

# Adverse Childhood Experiences

The ACE score is meant as a guideline. It is not diagnostic. Check the box next to each type of stress you experienced prior to turning 18.

- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
- 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?
- Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?
- Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
- Did a household member go to prison?

Add up the number of boxes you checked: \_\_\_\_\_

This is your ACE score.

# Resiliency

People bounce back from tragedy, trauma, risks, and stress by having some "protective" conditions like these in their lives. Check the box next to each condition you typically experienced prior to turning 18.

- I had people who gave me unconditional love, who I knew were "there for me."
- I was involved in a group where I felt cared for and valued.
- I treated myself with kindness and compassion.
- I had people who let me know they believed in my ability to succeed.
- I believed in myself most of the time, and generally gave myself positive messages about my ability to accomplish my goals, even when encountering difficulties.
- My voice (opinion) and choice (what I wanted) was heard and valued in my close personal relationships.
- I volunteered to help others or a cause I cared about.
- I was involved in one or more positive after-school hobbies or activities.
- I felt "close to" some people at school.
- Most of my relationships had clear, healthy boundaries.
- I experienced clear, consistent expectations and rules.
- I set and maintained healthy boundaries for myself by standing up for myself, not letting others take advantage of me, and saying "no" when I needed to.
- I had (and used) good listening, honest communication, and healthy conflict resolution skills.
- I knew how to set a goal and take the steps to achieve it.

Celebrate your "yes" answers! The more boxes you checked, the more resilience you had to protect against stress and trauma.

For any boxes you couldn't check about your childhood, consider whether you can check them now.

# Self Reflection Questions

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” –John 16:33*

1. Was the trouble/stress I experienced during childhood positive, tolerable, or toxic? (Based on the explanation shown from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.)
2. What or who helped buffer that stress and make me the survivor I am today?
3. What is my body’s typical response to stress? Am I prone to fight (aggression), flight (avoidance), or tend/befriend (comfort- or support-seeking)?
4. In the past few weeks or months, what activities, thoughts, images, or sounds have triggered this response?
5. What does it look like when my basic needs—worth, love, trust, rest, and nourishment—are met? And when they are not met? How does feeling SLATH(y) impact me?
6. What tactics or techniques help me counter that stress response and bring peace in my body and mind? For example: physical exercise, yoga, deep breathing, prayer, singing, meditation, a warm bath, a walk in nature, or mindfully focusing on a word or phrase that has a positive meaning to you (a.k.a. the relaxation response). *Also consider the Personal Resiliency Builders below.*

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## Personal Resiliency Builders (Individual Qualities that Facilitate Resiliency)

*By Nan Henderson, MSW*

Check the top three or four resiliency builders you use most often. Ask yourself how you have used these in the past or currently use them. Think of how you can best apply these resiliency builders to current life problems, crises, or stressors. (Optional—Circle one or two resiliency builders you think you could add to your personal repertoire.)

- Relationships—*Sociability/ability to be a friend/ability to form positive relationships*
- Service—*Giving of yourself to help others*
- Humor—*Having and using a good sense of humor*
- Inner Direction—*Basing choices/decisions on internal evaluation (internal locus of control)*
- Perceptiveness—*Insightful understanding of people and situations*
- Independence—*“Adaptive” distancing from unhealthy people and situations/autonomy*
- Positive View of Personal Future—*Optimism; expecting a positive future*
- Flexibility—*Can adjust to change; can bend as necessary to positively cope with situations*
- Love of Learning—*Capacity for and connection to learning*
- Self-Motivation—*Internal initiative and positive motivation from within*
- Competence—*Being “good at something”/personal competence*
- Self-Worth—*Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence*
- Spirituality—*Personal faith in something greater*
- Perseverance—*Keeping on despite difficulty; doesn’t give up*
- Creativity—*Expressing yourself through artistic endeavor, or through other means of creativity*

# Small Group Discussions

*These questions are intended to spark reflection and conversation. However, no one should share beyond their personal comfort level. Feel free to select one question or topic to discuss for the duration or discuss several. Use this time to process what was shared in the main sessions and grow together, in whatever manner seems appropriate for your group.*

## Childhood

1. Did anything surprise you about the ACEs research? Why or why not?
2. Difficult life experiences, like growing up in a family where you were hurt, where there was mental illness or drug/alcohol issues, or witnessing violence, can affect our health. Do you feel like any of your past experiences affect your current physical or emotional health?
3. What was difficult about your childhood? What were you grateful for during your childhood?
4. In what way(s) did your childhood make you stronger, to prepare you for adulthood?

## Perfection

1. How does the idea of living “in between the gardens” make you feel?
2. In what ways do you see yourself or those around you striving for perfection?
3. Do you find yourself hiding behind a facade to give the impression you’re mess-free? Why? What might happen if you gave God unfettered access to your mess?
4. With whom can be totally honest about your mess—who has God placed in your life to listen well and offer wise, Christ-focused encouragement? If you can’t think of anyone, might this be someone you could pray for?

## Trouble

1. What life plans haven’t gone as expected? How have you responded to that loss of control?
2. Who is someone you know who lives as an HEIR+EXILE in a way that honors Jesus? What about their way of life honors Jesus? What is preventing you from living that way?
3. How are you willing or unwilling to suffer like or with Jesus? Is comfort or happiness a perceived need (idol, even?) in your life that stands in the way of suffering well?
4. How is the type of joy written about in Scripture evident in your life?

## Needs

1. How are your legitimate needs currently being met?
2. How do you feel when your legitimate needs aren’t met? How do those SLATH(y) feelings manifest in your behaviors throughout the day? Who suffers as a result?
3. Are there any *perceived* needs getting in the way of your *legitimate* needs being met as God intends?
4. How is God currently meeting your needs through his creation?