

**BREATH BODY MIND**

**Cognitive Hypnotherapy  
Pain Neuroscience Education  
Trauma Release Exercises  
Buteyko Breathing  
Health Coaching**

**ADVERSE  
CHILDHOOD  
EXPERIENCES**

# Adverse Childhood Experiences

## **What are ACEs?**

Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatising events that happen in childhood, up to the age of 17. These include experiencing or witnessing violence or abuse, being a victim of neglect, or being brought up by parents with mental health and/ or substance use problems.

ACEs are very common and occur across all ranges of the socio economic spectrum, although some children are statistically more at risk than others.

## **Why does this matter?**

ACEs can have a lasting, negative effect on health, happiness and wellbeing. They are linked to chronic health problems, toxic stress, mental illness, substance misuse, difficulties in personal relationships and lower levels of opportunities, satisfaction and achievement in life.

ACEs are costly, in terms of the social and economic burden on families, communities and society at whole. Toxic stress can also be passed down through generations.

## **What do I do if I have a high ACE score?**

Its important to know that although having a high ACE score can be detrimental if unrecognised and untreated, there are many things you can do to help improve your quality of life.

Understanding how and why your childhood may be influencing your adult life is the first step. Knowing that you are not alone, being able to talk to supportive people, and practicing self compassion and self care is also important. Having therapy for trauma can go a long way towards neutralising the effect ACEs have on your life too.

# Find out your ACE score

## How many of the following have you experienced?

1. Before your 18th birthday, did a parent or other adult in your 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 you might be physically hurt?
2. Before your 18th birthday, 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 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?

Now add up how many questions you answered 'yes' to. This is your ACE score.

There are, of course, many other types of childhood trauma — racism, bullying, watching a sibling being abused, losing a caregiver (grandmother, mother, grandfather, etc.), homelessness, surviving and recovering from a severe accident, witnessing a father being abused by a mother, witnessing a grandmother abusing a father, involvement with the foster care system, involvement with the juvenile justice system, etc.

The ACE Study included only those 10 childhood traumas because those were mentioned as most common- those traumas were also well studied individually in the research literature.

The ACE score is meant as a guideline: If you experienced other types of toxic stress over months or years, then those would likely increase your risk of health consequences, depending on your ACE score.

Fortunately, our brains are plastic- meaning they can change, at any point in our lives.

We can outgrow the effects of trauma with therapy, nervous system regulation, finding safety in our bodies, harnessing the power of neuroplasticity, learning how to love ourselves, being in community, and practicing self compassion.

Your past does not have to define your future.