

GRANDparents Connection



For Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

What is ACES? How can it Affect my Grandchild?

Dear Grandparents,

Have you ever heard someone say, “When I was a kid we didn’t wear seatbelts and we went outside and played every day all day,” a lot has changed since the days of children roaming free and unrestrained in cars. Fortunately, we now have a great deal of data and research to show us how to keep our children safe. Some might say we have too much information, but knowledge is power after all.

A considerate focus on **Adverse Childhood Experiences** or **ACES** has provided us with insight on childhood experiences that might impact overall health in the future. While this can be a scary concept, having knowledge about ACES can give us the power to improve children’s trajectory for better overall health as an adult.

In January, Temerity Berry, Senior Prevention Specialist from Cape Assist provided grandparents with a look at ACES and how to better understand the impact of previous traumatic experiences on a child’s coping skills and behavior.

More importantly Temerity supplied Grandparents with techniques to combat the experiences in children’s lives with Protective and Compensatory Experiences (PACES) to give an opportunity at improved lifelong health and wellness. As an example Temerity used what she called “the Bear” story. She explained if we see a bear in the woods our bodies tell us to respond with fight or flight. Just the one incident with a bear is traumatic but when we move on from this situation we calm down and cope with having been face to face with the bear. Where the situation is taxing on our physical and mental health is when the bear is always there confronting us as might be the case with some children’s home lives.

Being constantly worried for their safety or a sibling’s safety, living in a violent home or with someone that has a substance use disorder or mental health illness could be an example of the continuous need to engage in fight or flight. When this constant occurs a child may experience physical and mental health challenges later in life. Supporting a child during or after these adverse childhood experiences with positive experiences can allow a child to feel comforted and loved so that they are able to cope more effectively with what they have experienced.

The love and support of a family member, such as a grandparent, aunt or uncle can go a long way in countering those experiences that may otherwise be a challenge for a child.

So caregivers, keep those hugs and supportive talks coming, you are supplying a lifetime of benefit!

Christine Zellers, MPP, FCHS Educator /Assistant Professor

History of ACES...

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “The original ACE study was conducted at Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997.”

The study used data collected from Health Maintenance Organization members who had completed confidential surveys regarding their experience during childhood and their current behaviors. Along with the survey adults had a physical exam.

When examining ACES studies took into account not only abuse factors but identifiers such as environmental influencers. For example, was the child abused or a witness to abuse of another? Some of those effected by ACES experienced it outside of the home, in their community or because of a natural disaster.

Findings from the CDC report that over two-thirds of adults have been exposed to at least one ACE and over 17,000 adults taking the survey’s noted there was a prevalence linked between traumatic experiences in childhood and overall health.

This may be weighty information, but, it also led to further studies of ACES which in turn examined how to counter balance these effects with Protective and Compensatory Experiences (PACES). Protective factors that reduce or buffer the effects of risk, stress or trauma give caretakers insight to enable more positive experiences in a child’s future.

Creating “HOPEful” Outcomes

The Good News... after all of the findings that ACES can be impactful on the long range health of an individual there are steps that can be taken to move an individual into a more healthful outcome.

In 2017 the *Casey Family Program* published an article on **HOPE (Health Outcomes of Positive Experiences)** which was added to the ACES surveys. It measures the effects of positive experiences during childhood.

Children who reported being supported and feeling they could discuss feelings in hard times with a supportive person had a reduced incidence of health related problems as adults.

That is good news and shows us just how much your love and support can change the outcomes of a child’s adult life.

According to *Balancing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) with Hope*, children with three or more ACEs who felt support from their family reduced their incidence of obesity, adult smoking, poor/fair health and depression. This shows us a supported child can work towards a healthier adulthood despite having encountered a traumatic scenario in their life.



Studies like the ACES survey that examine both the physical and emotional aspects of experiences provide us with great information on how to identify and cope with stress for better overall health. Knowing what has caused trauma or how a child might respond gives us the ability to support and love the child unconditionally whereby giving them security and confidence now and in the future.



This tree, on display at RCE of Cape May County, was decorated with love by the grandchildren of the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Program.

Resilience is the key to overcoming ACES according to studies, here is how you can assist the child in your life:

- Support the child by becoming or continuing to be a positive encouraging member of their lives — unconditional love will help them feel supported. This can come from home or community and gives the child a sense of hope.
- Try to balance negative experiences with positive emotional support and a feeling of belonging in your grandchild. If a child has experienced separation from a parent it might take years for them to realize you are there to pick them up every day after school. Being there is just what they need, it is constant and supportive reinforcement to their emotions and feelings over previous trauma.
- Model healthy coping skills – it’s hard for us as adults to always find ways to cope in difficult situations but leading by examples will give children the foundation to cope themselves now and later in life.
- Do your best to create a safe and stable living environment. Create routines and activities that kids can count on in everyday life. Those small every day regular routines can really help with creating a sense of security for a child.
- Pick your battles. Don’t let a child always have their way but start to notice if there are certain instances when a child is repeatedly having a difficult time so that you understand and can help them to understand it as well.

NOTES AND CITATIONS:

- “Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences | Violence Prevention Injury Center | CDC.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 31 Dec. 2019, www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/aces/fastfact.html.
- Sege, Robert, et al. *Balancing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) With HOPE* New Insights into the Role of Positive Experience on Child and Family Development*. Casey Family Programs, 2017, hria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Balancing-ACEs-with-HOPE.pdf.
<https://hria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Balancing-ACEs-with-HOPE.pdf>
- *The Pulse ACES and PACES*. United Way of Central Oklahoma 1444 NW 28th St. • Oklahoma City, OK 73106 405.236.8441 • unitedwayokc.org, www.unitedwayokc.org/sites/default/files/files/The Pulse ACES and PACES.pdf.
- Temerity Berry, Senior Prevention Specialist presented at the January 15, 2020 Grandparents Raising Grandchildren meeting, she is from Cape Assist in Cape May County.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group

A program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County Family & Community Health Sciences provides educational and social support to grandparents residing in Cape May County who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren. The group meets the third Wednesday of the month except in June and July.

Upcoming Programs:

April 29 - “I was raised by my Grandparent”

May 20 - Food Safety and a BBQ

August 12 - “Back to School Bash”

Panel discussion with education experts



Visit our Website:

<http://capemay.njaes.rutgers.edu/>

The GRANDparents Connection is published for grandparents raising grandchildren. The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group and all of Rutgers Cooperative Extension’s educational programs are offered without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension Cape May County

355 Court House – South Dennis Road
4 Moore Road, DN 703 (mailing address)
Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
(609) 465-5115 Ext. 3609

Editor:

Chris Zellers, MPP

Family and Community Health Sciences
Educator/Assistant Professor
Department of Family and Community
Health Sciences
Rutgers Cooperative Extension of
Cape May County
zellers@njaes.rutgers.edu
Phone: 609-465-5115

If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please call (609) 465-5115 ext. 3609.

Cooperating Agencies: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and County Boards of Chosen Freeholders. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a unit of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, is an equal opportunity program provider and employer.