agencies can we access for support?
- ▶ Who in our schools has training and credentials / licensure to work with these students?

Question #10

- ▶ Did a household member go to prison?

Response to #10

- ▶ What was the charge?
- ▶ Is there a pattern to this behavior?
- ▶ How can we support the child to understand this separation?
- ▶ Is there anything in our classroom that can be perceived as ‘prison’?
- ▶ How can we help the student see other options to behavior which may lead to possible prison / detention in their future?
- ▶ What are our perceptions regarding prison?

Resilience

- ▶ Building stress - the ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even stress - can help our children manage stress and feelings of anxiety. However, being resilient does not mean that children won't experience difficulty or distress. Emotional pain and sadness are common when we have suffered major trauma or personal loss, or even when we hear of someone else's loss or trauma.
 - ▶ APA, Resilience Guide for Parents & Teachers (2018)
page 1

10 Tips for Building Resilience in Children and Teens

(APA, resilience guide)

- ▶ Make Connections
- ▶ Help your child by having him or her help others
- ▶ Maintain a daily routine
- ▶ Take a break
- ▶ Teach your child self-care
- ▶ Move toward your goals
- ▶ Nurture a positive self-view
- ▶ Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook
- ▶ Look for opportunities for self-discovery
- ▶ Accept that change is part of living

Resilience Guide for Parents

(psychcentral)

- ▶ Don't accommodate every need
- ▶ Avoid eliminating all risk
- ▶ Teach them to problem-solve
- ▶ Teach concrete skills
- ▶ Avoid 'why' questions
- ▶ Don't provide all the answers
- ▶ Avoid talking in catastrophic terms
- ▶ Let your kids make mistakes
- ▶ Help them manage their emotions
- ▶ Model resiliency

Things to consider.....

- ▶ Who are your support staff in the school (licensed in mental health)?
- ▶ Who are your support people in the community?
- ▶ What do you have in place regarding confidentiality?
- ▶ How do we communicate information that we may need to communicate? And to whom? How is this decided?
- ▶ What assumptions do we have in terms of appropriateness of behavior?
- ▶ Do we have a response team? Do we need one? Who should be on it?
- ▶ Each school is different, how can we be united in providing support, yet acknowledge the different needs
- ▶ What can we as individuals, as schools do to support coping and establish a growth model for all students?

Additional things to consider:

- ▶ Alternative Education programs?
 - ▶ PI 25
 - ▶ Children identified as 'at-risk' - what is procedure for that?
 - ▶ Children who 'fall between the cracks'
- ▶ Family resources in the community?
 - ▶ Boys and Girls Club
 - ▶ YMCA
 - ▶ Church activities
 - ▶ What else is available in your community?

Resources

- ▶ American Academics of Pediatrics (2014) Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Lifelong Consequences of Trauma
- ▶ American Psychological Association (2018) Resilience Guide for Parents & Teachers
- ▶ Barr, Donald, When trauma hinders learning. Kappaonline.org (V99 N6 March 2018)
- ▶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, About Adverse Childhood Experiences, Retrieved 4/10/2018
- ▶ Conscious Discipline (2018)
- ▶ Milwaukee Center for Independence (email June 30, 2018)
- ▶ <https://www.nationalregister.org/from-the-executive-offers-desk-adverse-childhood-experiences-and-immigration-policy> (retrieved 6-20-2018)
- ▶ Psychcentral.com (2018) 10 Tips for Raising Resilient Kids