

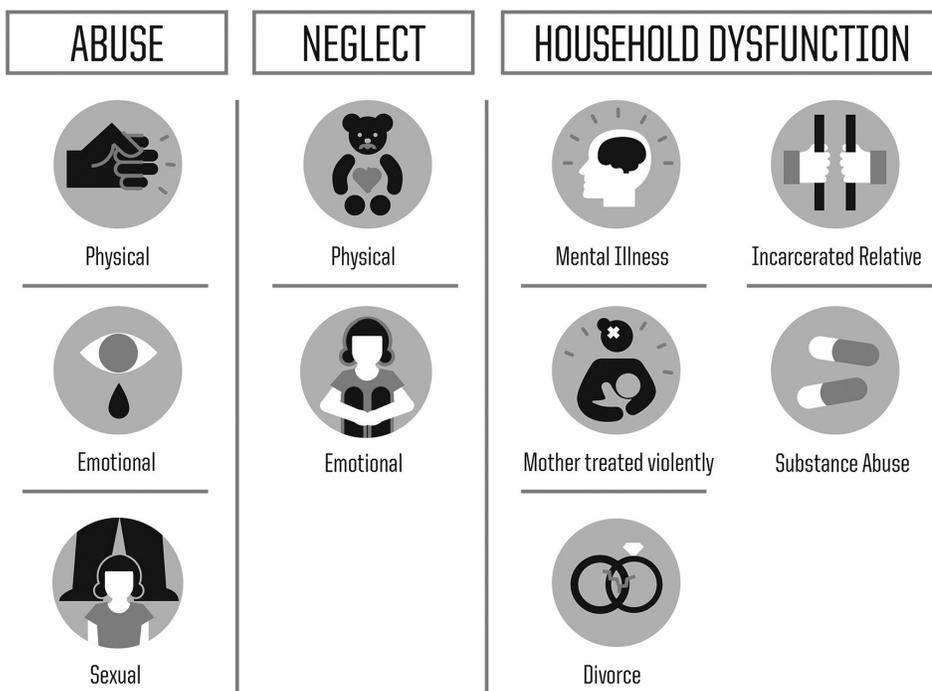
ACE Scores and Risks for Future Health Issues

Talk of an ACE score has become more prominent in the media and mental health field, though the measure has been around for decades. So, what is an ACE score? ACE stands for Adverse Childhood Experiences and is the product of one of the longest and largest research projects undertaken by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente. What started out as an obesity research project in 1985 turned into a much broader undertaking. The originator of the study decided to dig deeper into the reasons why fifty percent of folks who were trying to lose weight would drop out after being partially successful in their weight loss goals. It turned out that there were underlying reasons why people didn't want to lose weight! And it is that discovery that prompted the development of the larger research project. The original ACE questionnaire had close to 100 questions, but increased interest in the measure has produced a shortened version of ten questions for use by non-research participants. For every yes you earn, you score one point. In fact, ACEs are incredibly common within any group, and it is found that almost two-thirds of responders in the original research had at

least one ACE while 12.5% of the group had four or more. To have a zero ACE score is a result of luck. The original cohort continues to be monitored for health issues and mortality rates.

The prevalence of ACE scores has implications for us, the community, and the nation. A higher ACE score correlates to other health problems later in life. Once someone has four ACEs, the risks increase dramatically for a person to experience respiratory problems, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, alcoholism, cancer and suicide. And that is only the beginning of the list of health issues! So, what earns a point on a person's ACE scorecard? Prior to the age of 18, if a child experienced sexual, emotional, or physical abuse, was a victim of neglect, witnessed domestic violence, witnessed substance misuse or mental illness in the household, experienced parental separation or divorce or a parent's incarceration, each of these experiences earns one point. A score of six points or more puts an adult at risk of losing 20 years off their expected lifespan.

Three Types of ACEs



Take five minutes and complete your own ACE assessment

Prior to your 18th birthday:	Yes
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?	
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?	
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?	
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?	
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?	
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	
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?	
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?	
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	
10. Did a household member go to prison?	
Add up your "Yes" answers. The total is your ACE Score.	

Now you might think that the assessment doesn't cover all the potential trauma and you are correct. Racial or gender discrimination, poverty, and community violence all add to a child's stress level. This short version is meant to be a simple guideline. The other important thing to remember is that this assessment does not count the frequency of an experience. Witnessing chronic violence, versus a one-time assault on a parent, would make a difference on your potential health risks.

What should also be considered is that the impact of trauma can become transgenerational, in other words, the effects of trauma can be passed down to our children. Adversity in early childhood and the parenting style that your parents used will impact the way you parent. It is important to understand our own history in order to make effective

changes in the way we nurture children. A high ACE score does not condemn a person to poor health in later years. Many people have high ACE scores, but still do remarkably well. Looking closely at these individual's histories inevitably finds that they had one adult in their life who cared and took interest in them. Positive relationships can be a powerful antidote to the poison of adversity.

Those in the public health care sector have deemed high ACE scores and the resulting disease to be a public health crisis. But an ACE score does not predict the future and there are things that parents and families can do to mitigate the toxic stress that is a result of having so much childhood adversity. Building resiliency is a necessary component for a person to overcome a hard start in life. Read on to learn about building resiliency in children.

The Journey from Vulnerable to Resilient: Engaging the Protective Factors

As guardians of children from hard places, we care for some of the earth's most priceless and vulnerable treasures. They come to us beaten, bruised, with head lice, and red eyes, having inner voices that continuously remind them of their broken past. With tender care, broken things can reveal stunning beauty. There are ways to coax loveliness out of heartache. What do our kids need to heal and grow resiliency?

Research in child welfare points to five main protective factors critical to the strengthening and nurturing of children. These include parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and the social and emotional competence of children. These elements build on one another and the more that are present, the more positive the outcome. So, what do these things look like in the practicality of everyday life?

Parental resilience is the ability to constructively cope with and bounce back from all challenges. It is about creatively solving problems, building trusting relationships, maintaining a positive attitude, and seeking help when it is needed. It's no surprise that when parents model resilience, kids catch on to it. However, to be resilient, parents need to care for themselves fiercely and courageously. Parents who are resilient take a good, hard look at their own stuff and they own it. These parents seek out connections with others who are walking the same journey and they use the power of like-mindedness to work efficiently in affecting change.

Social connections refer to feelings of closeness and belonging with others. At our core, human beings are wired for connection. There is nothing we want more than to belong. One caring adult (you) can make a tremendous difference here. In addition to feeling loved and connected to other people, children need the sense that they are part of something larger than themselves that holds meaning and purpose. Involvement in community groups, service organizations, church groups, and learning communities all provide a sense of connection. Finding ways for children to grow their potential and give back to their community is healing and can be done in small or large group settings depending on a child's interests, skills, and comfort level.



Concrete support, an element that was often missing in the lives of our children before they came to us, includes basics like food, clothing, and shelter. Less obvious things include access to quality physical and mental health care, educational supports, and therapy—all of which should be trauma-sensitive in nature. Wired ultimately to protect us from harm and react to threat, our brains are unable to calm until we sense that the basics are covered. We must also keep in mind that psychological safety and physical safety are not the same thing. For kids, safety can be found in predictability, routine, adequate time for transitions, and intentional inclusion of familiar cultural elements. For foster and adoptive parents, concrete support may include things like having reliable, regularly scheduled respite, help from others with shopping or household chores, joining a walking group or starting a yoga practice, cuddling with our partner, and making sure we schedule an annual physical at the very least. It goes beyond

three hot meals and a cot, and everyone in the home has needs, not just the children.

Our level of satisfaction in any relationship is directly related to the distance between reality and our expectations. When parents are knowledgeable about child development, they can have realistic expectations for their children. Among kids from hard places, expectations can require some significant adjustment due to trauma's effects on development. When parents set well-informed and realistic goals, kids can meet them and experience feeling capable and lovable in the process. Viewing parenting in a coaching paradigm, taking a positive approach that empowers the child, allows for this growth to occur. For parents, this involves keeping simple rules centered on safety, letting kids help with chores and do as much as they can for themselves, offering lots of choices (with smart limits of course), modeling healthy choices, and providing positive feedback for prosocial behavior, among other things. Kids who make lots of choices and contribute to their family in meaningful ways will feel a healthy sense of control and power.

Kids build social and emotional competence through experience. This includes embracing the assumption that children do well when they can. When our children are struggling to attain a goal, it is mainly due to a skill that is lacking as opposed to a willful choice to do poorly. So as parents, it is important to look at the strengths as well as the areas of need that our children display. When we see an area of relative weakness, it is time to dig a bit deeper to see what skill needs further coaching. Our feedback should always communicate an unconditional love and positive regard toward the child, a message of support for perseverance despite outcomes, and the simple question, "What do you need?"

In addition to providing positive behavioral coaching, we will need to help our children with healthy emotional expression. Watch for signs of re-enactment of trauma, avoidance, or hyperactivity. Do we ask kids about what is bothering them? Absolutely...but tenderly. We let them take the lead. Do we help them identify the feelings that are going on inside? You bet. But if the child corrects our assumptions, gracefully accept it, they are always the expert. Do we help those around us to understand our children's hurt? Yes, with respect for the fact that their stories are their own and that we should share only what is needed to help others care for our children more competently. Do we think intently about how to ensure that our children's safety is maintained through adequate supervision and developmentally sensitive boundaries? Yes, and yes. It is a tall order, and why we caregivers need lots of care and support as well.

At the heart of the protective factors stands an empathetic parent: one who will take time to listen. Take comfort in the fact that someone who is hurting is not usually looking for answers, but rather an open ear and a quiet presence. The child will heal when he or she feels seen, heard, and validated. This skill comes with time and practice too. So, will we do it perfectly every time? No, guaranteed. And that is when we ask our kids for a redo. This is the gift of connection.



safer, healthier relationships
for children and families

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partnering
investing
empowering



St. Louis County
Children's Service Fund
Keeping Kids First



Our Vision

FamilyForward leads the community in providing innovative solutions for advancing safer, healthier relationships for children and families.

Our Mission

FamilyForward moves vulnerable children in the direction of hope by delivering comprehensive therapeutic and educational services to support biological, foster, and adoptive families.

Visit familyforwardmo.org/publications to read LifeLines online.

Educational Opportunities for Adoptive and Foster Parents

Each session counts as training toward your licensure requirement. Sessions are provided at low or no cost to all foster and adoptive parents. Registration is required.

Please note that all classes are for adults only. Children are not permitted in the classroom as training content is often not appropriate for them. Please arrange for childcare in your home as children cannot be left unattended in the lobby or hallways of the building. Thank you for helping keep your children safe.

Level B Training

Mondays: April 15, 22, 29, 2019 | 6:00 – 9:00 pm

Prerequisite: Successful completion of 18 hours of Level A Training and 27 hours of STARS Training. Registration for this class must be completed by the family's case manager. This **three-part** training is mandatory for resource providers who parent children with exceptional needs, requiring a high level of oversight and safety planning. Crisis intervention, behavior, suicidality, and medication management are covered in addition to the impact on the family while caring for these children with unique challenges. Completion of this training is not a guarantee that children meeting the qualifications for such services will be placed with the resource family. This training must be completed in its entirety at FamilyForward.

Trauma 101

Thursday: May 2, 2019 | 6:00 – 9:00 pm

When a child is abused or neglected it can affect every aspect of the child's development: physical, emotional, social, and psychological. Training covers the 12 Core Concepts of Understanding the Traumatic Stress Response and focuses on the reasons for delays and challenges based on the neurobiology of brain development. This introductory course covers the mandatory articles required for all foster parents.

The Art of Advocacy

Monday: May 6, 2019 | 6:00 – 9:00 pm

This curriculum is from the National Family Advocacy Support and Training (FAST) Project. Every parent wants to see their child happy, healthy, and part of the community. The training approaches parents as the experts for their child; parents will learn what advocacy means and learn and practice the skills necessary to become a more effective and intentional advocate for their child.

TIPS I (Trauma Informed Parenting for Success)

Tuesday: May 21, 2019 | 6:00 – 9:00 pm

If you have taken previous classes geared toward working with the challenging behaviors of children with trauma histories, this will be a good *refresher* course to review and practice the core concepts of trauma-informed parenting. **Attachment** will be the focus of this class.

TIPS II (Trauma Informed Parenting for Success)

Tuesday: May 28, 2019 | 6:00 – 9:00 pm

This is the second installment in a series of classes designed to give parents a refresher on parenting concepts covered in other classes geared toward children with challenging behaviors. Building on the attachment concept, other areas of child development that will be explored will include **self-regulation**, **affiliation**, and **attunement** (being part of a group and being aware of others). Come prepared for hands on activities in this fun class!

FamilyForward Parenting KIDS (Kids in Difficult Situations)

Thursdays: May 16, 23, 30 and June 6, 13, 20, 2019 | 6:00 – 9:00 pm

Children with histories of abuse and neglect tend to exhibit very difficult behaviors such as chronic lying, stealing, aggression, difficulties with eating and/or sleeping. Trauma-focused parenting is discussed with an emphasis on the impact of trauma on brain development. Ensuring a child's physical, emotional and psychological safety is paramount to decreasing behavioral issues and "re-wiring" the brain for appropriate behavioral responses. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) curriculum is utilized and supported with additional material/videos from professionals in the field of developmental trauma. 18 hours of class time is covered in six consecutive weeks. This is one of FamilyForward's most popular classes and can be a game changer for parents.

Understanding the Effects of Sexual Abuse

Tuesdays: June 4 and 11, 2019 | 6:00 – 9:00 pm

Parenting a child with a history of sexual abuse can be frightening—from responding to the child's acting out behavior to dealing with emotions. Discussions focus on the best ways to minimize the trauma and help your child heal. Sex trafficking will be explored in the training. This is a two-week class, attendance at both weeks is strongly encouraged.

Movies on Mondays

Off and Running

Monday: June 10, 2019 | 6:00 – 8:30 pm

Winner of multiple awards, this documentary captures the coming of age story of an adoptive teenager as she struggles to connect with her birth parent. Placed in a unique and loving home, Avery has a bright future but her search thrusts her into a complicated exploration of her race and identity that threatens to distance her from her family. Group discussion to follow covering the issues depicted in the film.

Paper Tigers

Monday: June 24, 2019 | 6:00 – 8:30 pm

This film explores the transformative journey of a high school and its students as the stakeholders become aware of how early trauma affects the way they respond to the world and others. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) scores and how they can inform and empower those who are affected by trauma will be explored. With knowledge and nurture change is possible!

Our calendar of trainings
can be viewed online:
familyforwardmo.org/calendar

(All classes are still held at our
Creve Coeur location)



Register for Training

Contact Gail at 314.968.2350 ext. 5234 or gail.knipshild@familyforwardmo.org



Our Location

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