

# Building Resilience Through Practice

## ACEs lead to health consequences in adults

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** are emotional and physical disturbances that happen in a youth's lifetime that can potentially lead to harmful long-lasting effects. ACEs can result in mental, physical, social, and emotional consequences.<sup>1</sup>

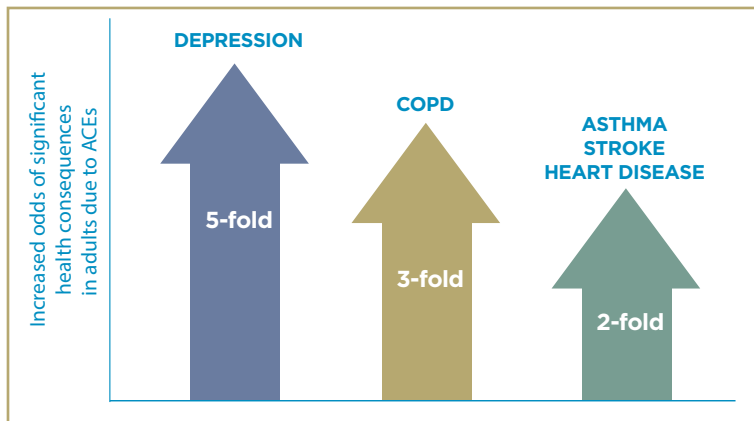


Figure 1: A History of ACEs leads to significant health outcomes in adults<sup>2</sup>

## ACEs are common

In 2018, 64.5% of St. Mary's County residents, who participated in the BRFSS, stated that they had experienced at least 1 Childhood Adversity. Out of that 64.5% over 29% of those residents stated that they experienced at least 3 or more. The ACEs Study (Dr. Anda/CDC) showed a correlation between high ACEs scores and risk-taking behaviors (drinking, smoking, SUD, sexual partners) and negative health outcomes (cancer, COPD, diabetes, asthma) later in life.

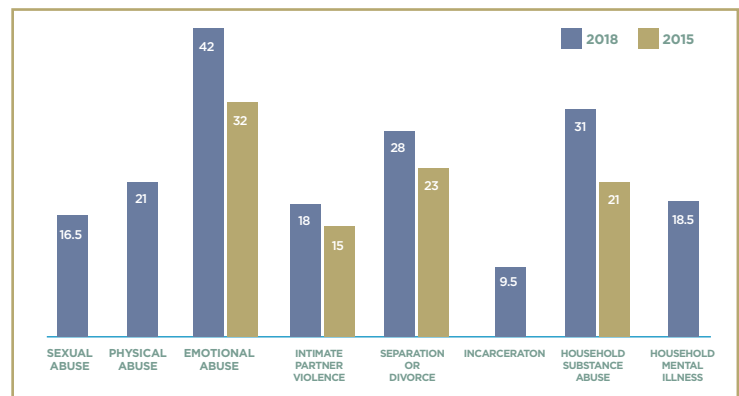
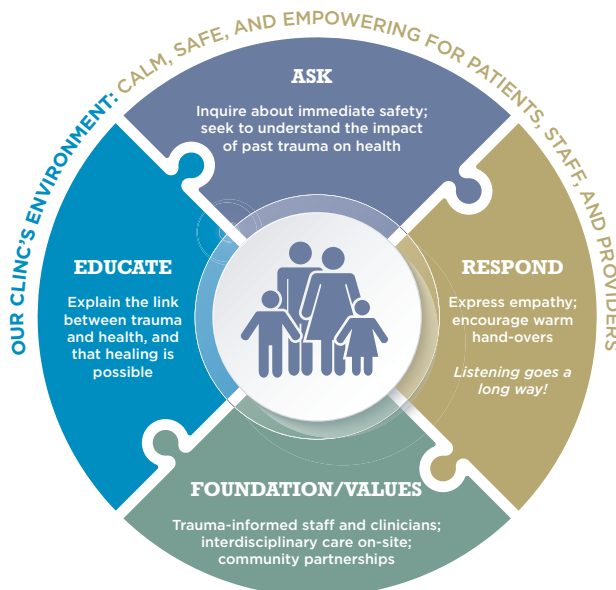


Figure 2: Comparison of 2015 and 2018 BRFSS ACEs findings



## Build support for patients with ACEs

**Building a trauma-informed practice** encompasses more than the one on one patient-clinician relationship.

Figure 3: Five elements can aid a clinic or practice in providing trauma-informed care.<sup>3</sup>

Figure adapted from Machtinger EL, Davis KB, Kimberg LS, et al. From Treatment to Healing: Inquiry and Response to Recent and Past Trauma in Adult Health Care. *Womens Health Issues*. 2019;29(2):97-102





# Begin the conversation about ACEs with patients.

**You don't have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.  
Listen, reflect, and acknowledge the patient's needs.**

Trauma-informed care starts with the patient in front of you. By offering support and creating personal interactions, providers can teach ways to build resilience and positive coping mechanisms.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Ask about impact of ACEs on life and health

- Keep questions broad and related to overall health today to encourage sharing.
  - Example question: Have you had any life experiences that you feel have impacted your health and well-being? How has that experience(s) affected you?
- Ask the questions face-to-face (either virtually or in person), avoiding reliance on questionnaires to extract responses.
- Remember that sharing the details of an ACE can be traumatic.

## 2. Listen

- Listening can be one of the most important services clinicians can give their patients
  - Allow the patient to share whatever they feel comfortable disclosing
  - Express gratitude and understanding that the process of sharing an ACE is difficult.
  - Focus on what the patient is saying they need, rather than how to fix a specific problem
  - Keep the questions to a minimum while a patient is sharing their story.

## 3. Understand the patient's strengths

- Keep to understand the patient's strength and resources
  - What are you proud of?
  - What are your strengths
  - Can you tell me about your support system?
  - Do you have any cultural, religious, and spiritual practices that are important to you?
- Use reflection or teach-back methods

## 4. Support & follow-up

- Focus on the supports for which the patient expressed the greatest need
  - What are ways or things we can do to make you feel safe?
  - Would you like me to help you find support from others who have been through what you have been through?
- Provide links to services and resources whenever possible.
- Establish a plan to reconnect to follow-up on referrals or services.
- Share relevant information with members of the healthcare team when possible.

Trauma-specific interventions	General interventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Individual or group therapies</li><li>Somatic interventions (Mindfulness, yoga, acupuncture)</li><li>Medications for symptoms (insomnia, anxiety, depression)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Support groups or behavioral counseling for risk behaviors (substance use)</li><li>Mindfulness-based stress reduction, yoga, or art-based therapies</li><li>Practices that build connection, comfort, and meaning (faith/spiritually, exercise, caring for people or pets, nature, work)</li></ul>

## 5. Document

- Provide a summary of relevant information to the care team
  - Ask them, "How would you like me to document what you have shared with me?"

### References:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach. Rockville, MD U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;2014.
- Merrick MT, Ford DC, Ports KA, et al. Vital Signs: Estimated Proportion of Adult Health Problems Attributable to Adverse Childhood Experiences and Implications for Prevention - 25 States, 2015-2017. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2019;68(44):999-1005.
- Machtinger EL, Davis KB, Kimberg LS, et al. From Treatment to Healing: Inquiry and Response to Recent and Past Trauma in Adult Health Care. Womens Health Issues. 2019;29(2):97-102.
- Levy-Carrick NC, Lewis-O'Connor A, Rittenberg E, Manosalvas K, Stoklosa HM, Silbersweig DA. Promoting Health Equity Through Trauma-Informed Care: Critical Role for Physicians in Policy and Program Development. Fam Community Health. 2019;42(2):104-108.