

Childhood Experiences Survey

Quick Facts about the Tool

Author(s): Drs. Robert F. Anda and Vincent J. Felitti conducted the foundational Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Survey. Drs. Joshua Mersky and James Topitzes adapted the ACE work to create the Childhood Experiences Survey (CES) for use in WI home visiting programs.

Authors' Intent: The CES is designed to expand the ACE framework and help home visiting professionals and the families they serve understand and respond to connections between trauma experienced in early life and one's physical, mental, social-emotional, and economic wellbeing in adulthood.

About the Tool: The CES contains 18 questions: 10 related to conventional ACEs identified in previous research (physical, sexual and emotional abuse, physical and emotional neglect, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, incarceration/jail, and divorce/separation), 7 related to potential ACEs (family financial problems, food insecurity, homelessness, parental absence, parent/sibling death, bullying, and violent crime, and 1 question related to the respondent's comfort level when answering the questions.

Purpose

The ability of home visitors and families to see the connections between a parent's adverse childhood experiences and current family situations can help parents to change family dynamics and challenging life circumstances. Insight about ACEs and present circumstances may also uncover the parents' coping strategies and strengths that may be critical resources in addressing current stressors.

Protocol

- Be compassionate, open, and respectful when introducing the tool, and explain that the focus will be on things that happened in their life prior to turning 18 and may be of a sensitive nature.
- Make sure that the person completing the screen can speak freely/safely.
- Start the screen early in a home visit to make sure the screening process is conversational, unhurried, and delivered calmly.
- If you are aware of abuse history already, acknowledge awareness and explain that the screen simply ensures that you haven't overlooked something important that happened in the person's life.
- Record responses or ask families if they want to circle their own responses.

Pitfalls

- Don't assume that people are necessarily ready or resistant to talk about abuse or negative experiences.
- Don't just hand the mom the screen and say, "Please fill this out."
- Don't wait until you're entering the data into DAISEY to understand the results of the screen.

Value to Families

- *Understanding ACEs can motivate parents to create different opportunities for their children than they themselves experienced.*
- *Identifying resiliency can build bridges to strategies and problem solving in current life.*

Framing it for Families

- **Convey Compassion:** *Sometimes what people experience in childhood can impact their own beliefs and parenting practices. I'll be asking you questions that some people find uncomfortable. If you want to talk more about what a question means, let me know. We can do that. If there is a question you'd prefer not to answer, let me know and we can skip it.*
- **Be Open/Explain Why:** *We ask these questions to all families we work with because often what parents experience in their own childhood can influence what happens or how they feel when they raise children of their own.*
- **Emphasize Parent Control:** *I am going to go through some questions with you about difficult experiences you may or may not have had before you turned 18. Please feel free to skip any questions you prefer not to answer or ask what a question means.*

- If you're uncertain if abuse is current or past, respectfully explore if there is need for additional support to work through related issues.
- Inquire with the person about their need/interest for ongoing support with a warm hand-off to a community referral. If the need for services isn't immediate but the person wants additional support, they can call 211 or 1-800-422-4453 to reach a referral source or to locate local services.

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Usefulness to Practitioners

- Provides an opportunity to understand how a parent sees her/his own childhood
- May uncover motivations for change and progress in family goals
- Can build trust and strengthen partnership if person's responses or decisions not to respond are honored
- Helps to contextualize family goal setting:
 - Understanding a parent's trauma history opens the door to discuss what parenting practices a parent wants to continue or change from what they themselves experienced.
 - The ACE survey gives insight to home visitors about barriers families may be experiencing in meeting goals. A family may be having trouble making progress with a parenting practice they have little or no procedural memory of from their own childhood.
 - Choosing parent education strategies: When trauma or toxic stress histories have disrupted or inhibited the development of procedural memories related to care and nurturing, meeting goals requires less of a focus on sharing curriculum and didactic teaching with a parent and more hands-on coaching of the parent-child relationship.

Follow-up Resources: Resilience

Robert Wood Johnson: Videos and Articles
<http://www.rwjf.org/en/library/collections/aces.html>

Tools to Support Resilience for Parents, Providers, and Communities
<http://resiliencetrumpsaces.org>

Follow-up Resources: ACEs

ACEs
<http://acestudy.org>

ACEs in Wisconsin
<https://preventionboard.wi.gov/>

Quick Facts: ACEs

What We Know about ACEs in Wisconsin:

- 56% of Wisconsinites have experienced at least 1 ACE
- 14% have experienced 4+ ACEs

What We Know about ACEs in the US:

- 64% of people nationally have experienced at least 1 ACE
- Over 12% have experienced 4+ ACEs
- Health, mental health and behavioral outcomes associated with ACEs are related to the 10 leading causes of death in the US

When Someone Has 4 or More ACEs:

- Twice as likely to smoke
- Twice as likely to have heart disease
- Twice as likely to be diagnosed with cancer
- Four times as likely to have emphysema or chronic bronchitis
- Six times as likely to have sex before age 15
- Seven times as likely to be alcoholic
- Twelve times as likely to have attempted suicide
- 46 times as likely to have injected drugs

Resilience and Protective Factors Matter!

- Early intervention works and works best using a two generation model that addresses the needs of parents and children and their relationship
- High quality home visiting is linked to better mental health, physical health, and developmental outcomes
- Developmentally appropriate, positive, engaging early learning experiences
- Comprehensive physical and behavioral health services, including but not limited to developmental screening and follow-up, a medical home, and a dental home

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Tips for Supervisors

Workplace Environment

- Support formal and informal dialogue and debriefing.
- Have policies and practices in place for weekly or biweekly reflective supervision, and honor that time by being prepared and in the moment.
- Have an effective on-call system so home visitors have an accessible resource person if a crisis emerges during a visit.
- Have clear policies and practices in place to promote healthy boundaries and ethical practices.
- Create time in the office where staff see one another and can notice, check-in and support one another.
- Celebrate the strengths of all staff. Take time to celebrate when people handle difficult situations with grace, respect, and honesty.

Promoting Self-Care

- Evaluate paid time-off policies. Do they allow sufficient time for relaxation, rejuvenation, and work-life balance?
- Does time away really mean time away, or are people regularly contacted on days off? Develop an on-call rotation so time off can be honored.
- Evaluate compensation policies. Are the stressors of challenging caseloads being intensified by the stressors of meeting financial obligations with low wages? Complete regular salary studies to make sure that compensation is competitive with industry standards. Free tools such as [payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com) provide free wage and benefit comparisons.
- Have regular check-ins about boundaries that recognize the nuances and difficulty of negotiating boundaries with colleagues and families.

Use Data to Celebrate Successes

- DAISEY analysis can inform supervisors when benchmarks around screening are met and provide opportunities to celebrate progress and success related to completing screens on time.
- Spot checking CES results can give insight into the complexity of someone's caseload. If a worker's caseload includes many moms with 4 or more ACEs, consider what additional supports the home visitor may need to individualize services for those higher need families.

Becoming Trauma Informed

- Being a trauma informed program is not simply a matter of professional development and awareness of trauma informed practices. Becoming trauma informed is an ongoing process of practice, reflection, and attention to outcomes.

Reflective Exercises

Learn More about Happiness

- **Flow, the Secret to Happiness**
www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow
- **Jessica's Affirmation**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qR3rK0kZFkg
- **Validation**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cbk980jV7Ao>

"Researchers have found that happiness is surprisingly contagious. Psychologist James H. Fowler studied the data of 5,000 people over 20 years and found that happiness benefits other people through three degrees and that the effects last for a year. He says: "We found a statistical relationship not just between your happiness and your friends' happiness, but between your happiness and your friends' friends' friends' happiness."
(<http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/happiness/helping-others>)

Learn More about Resilience

- **Resilience in a Cross-Cultural Perspective: How resilience is generated in different cultures, Arve Gunnestad**
<http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr11/gunnestad.htm>
- **A Brief Video on Resilience**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pnhFmdz-ig>

Take Time and Make Time for the Positive

- Talk one-on-one or as a group with your supervisor or colleagues about how you define success with a family.
- Little steps can make a big difference in building engagement, trust, and a strong working alliance. Recognize high quality engagement and appreciate it when it happens. Notice why it's working. Notice what creates barriers.
- Identify a family strength or many family strengths, ask them to identify their family strengths, and record them on a post-it note in their file to remember during difficult visits.