

Adverse Childhood Events

In 1995-1997, Kaiser Permanente and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) collaborated on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. There were 17,337 people who participated in the study.¹ The goal was to determine if the participants had experienced traumatizing events in their childhood, which lead to health concerns later in life.

It concluded that the more ACE's that are experienced shows a higher chance for health risks over a lifetime. The data showed that 26.0% of the 17,337 participants had at least one ACE, while 22.0% reported to have at least three or more.

The CDC explains that Adverse Childhood Experiences disrupt neurodevelopment and affects social, emotional, and cognitive impairment. A person is more likely to adopt health-risk behaviors and develop a disease, disability, social problems, and even early death when they have adverse childhood experiences.

The original study was conducted at an obesity clinic in San Diego. The chief physician, Dr. Vincent Felitti, was perplexed why women who were losing weight would drop out of the program. He learned after countless interviews that most of the women had been sexually assaulted as children. Felitti explained the correlation to be that the women were using their weight as protection against being assaulted again. The women believed if they looked and felt more attractive that they would be at risk for being assaulted or hurt.

Dr. Vincent Felitti teamed up with researchers from the CDC and created the ACE study. The researchers were astounded to learn how childhood trauma of all kinds resulted in serious health problems later in life. They found that when trauma gets activated, it can lead to many diseases, including chronic lung, heart, and autoimmune diseases and cancer, as well as struggles with addiction.

Learning what is at the root of our health concerns helps us to resolve them, so they do not become more serious or lead to premature death, as this study had found. It is critical to learn about what can lead to health concerns in the future and to prioritize health to live the healthiest and happiest life possible. We can start by understanding where our health and other life adversities began and how to balance our emotions, physical health, and lives.

ACE Questionnaire

Below is an edited version of the questions from the original ACE questionnaire. You can find the original questionnaire on the CDC's website, which is cited below. These questions are for experiences that happened before eighteen years of age.

*Answer each question with a *one* if the answer is yes or a *zero* if the answer is no.

Abuse

- Emotional abuse: Did a parent or caregiver living in your home swear at you, insult you, put you down, or act in a way that made you afraid for your safety? _____
- Physical abuse: Did a parent or caregiver living in your home push, grab, slap, throw something at you, or hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured? _____
- Sexual abuse: Had an adult, relative, family friend, or stranger who was at least 5 years older than you ever touch or fondle your body in a sexual way, made you touch his/her body in a sexual way, attempted to have any type of sexual intercourse with you? _____

Household Challenges

- Mother treated violently: Was your mother or stepmother pushed, grabbed, slapped, had something thrown at her, kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, hit with something hard, repeatedly hit for at least over a few minutes, or ever threatened or hurt by a knife or gun by your father (or stepfather) or mother's boyfriend? _____

- Household substance abuse: Was a household member a problem drinker, an alcoholic or did a household member use street drugs? _____
- Mental illness in household: Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or had a household member ever attempted suicide? _____
- Parental separation or divorce: Were your parents ever separated or divorced? _____
- Criminal household member: Did a household member ever go to jail or prison? _____

Neglect

- Emotional neglect: Did you feel unloved, not important or special? Did your family not look out for each other, feel close to each other, or lean on each other as a source of strength and support? _____
- Physical neglect: Did you feel that you did not have enough to eat, had no one to protect you or had to wear dirty clothes? Were your parents too drunk or high to take care of you or to take you to the doctor if you needed? _____

Add up your answers for a possible score of ten. _____

Ten is the highest possible score for this study. The higher the score creates a higher risk factor for health concerns to arise in the future.

References

1. Felitti, Vincent J., Robert F. Anda, Dale Nordenberg, David P. Williamson, Alison M. Spitz, Valerie J. Edwards, Mary P. Koss, and James G. Marks. "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (May 1, 1998): 245–58. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00017-8)