

ACES Talking Points

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men" (Frederick Douglass, 1817-1895)

Intro to ACES

- **What are ACES?**
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences
 - Can include physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence.
 - Assessment: 10 question assessment created by the CDC and Kaiser Permanente to predict the health outcomes. (61% Black children, 51% Hispanic children, 40% of White children experience ACE's in the U.S. 3/5 adults have experienced at least 1 ACE in the state of Georgia)
 - Teachers can take the assessment and keep score to themselves. Link to PDF: <http://www.odmhsas.org/picis/TraningInfo/ACE.pdf>
 - Explanation: The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he/she/they to suffer from things like heart disease and diabetes, poor academic achievement, and substance abuse later in life.

**A PERSON WITH 4 OR MORE
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD
EXPERIENCES IS***

2.2 TIMES AS LIKELY TO HAVE ISCHEMIC HEART DISEASE

2.4 TIMES AS LIKELY TO HAVE A STROKE

1.9 TIMES AS LIKELY TO HAVE CANCER

1.6 TIMES AS LIKELY TO HAVE DIABETES



CENTER FOR
YOUTH WELLNESS
health begins with hope

*Vincent J. Felitti, et al., The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, 14 AMERICAN J. OF PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE 245 (1998).

Impact of ACEs on School Performance

Children with 3 or more ACEs are nearly 4 times (OR=3.66) more likely to have developmental delays

Children with 4 or more ACEs are 32 times more likely to have behavioral problems in school

Chamberlain, L. "Trauma-Informed Approach Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Building Resilient Communities." 2014.

- **Toxic Stress**

- Experiencing many ACEs along with systematic racism and poverty can lead to toxic stress.
- Toxic stress develops when the child does not have supportive adults in their life.
- Excessive amounts of toxic stress can damage the stress response system leading to wear and tear on the brain and body.
- Video on the biology of toxic stress:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4CD6jyWw2A>
 - excessive trauma can have children in constant fight or flight mode

- **Behavior in the Classroom**

- Children with 3 or more ACE scores are 5x more likely to have issues with attendance, 6x more likely to have behavior problems, and 3x more likely to experience academic failure
- Children act out because of trauma:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiKQYSiMx0>

- **Teacher Perspective**

- Why should we care?
 - Highlight how school is one system that is consistent in their life. It is essentially their second home.
- What's wrong with you vs What happened to you?
 - Punitive practices may be counterproductive

- **What can we do?**

- This approach is not about singling out students who have experienced adversity, but about shifting the culture, norms, and practices of an entire school to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.
- How can we help our students THRIVE

THRIVE: Teach, Help, Reduce, Intervene, Voice, Eliminate

- **Teach** students about mental health.
- **Help** build protective factors and resilience.
- **Reduce** risk factors
- **Intervene** to provide support
- **Voice** your concerns
- **Eliminate** barriers to student well-being

A Strategy To Help Our Students
Educators and school staff can help students **THRIVE!**

T **Teach** students about mental health.
Help students manage symptoms by educating peers and family members. Two-thirds of people with mental health disorders will not seek help for fear of being perceived as dangerous or unpredictable. Students educated on mental health issues are less likely to stigmatize those suffering from them.

H **Help** build protective factors and resilience.
Listen for students' social and emotional challenges. Encourage student leadership and agency. Maintain predictable routines and give time for transitions—both inside and outside the classroom.

R **Reduce** risk factors.
Set clear behavioral expectations and enforce them consistently. Involve students in creating these expectations. Facilitate positive relationships with peers and adults.

I **Intervene** to provide support.
Get to know the mental health professionals in your building or community. Ask for help when a student's needs exceed your expertise.

V **Voice** your concerns.
Inquire about learning mental health first aid to identify early warning signs. Communicate with administrators or school health professionals about concerns. Only a licensed mental health professional can make an official diagnosis.

E **Eliminate** barriers to student well-being.
With your union, advocate for professional development and workforce wellness programs that help all school personnel promote students' mental and emotional health and prevent educator compassion fatigue.

Website of images below: <https://www.aft.org/school-personnel-can-help-students-heal-trauma>

Childhood trauma
Changing minds:



School Personnel Can Help Students Heal from **Trauma**

Promote resilience and avoid re-traumatization
by understanding how violence
impacts child development.

NEGLECT

ABUSE

DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE



COMMUNITY
VIOLENCE

Traumatic events can impact children's brains, bodies, and
behaviors long after the events have occurred. To manage
the stress, children adopt coping mechanisms like:

AGGRESSION

LASHING
OUT

SELF
HARM

WITHDRAWING

AVOIDING
EYE
CONTACT



Adults in school settings are uniquely poised to support children, to avoid triggers that might re-traumatize them, and promote resiliency. By addressing trauma we can...



**INCREASE
READINESS
TO LEARN.**



**INCREASE
PROBLEM-SOLVING
ABILITY.**



**BUILD
SUPPORTIVE
CLASSROOM
COMMUNITIES.**

What can school personnel do?

Consider underlying causes of behavior. For example, when faced with defiance, instead of thinking "What is wrong with this child?" ask yourself: "What happened to this child? And how can I help?"

1

Use Everyday Gestures to build relationships and promote healing.



CELEBRATE

"I am proud of your hard work studying for the exam, Celinda."

"James, these thoughtful adjectives you used help me understand your favorite food."



LISTEN

"Tell me more about how you're feeling."

"Did you mean (this)? I want to make sure I understand you."



COLLABORATE

"I see you're stuck. Tell me what you have tried and I will listen for ways I can help."

"Great thinking! What would you do next?"



COMFORT

"You seem different today. Remember that I care about you and I am here for you."

"Are you feeling nervous or anxious about something?"



INSPIRE

"I've heard so many great ideas today!"

"Who would you be if you could be anyone in the world?"

2

Minimize Triggers.

Some elements of school environments push students to suddenly re-experience the stress and hurt of adverse experiences. Think about ...



HARSH LIGHTING

Try using lamps or covered overhead fluorescents.



SLAMMING DOORS

Use door stops; and consider how covered windows or screens may serve the same purpose.



SHOUTING

Rugs and other noise-absorbing fabrics can help reduce and muffle hectic noise from outside or out in the halls.



BELLS AND LOUDSPEAKERS

Advance notice of jarring sounds may help students prepare for them and avoid being startled or triggered.



UNWELCOME OR UNEXPECTED TOUCH

Ask permission or give warning before physically touching a student.

3

A Whole School Approach.

Entire school communities should work together to support healthy development. Trauma sensitivity will look different in every community, but schools working to be trauma-informed should consider adopting these kinds of programs:



Breakfast after the bell programs to assure regular, well-balanced meals.



Mindful breathing to promote effective stress management and relaxation.



Thoughtful scheduling of activities, including school start times and major assessments, to help families stick to sleep routines.



Peace rooms and restorative justice circles to address, rather than isolate, challenging behaviors.



Classroom brain breaks and planned physical activity to address the whole child.

Taking Care Of Yourself

Your own wellness is an essential resource for success. Trauma-informed educators can ensure that they are prepared to best support students by modeling resiliency:



Stay calm in unpleasant situations

Strengthen supporting relationships

Ask for help

Apologize for missteps, even when no harm was intended.

Accept mistakes as opportunities to learn