



# Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation

The Institute for Family Violence Studies

Florida State University

## **MAY EPRESS Part 2**

As child welfare professionals, it's essential that you understand the role of adverse childhood experiences, trauma, and the mitigating properties of strengthening resilience in the families you work with. Below is a PowerPoint that can be used to prepare your supervised visitation staff and volunteers on these issues.

This PowerPoint will be available for download at this URL

<https://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/clearinghouse/manuals-and-materials/>



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE FOR FAMILY VIOLENCE STUDIES

# ACEs, Trauma & Resilience Training for Supervised Visitation Monitors

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## Trauma

- The **OLD** way of thinking about trauma:

GET OVER IT



- The **NEW** way of thinking about trauma:

**"Trauma is to mental health as smoking is to cancer!"**

*-Dr. Steven Shafiq, former president of the American Psychological Association*



## The ACE Study

- How the Study Started

- Dr. Felitti was originally conducting a weight loss study on female participants when many women started **dropping out of the study.**



- After interviewing women who dropped out, he discovered **over half of the female participants had experienced sexual abuse** during their childhoods.
- Dr. Felitti decided to conduct a study to observe the relationship between **adverse childhood experiences** and adult development of **mental health problems and physical illnesses.**

## The Study's Setup

- The study included over **17,000 participants** from 1995-1997.
- Participants were asked about any **traumatic or stressful events** during their childhood and their **current health status.**
- These traumatic or stressful events are known as **adverse childhood experiences (ACE)** and participants' **ACE scores** were determined by their answers to the study questions.



## What are ACEs?



**Adverse Childhood Experiences (or ACEs)** are traumatic or stressful events that occur during childhood.

## What is Considered an ACE?

- ACEs Include:
  - **Abuse:** emotional, physical, sexual
  - **Neglect:** emotional, physical
  - **Household issues:** physically abuse against mother, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental divorce or separation, incarcerated household family member
  - **Exposure to community violence**



## ACEs Questions

### Before Age 18

- 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?
- 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 had marks or were injured?
- Did an 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 or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?

## ACEs Questions

### Before Age 18

- Did you often or very often feel that: No one in your family loved 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?
- 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?
- Was a biological parent ever lost to you through divorce, abandonment, or other reason?

## ACEs Questions

### Before Age 18

- Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, 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 over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
- Did a household member go to prison?

9

## Effects of ACEs on Child Brain Development

- ACEs have **lasting effects on the developing brain** of a child.
- When children are exposed to traumatic experiences, their brain is **flooded with stress hormones** that interfere with the **development of the pre-frontal cortex and the amygdala**, which are responsible for **problem-solving skills, impulse control, empathy, and anger management**.
- When children experience toxic stress they may **lose the ability to process events** correctly.
  - This can lead to the development of **unhealthy coping mechanisms**, such as substance abuse and impulsive behavior, that adolescents may use when faced with difficult events.

10

## Effects of ACEs on the Immune System

- Children who experience **continuous toxic stress** often have their **stress response** activated.
- The stress response **weakens the immune system**, which our bodies need to **fight off disease and illnesses**.
  - When an individual has a weakened immune system, they are more likely to experience **poor physical health outcomes**.
- Our immune system also serves to control the **levels of inflammation** in our bodies. So, when our stress response keeps our inflammation levels from being regulated, we are at a **greater risk of contracting illnesses** like heart disease and type 2 diabetes.



11

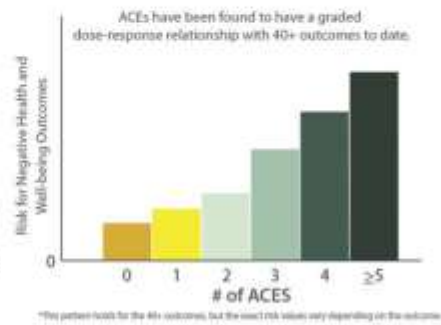
## Long Term Effects of ACEs on Individuals

- Effects of ACEs on Physical Health
  - Increased risk of obesity, diabetes, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones, weakened immune system
- Effects of ACEs on Mental Health
  - Increased risk of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, suicide attempts, neurological delays
- Effects of ACEs on Behaviors
  - Increased likelihood of drug use, alcohol use, smoking, impulsive behavior, multiple sexual partners
- Effects of ACEs on Life Potential
  - Decreased graduation rates, academic achievement
  - More time lost from work and school

12

## Long Term Effects of ACEs on Individuals

- **Dose-response:**
  - More ACEs increase the **risk and severity of negative health and well-being outcomes**
- **Adults with 6 or more ACEs**
  - Have a life expectancy **20 years less** than those without ACEs
  - Have **24 times increased odds** of attempting suicide



13

## Impacts of ACEs Throughout the Lifespan





## Effects of ACEs on Families

- **Difficulties** building and maintaining **healthy relationships**
- Intergenerational **cycle of abuse and neglect**
- **Poor emotional regulation** caused by **poor parent-child attachment**
- Increased **Intimate Partner Violence**
- **Somatic complaints**
- **Poverty**



13

## What is Trauma?

- Trauma is the **emotional response to a distressing experience.**
- Examples of traumatic experiences include sexual assault, car accidents, and witnessing violence.
- Trauma can include **adverse childhood experiences** and **stressful experiences** during adulthood.
- ACEs can lead to an **increase risk of** an individual experiencing **trauma during adulthood.**

14

## Effects of Trauma

- **Physical Effects:**
  - Poor concentration, rapid heartbeat, fatigue, insomnia.
- **Behavioral Effects:**
  - Risky behaviors, changes in eating habits, alcohol and drug use, verbal abuse.
- **Emotional Effects:**
  - Anger, rage, sadness, anxiety, panic attacks, seemingly unreasonable fear, shame.



## What is Resilience?



- Resilience is the ability to recover from traumatic or stressful experiences
- When individuals are resilient they are able to counteract some of the negative effects of ACEs and adult trauma
- Resilience in children can minimize the effects of ACEs and reduce the risk of re-traumatization during adulthood

18

## Protective Factors to Build Resilience

- Six protective factors **reduce the likelihood of family violence and lower ACE scores**
- Protective factors **build family resilience and coping abilities** to respond to ACEs and trauma
- These factors include:
  - Nurturing and attachment
  - Knowledge of child developmental stages
  - Parental resilience
  - Supportive social connections
  - Access to concrete community support
  - Social and emotional competence of children



19

## Nurturing and Attachment

- Nurturing children and developing parent-child attachment is the process of a **parent emotionally bonding to their child** through kind, supportive, age appropriate behavior.
- Nurturing and attachment **build resilience** in children because they **learn to trust and feel secure** with their parent.
- **Example:** A mother teaching her son to read.
  - This builds resilience because the mother and son are bonding over a supportive activity and the son is learning a new skill.
- **Non-example:** A parent unwilling to comfort their child when he or she is upset.
  - This does not build resilience because the parent denies the child emotional support when they need it.

20

## Knowledge of Child Developmental Stages

- Knowledge about child development is a **parent's understanding of how their child will grow** emotionally, physically, and mentally. This knowledge also includes **awareness of a child's needs** throughout their stages of development.
- When parents understand their child's developmental stages, they have **realistic expectations** of their behavior and abilities. So, parents are able to **fulfill their child's needs**.
- This factor can protect against trauma because parents know and are able to **provide the care and emotional support** their child needs based on their developmental functioning.
- **Example:** A father understanding why his seven month old baby cannot be potty trained.
  - This builds resilience because the child will not be expected to perform tasks they would not be able to do and the father can provide needs accordingly.
- **Non-example:** A mother insisting that her six year old supervise a toddler.
  - This does not build resilience because the mother has unreal expectations of her six year old's abilities and is not considering either child's needs.

21

## Parental Resilience

- Parental resilience is a parent's own inner resources and coping skills that **help them handle stress and crises**.
- Resilience coping abilities allow a parent to be able to solve problems, remain calm when upset, and **persist in challenging times**.
- When parents show resilience, they **model positive coping mechanisms** for their children and build **strong relationships** with their children.
- **Example:** A mother takes the time to work with a child who is acting in a challenging way.
  - This builds resilience because the mother is patient when responding to her child who is struggling and shows her support.
- **Non-example:** A parent unable to get out of bed after encountering a difficult situation.
  - This does not build resilience because the parent is not persevering in response to their difficulties and their child will not learn positive coping mechanisms from the parent.

22

## Supportive Social Connections

- **Maintaining supportive connections** with extended family members, friends, and neighbors helps families **improve their emotional health and encourages positive parenting practices**.
- Supportive social connections **improve parental resilience** by improving their ability to cope with the many challenges of parenting.
- These connections **model healthy relationships** for children and minimize the negative effects of ACEs on relationships.
- **Example:** Parents in the same neighborhood take turns car-pooling their children to school.
  - This builds resilience because the parents are sharing responsibility with their neighbors and their children have a supportive social connection to model their relationships after.
- **Non-example:** A mother experiencing abuse wants to leave her abusive partner but has nowhere to go.
  - This does not build resilience because the mother has no other trusting, supportive connection to turn to when she needs a safe place for herself and her children.

28

## Access to Concrete Community Supports

- Concrete community supports are **social services that provide basic needs**, such as food, water, shelter, safety, and health care. Additional supports provided by the community can include childcare, domestic violence services, substance use treatment, and housing.
- A family's **inability to meet their basic needs** can lead to **family dysfunction**, less productive coping strategies, and decreased resilience.
- **Example:** A child becomes sick and the father immediately takes him to the doctor.
  - This example builds resilience because the family has access to the resources they need to be healthy and safe.
- **Non-example:** A single father cannot stop drinking and does not know who to ask for help.
  - This does not build resilience because the father does not have the available resources to address this substance use.

29

## Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Social competence is a child's ability to **interact with others**. Emotional competence is a child's ability to **identify and express their feelings**.
- Social and emotional competence allow **children to relate and respond to the feelings of others and communicate their needs**.
- **Example:** A little boy asking his sister if she is okay after a fall.
  - This builds resilience because the boy recognizes the feelings of his sister and is concerned about her. Also, the sister's emotional needs are met because her brother checks to see how she is feeling.
- **Non-example:** A child refuses to share anything with her brother.
  - This does not build resilience because the child does not consider the feelings of her brother and does what she wants anyway.

26

## What does Resilience look like?

- Resilience in children:
  - Ability to function in stressful situations
  - Problem solving abilities
  - Ability to build trusting relationships with adults
- Resilience in adults:
  - Maintains a positive outlook
  - Ability to be flexible with change
  - Holds a positive view of oneself
  - Builds and maintains positive relationships with friends and family members



26

## Implications for Supervised Visitation

- Most of the children and parents involved in supervised visitation have one or more ACEs
- Ways to counteract the negative effects of ACEs in supervised visitation settings:
  - Be aware of the effects of ACEs on children and families
  - Connect families to services they may need because of the negative effects of the ACEs they have had

27

## Implications for Supervised Visitation

- Supervised visitation monitors can build children's resilience by...
  - Create a safe environment for children and families to interact
  - Encourage healthy parent-child relationships
  - Demonstrate positive relationships with other adults to set an example for children
  - Provide emotional support for children



28

## Discussion Questions

- What are some traumatic experiences that are common among your clients?
- How do your clients demonstrate resilience?
- Would you consider your agency trauma-informed?
  - What changes could be made to provide trauma-informed care?

25

## Conclusion

- ACEs and trauma have negative long-term effects on physical health, mental health, behaviors, and life potential
- ACEs increase the risk of individuals experiencing trauma throughout their life
- Resilience is crucial for children and adults to minimize the long term effects of ACEs and trauma
- As child welfare workers, you can help children and families build resilience by creating a safe environment, modeling positive interactions, and providing emotional support to clients

26



## Resources

- Sesame Street video <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/traumatic-experiences/>
- 60 Minutes [https://www.cbs.com/shows/60\\_minutes/video/vm02T0fGuBx6X3KK\\_YPO5Kse6UBHxad8/treating-childhood-trauma/](https://www.cbs.com/shows/60_minutes/video/vm02T0fGuBx6X3KK_YPO5Kse6UBHxad8/treating-childhood-trauma/)
- 60 Minutes Overtime <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-life-changing-story-oprah-reports-this-week/>

31