



# ACES: Adverse Childhood Experiences

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND ADDICTION

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# “It’s not the drugs, it’s the ACES”

- ▶ “Addiction shouldn't be called addiction. It should be called “ritualized compulsive comfort-seeking.”
- ▶ RCCS (addiction) “is a *normal* response to the adversity experienced in childhood, just like bleeding is a normal response to being stabbed.”
- ▶ “I’ve seen about 1,200 patients who are addicted. Of those, more than 1,100 have an ACE score of 3 or more.”

Dr. Daniel Sumrok

(family physician, former U.S. Army Green Beret, Director of the Center for Addiction Sciences at the University of Tennessee.

# How does Dr. Sumrock respond?

- ▶ Treat people with respect instead of blaming or shaming them.
- ▶ Listen intently to what they have to say.
- ▶ Integrate the healing traditions of the culture in which they live.
- ▶ Use prescription drugs if necessary.
- ▶ Integrate adverse childhood experiences science: ACES.

“My patients seem to respond really well to this.”

-Sumrok

# What are ACES?

- ▶ An adverse childhood experience (ACE) describes a traumatic experience in a person's life occurring before the age of 18 that the person remembers as an adult. Minnesota Dept of Health
- ▶ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that have the potential to cause long-lasting negative effects. Ohio Dept of Health.

## ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

## NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

## HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce

What are  
ACES?

- ▶ The 1998 CDC study's participants were 17,000 mostly white, middle and upper-middle class college-educated San Diegans with good jobs and great health care – they all belonged to the Kaiser Permanente health maintenance organization.

## Adverse Childhood Experiences Are Common

### Household dysfunction:

<b>Substance abuse</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Parental sep/divorce</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Mental illness</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Battered mother</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Criminal behavior</b>	<b>6%</b>

### Abuse:

<b>Psychological</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Physical</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Sexual</b>	<b>21%</b>

### Neglect:

<b>Emotional</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Physical</b>	<b>10%</b>

# What about the rest of us?

**Almost half of all children in the United States have experienced at least one ACE, but black and Hispanic children are at much higher risk than their white peers--51% of Hispanic children and 61% of black children have had an adverse childhood experience, compared to 40% of their white peers.**

**Research shows that individuals who have experienced high levels of childhood trauma (five or more ACEs) are three times more likely to abuse prescription painkillers and 5 times more likely to inject drugs. Furthermore, the vast majority (80%) of opioid users seeking treatment had at least one adverse childhood experience.**

**Ohio ranks 46th in the nation for kids having three or more ACEs, putting them at higher risk for long-lasting negative effects.**

# How do you determine your ACEs score?

- ▶ The following questions are taken from the standardized ten question survey.
- ▶ Ohio has a shortened, simplified eight question survey available at [www.groundworkohio.org](http://www.groundworkohio.org)
- ▶ Keep track of your own ACEs score.

# ACES Questionnaire

Prior to your 18th birthday:

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?  
No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

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 had marks or were injured?  
No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

3. 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?  
No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

4. 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?  
No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

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?  
No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

ACES  
Questionnaire

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

7. 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?  
No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?  
No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?

No \_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_

# ACES Questionnaire

10. Did a household member go to prison?

No \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Now add up your “Yes” answers: \_\_\_\_\_

This is your ACE Score.

Approximate risk levels

1-3 moderate risk

4-5 significant risk

5+, high risk

# Resilience: The other side of the issue

- ▶ Resilience is “the ability to ‘bounce back’ after misfortune, harm, or injury.” <https://acestoohigh.com>
- ▶ ACEs don’t affect all children the same way.
- ▶ Trauma is experienced differently by different members of the same household.
- ▶ “**Resilience** is the result of a dynamic set of interactions between a person's **adverse experiences** and his or her **protective factors**. ... The presence of **protective factors**, particularly safe, stable, and nurturing relationships, can often mitigate the consequences of ACEs.”

# Resilience Questionnaire

1. I believe that my mother loved me when I was little.

**Definitely true**      **Probably true**      **Not sure**  
**Probably Not True**      **Definitely Not True**

2. I believe that my father loved me when I was little.
3. When I was little, other people helped my mother and father take care of me and they seemed to love me.
4. I've heard that when I was an infant someone in my family enjoyed playing with me, and I enjoyed it, too.
5. When I was a child, there were relatives in my family who made me feel better if I was sad or worried.
6. When I was a child, neighbors or my friends' parents seemed to like me.
7. When I was a child, teachers, coaches, youth leaders or ministers were there to help me.

# Resilience Questionnaire

8. Someone in my family cared about how I was doing in school.
9. My family, neighbors and friends talked often about making our lives better.
10. We had rules in our house and were expected to keep them.
11. When I felt really bad, I could almost always find someone I trusted to talk to.
12. As a youth, people noticed that I was capable and could get things done.
13. I was independent and a go-getter.
14. I believed that life is what you make it.

How many of these 14 protective factors did I have as a child and youth? (How many of the 14 were circled “Definitely True” or “Probably True”?) \_\_\_\_\_

Of these circled, how many are still true for me?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Prevention

“It basically takes one good relationship” that “teaches you from experience that you are safe-lovable-capable-meaningful.”

Dr. Mark Raines

## CDC Strategy for Preventing ACEs

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>

Strategy	Approach
Strengthen economic supports to families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Strengthening household financial security</li><li>● Family-friendly work policies</li></ul>
Promote social norms that protect against violence and adversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Public education campaigns</li><li>● Legislative approaches to reduce corporal punishment</li><li>● Bystander approaches</li><li>● Men and boys as allies in prevention</li></ul>
Ensure a strong start for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Early childhood home visitation</li><li>● High-quality child care</li><li>● Preschool enrichment with family engagement</li></ul>
Teach skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Social-emotional learning</li><li>● Safe dating and healthy relationship skill programs</li><li>● Parenting skills and family relationship approaches</li></ul>
Connect youth to caring adults and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Mentoring programs</li><li>● After-school programs</li></ul>
Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Enhanced primary care</li><li>● Victim-centered services</li><li>● Treatment to lessen the harms of ACEs</li><li>● Treatment to prevent problem behavior and future involvement in violence</li><li>● Family-centered treatment for substance use disorders</li></ul>

Recovery must  
also be  
trauma  
informed.

"The three E's of Trauma:  
Events, Experiences and Effects."

"The four R's: Key Assumptions in a  
Trauma Informed Approach -  
Realization, Recognize, Respond,  
Resist Re-traumatization.

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Concept-of-Trauma-and-Guidance-for-a-Trauma-Informed-Approach/SMA14-4884>

The fifth R is "Relationships." Build new  
strong, healthy relationships.