

# UNDERSTANDING AND HEALING PAST TRAUMA

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
APRIL 2019 RESOURCE SHARING



## The Power of Disconnection...

Bad things happen in life and no family is perfect. We all struggle sometimes. But, if the experiences we had in our family were too difficult for too long - our health can be impacted. Research, known as the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES), shows that adults, who experienced neglect, abuse, violence or other forms of

household struggle growing up, were more likely to:

- Abuse drugs and alcohol
- Have serious mental health problems
- Drop out of school
- Have serious physical health problems
- End up in prison

**How Does That Happen?!** Early experiences of feeling unsafe, threatened or alone create **toxic stress** in our bodies. Over time, being in such tough situations causes our brain and our body to stay on “alert mode.” This constant readiness for danger, **disconnects us** from our thinking brain and from our self-awareness. It can make us sick physically. It can make it hard to handle emotions. It can make it hard to parent and to be in a loving relationship. There is a reason to be hopeful - you can heal from difficult adverse experiences.



**How Can You Begin to Heal?!** One important part of healing the stress from **PAST** harmful relationships is to work on developing healthy and supportive **NOW** relationships. It can be hard to trust other people if, as a child, you were betrayed or hurt by people close to you. But **relationships are essential to health**. Relationships are one way that we can increase our resilience. Since our trauma happened in relationship to others it is best healed through relationships with others. Your effort to build healthier



relationships now, can help to break the cycle of hurt in your family across generations. A safe and nurturing relationship with you can protect your child’s brain and body from the harmful effects of stress and trauma. An effective relationship between you and your child can even protect them from any adverse experiences that may be happening in your family now!

**Parenting with Past Pain Is Hard!!** Yes, it is. Part of growing up, involves children having strong and often negative emotions as they navigate the world and develop their brains. Offering support

to your child, when they are distressed, is often difficult because your child's emotions may feel like demands on you. **That stress might trigger your own experiences of childhood hurt.**

When you are hurt or overwhelmed by emotions, it can be hard to stay calm or to follow through with the parenting your child needs. This can show up many ways:

- Impatience
- Difficulty calming down
- A quicker-than-average temper
- Fearing your child's reactions
- Shame
- Disconnection from your child

**Healthy Families Are Not Always Happy!** What's important is learning how to handle arguments and hard times in a way that **leaves you and your loving relationships intact.** One of the most important ways to reduce the toxic stress you may carry with you is to increase your support network.

- Invest time in finding reliable relationships for sharing your joys and fears. **If you feel isolated, work on building strong relationships in your community** by connecting with family, friends, and local networks - such as parenting groups.
- Seek out a doctor you trust and share your ACE score with them, to gain support on the physical health steps you can take to **protect your wellness.**
- Seek out mental health services for you or you and your significant other. It can be especially helpful to work with a mental health professional who knows how to help people recover from trauma. Such professionals are skilled at using techniques that help you to calm your body and mind - even when under stress.



For more information on the ACES study watch the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cckFkcfXx-c>

Then, you can find additional resources and calculate your own ACE and resilience score here:

<https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>

You also may find these videos helpful for understanding ACES and resilience:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF3j5UVCSCA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eS13oNQNAOg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pnhFmdz-ig>

If you find you need immediate support as you review these resources, contact Dauphin County Crisis Intervention at: (717) 232-7511. For general information about mental health services for you and your family, contact the Dauphin County Case Management Unit at: (717) 232-8761.

References: *Treatment of Complex Trauma: A Sequenced, Relationship-Based Approach.* & *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders in Children and Adolescents: Scientific Foundations and Therapeutic Models.*

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