

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): UW-Extension Family Educators Take Action



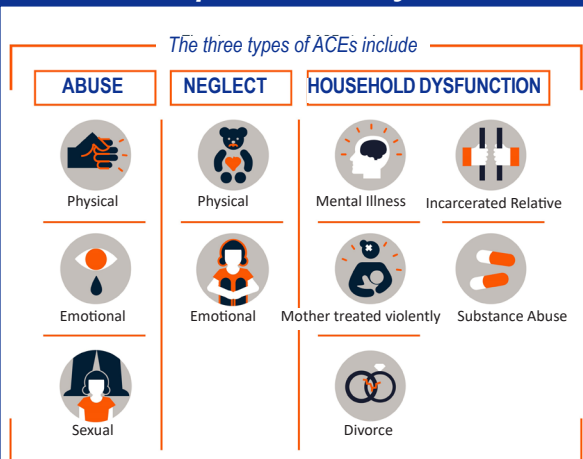
Childhood wounds can last a lifetime

Research shows that childhood adversity is more widespread and harmful than previously thought. The [ACEs Study](#) found that Adverse Childhood Experiences such as child abuse or neglect, incarceration of a family member, and family violence are associated with a range of psychological, social, and health problems in adulthood. These include alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, and reduced economic well-being. **In Wisconsin, 57% of adults report growing up experiencing at least one ACE.**

A major finding is the connection between childhood adversity and the leading causes of adult death, including stroke, heart disease, cancer, and lung disease. Advances in brain science demonstrate that extreme or prolonged stress from events like these can impact brain development, changing how people learn, cope and adapt throughout life. **The more adversity experienced in childhood, the greater the chances of psychological problems, illness and a shorter lifespan.**

The lifelong impacts of ACEs can be devastating to individuals and communities. **The consequences of ACEs contribute to crime and drug abuse, undermine workforce quality, and put a heavy financial burden on healthcare, child welfare, education, and criminal justice systems.** As a result, reducing ACEs and their consequences is a priority for UW-Extension.

Concerned about drug abuse? crime? mental health? workforce quality? taxes?
ACEs impact everyone.



Source: Centers for Disease Control, Credit: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Research shows that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as these are associated with negative outcomes in adulthood including poor mental and physical health, drug abuse, school failure, and economic insecurity.

UW-Extension Responds

UW-Extension family educators are taking action on multiple levels throughout Wisconsin.

Integrating Research into Practice

A key focus has been on raising awareness about the impact of ACEs and effective responses.

Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties are working to improve youth behavioral health by training hundreds of youth-serving professionals on ACEs, identifying mechanisms for how toxic stress impacts the brain, and sharing strategies to use in working with youth.

In Bayfield, Door, Douglas, Washington, and Winnebago Counties, educators offer professional development, community discussions, film screenings and [ACE Interface](#) presentations to raise awareness of ACEs and the prevention of childhood adversity.

Supporting Responsive Relationships & Building Core Life Skills

Safe, stable, nurturing relationships for children and adults along with skill education and support for parents are [key strategies for improving child outcomes](#). Wisconsin Cooperative Extension has a long history of helping families and children improve parenting and relationship skills, cope with stress, and make informed choices. Programs such as Raising a Thinking Child, eParenting®, and Strengthening Families Program 10-14, along with classes in co-parenting, relationship education and financial capability, help prevent childhood adversity by providing support and guidance to families so children can reach their full potential.

Many programs engage families with a history of adversity. The family Extension educator in Kewaunee County offers the [Trauma Informed Parenting Program](#), a national curriculum that teaches caregivers to recognize trauma symptoms and adjust caregiving to support and protect children. In several counties, including Ashland, Bayfield, Buffalo, Pepin, Racine and Winnebago, educators provide classes and family support for incarcerated audiences and others involved with the correctional system. Programs focus on interrupting intergenerational cycles of toxic stress by teaching skills for safe, stable, nurturing relationships and effective parenting, and helping individuals understand and cope with their own history of ACEs.

Preventing ACEs by Promoting Family Resilience

Extension educators in Marquette, Pierce, Dodge and Winnebago Counties offer professional development trainings to integrate the [Protective Factors Framework](#) approach into partner organizations and their work with families. This strength-based framework builds family factors that can make positive outcomes more

likely for children and their families and decrease the likelihood of child maltreatment. UW-Extension educators also use this framework to promote resilience in classes with families.

Collaborating for Long Term Solutions

Given the complexity of ACEs, UW-Extension educators have created or collaborated with coalitions to design multi-sector responses. For example, in Eau Claire County, the Brain Research Awareness Integration Network hosts an annual BRAIN Conference. The recent conference *Resilience Champions: Responding to the Complexity of Families* addressed intergenerational trauma, addiction, and compassion fatigue and ways to build resilience. The Buffalo-Pepin Early Years Partnership collaborated on ACEs-related

training for professionals who work with families and young children. In Winnebago County, UW-Extension is collaborating with partners to develop and publish a toolkit to help community agencies learn about becoming Trauma Informed.

Building Capacity

A statewide workgroup of Extension family educators meets regularly to share ongoing ACEs and Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) efforts and build capacity with internal and external audiences. They have presented webinars for colleagues and statewide partners, written educational briefs on [ACEs](#) and [TIC](#) and

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is an approach that recognizes trauma symptoms and the role childhood adversity may play in the lives of individuals.

TIC approaches:

- ▶ create environments where people feel physically and psychologically safe,
- ▶ recognize and build on the strengths of clients,
- ▶ use practices that do not re-traumatize individuals,
- ▶ work with clients in a compassionate and respectful manner, and
- ▶ promote the use of trauma-informed principles by all staff.

developed a comprehensive listing of [online ACEs/TIC resources](#).

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