

# ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACEs)



## Keywords:

**Adverse Childhood Experiences:** abuse, violence, neglect, or distressed family environments experienced by children under 18.

**Positive Stress:** short-lived stress typically associated with everyday life (e.g., meeting someone new, taking a test).

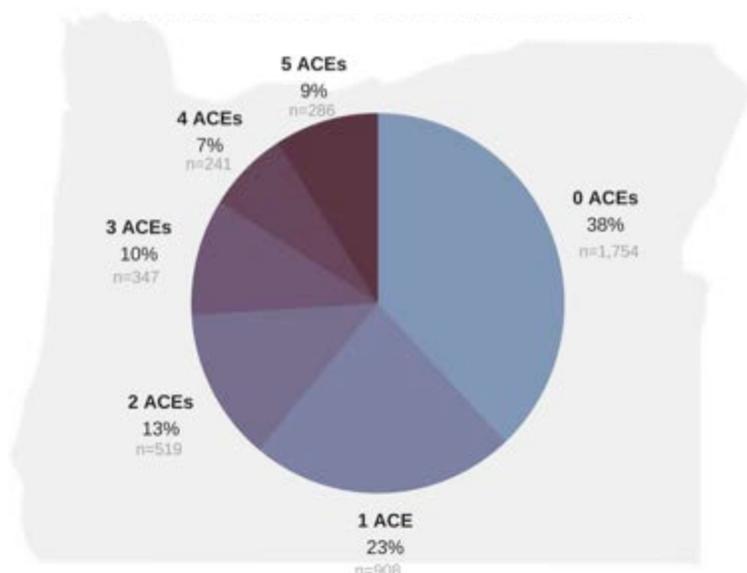
**Tolerable Stress:** serious stress that is buffered by the presence of positive relationships.

**Toxic Stress:** serious and prolonged stress with long-term consequences in the absence of positive relationships.

**Protective Factors:** factors or qualities that minimize the impact of ACEs or stress.

**Trauma-Informed Care:** an approach that aims to ensure environments and programs are welcoming and grounded in knowledge of the impact of trauma.

## Prevalence of ACEs in Oregon



Source: <http://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/HealthyPeopleFamilies/DataReports/Documents/OregonACEsReport.pdf>

# Trauma-Informed Care Strategies

## for Professionals Working with Children & Families

adapted and compiled by Shauna Tominey

### 1. Educate yourself and colleagues.

- Learn about ACEs and the impact of ACEs on children, families, and communities.
- Participate in ongoing professional development opportunities and engage in community discussions to expand your knowledge of ACEs, trauma-informed care, and related topics.
- Learn about key issues relevant to your community and the populations you serve.

### 2. Set up a welcoming environment.

- When offering programs, create an environment that helps families feel welcome.
- Make sure locations are known and accessible to families (e.g., provide maps, signage, easy parking options). Don't turn families away before they set foot through the door!
- Help families feel safe in the setting (e.g., keep pathways to the door clear, make sure hallways and outdoor areas are well-lit).
- Consider how families might be feeling when they arrive and how you want them to feel by the time they leave. Use the "Platinum Rule" as a guide to help plan your approach, agenda, and activities, and be flexible.



### 3. Prepare materials with care.

- Make sure that materials that advertise the program (websites, flyers) as well as those offered as part of a program (brochures, handouts, presentations) are accessible and meaningful to families.
- Minimize complex language and jargon to meet the needs of families with low literacy levels.
- Offer translated materials when possible.
- Use pictures and examples representative of families in the program.
- Ask yourself: Can diverse and nontraditional families see themselves in what you share?

### Platinum Rule

Treat others how *they* want to be treated.

### 4. Embed knowledge of trauma and trauma-informed care into facilitation.

- Build trust with families and recognize that establishing trust takes time.
- Let families know what to expect and share expectations in advance when possible.
- Create a group agreement to allow families to express their needs and shape their learning experience.
- Offer opportunities to share, but never force or require sharing.
- Value the strengths each individual and family brings to the table.
- Choose questions carefully and offer options. Consider how asking a question about someone's personal life or past might call up traumatic memories.

*People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did,  
but people will never forget how you made them feel.*

*- Maya Angelou -*

**5. Have a plan in place for challenging situations or missteps.**

- Have extra staff members available on hand (when possible) who can take an individual or family aside and offer help privately if a challenging situation arises.
- If and when you make a misstep (for example, saying something without meaning to that offends an individual or family or calls up an intense reaction), avoid defensiveness, listen to understand, and offer a genuine apology. Be sure to follow-up to repair the relationship.
- Learn from each new situation that arises. Acknowledge families as experts and ask what you can do differently to improve their experience next time. Use what you learn to shift your approach moving forward.

**6. Be a role model of positive stress management and self-care.**

- Talk about emotions and model strategies to manage emotions (pleasant and unpleasant).
- Take care of yourself and build your own short- and long-term strategies to manage stress.
- Think about your *Best Self*. Who do you want to be and how do you want families to see you? Practice strategies to be your *Best Self* more often.

**7. Get to know the resources available to families in your community.**

- Recognize the limitations of your own and your organization's knowledge, skills, and role. Maintain boundaries and be prepared to make referrals when necessary.
- Have resources on hand that you can share with families (e.g., parenting education programs, mental health professionals, health care providers).



***Protective Factors: Minimizing the Impact of ACEs***

The Center for the Study of Social Policy recommends that communities:

- 1) Facilitate friendships and mutual support among parents
- 2) Strengthen parenting skills, resources, and education
- 3) Value and support all parents through culturally competent practices
- 4) Promote children's social and emotional development
- 5) Provide resources for family crisis
- 6) Identify and respond to early warning signs of child abuse and neglect



*Did you know the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative (OPEC) offers free and low-cost parenting education classes, workshops, and events in 32 Oregon counties? Find your OPEC Hub here:*

<https://orparenting.org/grantees/grantee-directory/>



## *Learn more:*

### **ACEs**

Building Resiliency: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/HealthyPeopleFamilies/DataReports/Documents/OregonACEsReport.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Adverse Childhood Experiences

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>

Child Trends: Adverse Childhood Experiences

[https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences_FINAL.pdf)

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Adverse Childhood Experiences

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/collections/aces.html>

### **Trauma-Informed Care**

American Academy of Pediatrics Trauma Guide

<https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Pages/Trauma-Guide.aspx>

Implementing Trauma-Informed Care Into Organizational Culture and Practice

<https://www.chcs.org/resource/implementing-trauma-informed-care-organizational-culture-practice/>

Oregon Health Authority: Trauma-Informed Care

<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASESCONDITIONS/HIVSTDVIRALHEPATITIS/HIVCARETREATMENT/Pages/Trauma-Informed-Care.aspx>

SAHMSA's National Center for Trauma-Informed Care

<https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic>

Trauma-Informed Oregon

<https://traumainformedoregon.org/>

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