

What is it? Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful and/or traumatic events occurring to children at any point before the age of 18. These can be events that either directly harm the child or affect the environment in which they live. The original American study (Vincent Felitti et al 1998) identified ten ACEs; five which relate directly to the child and five which relate to the parents / household.

Child	Parent / Household
Physical abuse	Incarceration
Sexual abuse	Separation or divorce
Emotional abuse	Mental illness
Physical neglect	Substance misuse
Emotional neglect	Domestic abuse

The current and more widely recognised understanding of ACEs is broader than the American study and includes indicators of poverty, deprivation and inequality.

Why is it important?

ACEs have been found to have lifelong impacts on health and behaviour. They are relevant to all sectors and involve anyone from any area of society. When children are exposed to adverse and stressful experiences, it can have a long-lasting impact on their ability to think, interact with others and on their learning.

Evidence shows that ACEs can increase an individual's risks of developing health harming behaviours. These behaviours then lead to an increased risk of poor physical and mental health later in life (including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, depression and anxiety) as well as negative social outcomes, such as domestic violence, low levels of education, a criminal record / incarceration, and potentially early death. Where ACEs occur in family settings, there is a high risk of intergenerational transmission, contributing to a cycle of disadvantage and health inequity.

Adverse childhood experiences do not define people nor do they solely determine a life outcome; they are simply a tool to understand the potential risks an individual or population may face. The eradication of ACEs requires a coordinated effort and effective resourcing of early help and child protection services alongside public and social policy developments to address poverty and health inequalities at a structural level.

For more information:

There is a wealth of research available online, including comprehensive studies undertaken in Wales and Scotland. Here are a few publications which illustrate the research behind ACEs:

This video provides some further information on the medical and health research that support the concept of ACE's: [Ted Talks—Nadine Burke Harris, How Childhood Trauma Affects Health across a Lifetime](#)

Public Health Wales have developed this film to explain ACEs: [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) \(Wales\)](#) and have published these helpful infographics: [Infographic 1](#) & [Infographic 2](#)

The comprehensive Early Intervention Foundation Report from February 2020 includes PDFs of the summary and the full report and a summary video. <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next>

The study published in October 2019 in The Lancet entitled: Life course health consequences and associated annual costs of adverse childhood experiences across Europe and North America: a systemic review and meta-analysis is extremely informative. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(19\)30145-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(19)30145-8/fulltext)