



Positive Childhood Experiences

There have been over 10 years of research into something called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). ACES are specific things that occur in childhood that affect adult health and wellbeing.

The specific ACES that have been identified are growing up (prior to age 18) in a household with:

- Recurrent physical abuse.
- Recurrent emotional abuse.
- Sexual abuse.
- An alcohol or drug abuser.
- An incarcerated household member.
- Someone who is chronically depressed, suicidal, institutionalized or mentally ill.
- Mother being treated violently.
- One or no parents.
- Emotional or physical neglect.
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ACEs are surprisingly common. They happen in “the best of families”. And they have long-term, damaging consequences. The ACES lead to risky behaviors, which in turn lead to disease, disability, and social problems. All this can increase the risk of early death. The more ACES a person has, the more adult problems they are at risk for. *The ACE study reveals that one does not just “get over” or “grow out of” negative childhood experiences.*

When we know *why* things happen, and *how*, we can work to *prevent* them with our children. The best thing would be to create a life for our children, which doesn’t involve any ACES.

But some of the ACES we have little or no control over. So we have to ask: can we make the effects of an ACE less, by making sure our children have **Positive** Childhood Experiences?

If we try hard to make sure our children’s lives are filled with positive experiences, in the event that they are exposed to a life with one or more ACES, have we helped them become resilient? And if so, what are the positive childhood experiences that we can try to put in place in our child’s life?

We already know a bit about resiliency in children. We can try to embed certain things in our child’s life as much as possible. The following are identified resiliency factors, that maybe we can start thinking of as Positive Childhood Experiences too:

- Strong connection with family
- Strong connection with positive peers



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- Strong connection with non-parental adult
- Opportunities to develop self esteem
- Feeling like a valued member of the community

As a parent, you can work on creating a strong connection with your child. Developing positive experiences may help protect your child into adulthood.

For more information about the ACE study, go to: <http://www.cestudy.org/>

For more tips, or if you need more information or would like to talk to someone:

In Washington State: Call the Family Help Line at 1-800-932-HOPE

Outside of Washington State: contact your local Circle of Parents agency at

www.circleofparents.org