

Communiversality Developed and Tested Toolkit for Opioid Abuse Abatement



Module 3

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Peer Pressure

This section can be used by schools, communities, organizations, local and state government agencies, families, and advocates to show the importance of investing in building healthy families. Communities can use it to reduce the impact of the opioid crisis. It is meant to educate everyone about ways to create a healthy society.

This chapter is quite dense; spend some time with each section in this module — look at the illustrations, videos, and resources. Be sure you pay attention here — this chapter can give you a plan of action.

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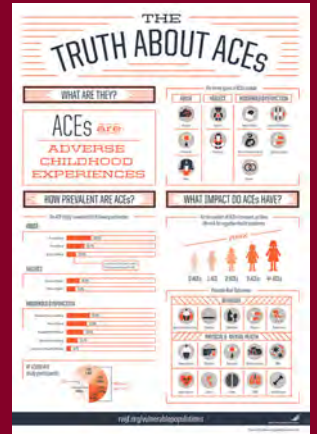
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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Peer Pressure

Many factors affect the course of our development. ACEs provide us with many insights into risk factors and protective factors. Our job as members of society is to identify these risk factors and commit to minimizing them. Most of all, we must understand the power of resilience and build those aspects into our individual lives, families, and homes (Morgan et al., 2022).

ACEs contribute to deteriorating communities. However, creating and sustaining safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children and families can prevent ACEs and help all children reach their full potential.



Download the poster: <https://www.tfec.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Truth-About-ACEs-Infographic.pdf>

What Are ACEs?

Definition

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are potentially traumatic childhood experiences (0 – 17 years) that impact individuals during their lives. The more ACEs one has, the greater the likelihood of a problem with opioids, but there are things an individual can do to lessen the impact and to help communities lessen the impact of difficult circumstances to help children thrive.

The infographic illustrates the categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). It is organized into three main sections: Abuse, Household Neglect, and Neglect. Abuse is further divided into Physical, Emotional, and Sexual. Household Neglect includes Mental Illness, Mother Treated Violently, Divorce, Incarcerated Relative, and Substance Abuse. Neglect includes Neglect and Emotional.

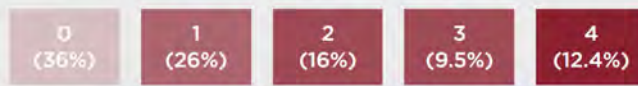
We talk about “acing” a course as a good thing. But another type of ACE is bad. This type of ACE stands for Adverse Childhood Experience. Something adverse is bad and includes things that occur to children before they are age eighteen. ACEs can include growing up in a household where your parents drink or are violent.

Maybe you had a brother or one of his friends who invaded your boundaries and harmed you. Look at the pictures and see if any of the issues relate to things that happened to you. Each of these things affected you. Now, you must find a way to lessen the impact of these things so they don’t continue to drag you down. By understanding your past, you can begin to get beyond the bad parts. Your past doesn’t have to be your future.

How Common Are ACEs?

About 64 percent of adults in twenty-five states reported they had experienced at least one type of ACE before age eighteen, and nearly one in six reported they had experienced four or more ACEs, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians (n.d.).

Number of ACEs Experienced by Age 18



Source: (PACEs Science 101, n.d.; National Collaborative for Health Equity, 2021; CDC, 2019)

ACEs Are Common

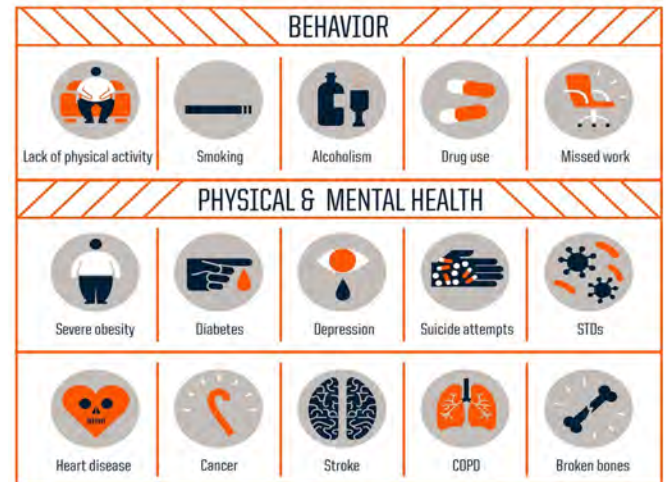


What Impact Do They Have?

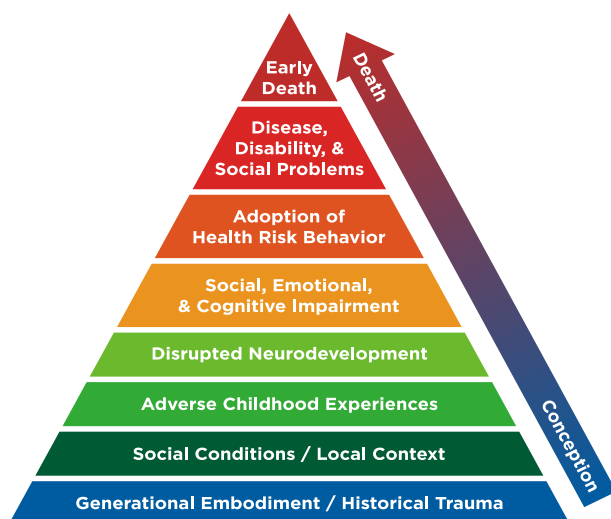
ACEs impact children from all ethnicities and genders. Women and several racial/ethnic minority groups are at greater risk of experiencing four or more ACEs.

Individuals are at a higher risk for alcohol and substance misuse, among other health and social outcomes, as there are increases in the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as abuse, neglect, violence, and other forms of trauma (Merrick et al., 2018; Grummitt et al., 2022; SAMHSA, 2000).

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems (cancer, diabetes, heart disease), suicide, mental illness, substance use problems in adolescence and adulthood, and early death. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential. ACEs can also increase the risks of injury, sexually transmitted infections, maternal and child health problems (including teen pregnancy, pregnancy complications, and fetal death) and involvement in sex trafficking.



What Contributes to ACEs?



- High rates of violence and crime
- High rates of poverty and limited educational and economic opportunities
- High unemployment rates
- Easy access to drugs and alcohol
- Where neighbors don't know or look out for each other
- Communities with limited community involvement among residents
- Few community activities for young people
- Unstable housing or where residents move frequently
- Communities where families frequently experience food insecurity
- Racism and bullying

ACEs Protective Factors

Individual

Caregivers who do these things or have the following characteristics

- Create safe, positive relationships with children
- Nurture their children and provide emotional support
- Who can meet basic needs of food, shelter, education, and health services
- Who have a college degree and have steady employment

Family

Families with the following characteristics

- Strong social support networks and stable, positive relationships in their community
- Caregivers are present and interested in the child(ren)
- Caregivers enforce household rules and monitor their child(ren)
- Caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors

Community

Communities where families have access to the following

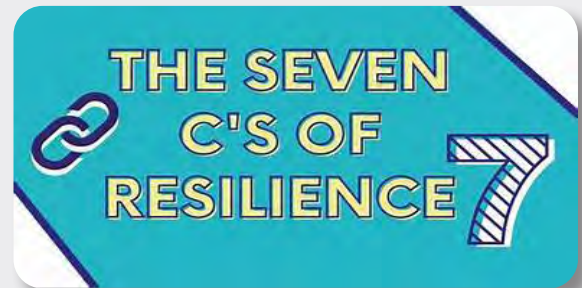
- Safe, stable housing
- High-quality preschool
- Nurturing and safe childcare
- Safe, engaging after-school programs and activities
- Medical care and mental health services
- Economic and financial help
- Adults have work opportunities with family-friendly policies

Resilience: The Biology of Stress & The Science of Hope (movie trailer)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49YZ2rn5R2M>

The Seven C's of Resilience



Parent and Teen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTmi4kHor_s

- Raise awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which are associated with substance use disorders, including an earlier age of initiating opioid use, recent drug use, and lifetime overdoses (Stein et al., 2017).
- Reduce stigma around seeking help with parenting challenges, substance misuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts.
- Shift the focus from individual responsibility to community solutions and promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments where children live, learn, and play.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)



Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>

The Threat of Opioid Misuse for Families



Tools to Start the Conversation



Download the 2-page PDF: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/Prevent-Addiction-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

The Teenage Brain

The human brain does not reach adult status until after age twenty-five. During the teen years, certain brain sections are more likely to reach out for excitement and get high than at other times. So, your brain can get you into trouble. However, if you know what's happening, you can coach yourself to resist some of the lures.

Different areas of your brain grow and mature at different rates. See the limbic structures. These areas are responsible for your emotions and rewards.

- The limbic system matures before the areas of your brain responsible for impulse control and judgment.
- This means you seek experiences that make you feel good before you realize you shouldn't do something.
- So, you could get involved in drugs without realizing the harm they could cause you later.
- Your brain is like a cheerleader leading you into mischief before your coach can stop it (Compton et al., 2019; Partnership to End Addictions, 2023; Center on the Developing Child, n.d.; First Things First, n.d.; Finel, 2015; and VAWnet, n.d.).

Opioid Use among Adolescents

Video on child brain development (NIH)



NIH: Teen Brain Development
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpfDijz2d8>

Talking with Your Teen about Opioids



Download the PDF brochure: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/TTHY-Opioid-Broch-2020.pdf>

What's the link between lack of sleep and drugs? Cell phones as culprits.

Another sleep problem is the cell phone. Cell phones emit blue light, which causes people to be more awake. So, put your cell phone in a drawer and don't use it or other electronic devices at least a half hour before bed (Wiginton, 2022). If you insist on watching TV, that's better for you than texting or gaming before bed. And what you watch on TV also matters; a sitcom rather than a suspenseful drama is better. There are also blue-light-blocking glasses, but stuffing your phone is easier (Pacheco & Truong, 2023; CDC, 2020; Rosen et al., 2019).

Most junior high and high school students do not get enough sleep. The recommendation for teens is nine-to-twelve hours per night to be extra alert and smart.

Despite biology and homework, lack of sleep has major consequences: impaired mood and attention and diminished impulse control. So, it's harder to say no to things. This is not

an excuse for doing drugs, but it means you must be extra alert and smart. If you're too tired, you're more likely to give in to drugs and peer pressure.

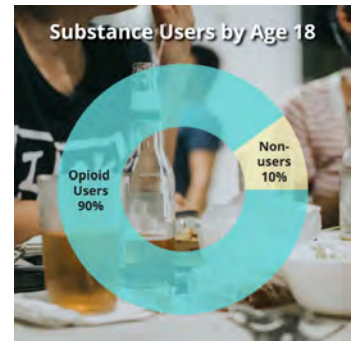
Knowing this trick of your brain, you can out-smart your brain.

The pre-frontal cortex and areas around it are responsible for judgment, decision-making and impulse control. Even later, the brain develops and uploads the executive function, which allows you to plan and meet goals, display self-control, follow multiple-step directions even when interrupted, and stay focused despite distractions, among other things (Abrams, 2022).

During the teenage years, the individual needs to forge independence from parents and fashion; self-identity; seeking out novel experiences and taking risks are part of this process. Unfortunately, the uneven maturation of the adolescent brain also increases susceptibility to environmental influences dominant during the adolescent years, such as peer influence.

Focus on delaying substance use in youth.

- Nine out of ten people with substance problems started using by age 18 (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.).
- For every year a teen delays substance use, the risk of addiction and substance misuse decreases by 4 to 5 percent (Scott & Krinke, 2019; Jordan & Anderson, 2017).



Talk to your kids about drug use.

- Ask your child to explain what they know about alcohol and drugs.
- Inform your child that drugs are harmful and they may result in injury, overdose, or death.
- Use simple language to explain your rules about alcohol/drugs.
- Store opioids and other prescription medicine securely.
- Properly dispose of leftover prescriptions. (Many communities offer "take-back" programs to collect unused medication.)

How Drug Dealers Are Exploiting Social Media To Target Young People



TODAY: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK8fcTPM46U>
More about the movie: <https://kplrfilms.co/resilience/>

Drug dealers moving from street corners to social media



Sky News: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESG_nGs7obc

Peer Pressure

What Is Peer Pressure?

Peer influence is when you **choose to do something you wouldn't otherwise do** because you want to feel accepted and valued by your friends. It isn't just or always about doing something against your will. It is often a feeling that one must do the same things as other people of one's age and social group to be liked or respected by them—conform to their standards. It is the influence of friends and acquaintances on our thoughts and actions (Brown, 2017).

Is Peer Pressure Good or Bad?

Peer pressure comes in two flavors: good and bad. For instance, peer pressure to participate in sports and join a team can be good, but peer pressure to use drugs can be bad (Brown, 2017).

What Are Examples of Peer Pressure?

Negative Peer Pressure?

- Convincing a friend to skip school.
- Encouraging a peer to fight or bully someone.
- Getting friends to engage in sexting.
- Pressuring a friend to drink or try drugs.
- Pushing someone to buy e-cigarettes online.

Peer pressure shapes your behaviors in subtle but powerful ways, such as these (Morin, 2022):

- The clothes you wear
- The places you go
- The way you behave
- The music you listen to
- The friendships you keep
- Whether you take drugs

How Can Pressure from Peers Lead to Drugs?

Teens whose friends or acquaintances use drugs are likely to experience pressure to do the same because peer pressure is a major factor in drug use and abuse. Millions of teenagers give in to peer pressure and first use drugs to gain acceptance from kids who already use drugs (Brown, 2017). Others, who are not teens, also are influenced by peer pressure.

Who Does Pressure from Peers Affect Most?

Everyone is subject to peer pressure at some point, but young people—especially teenagers—are most likely to give in to it. The most vulnerable teens are those still learning to make friends and gain acceptance from others. Many of them imitate the group they want to be a part of (Brown, 2017).

What Are the Gateway Drugs?

Gateway drugs are frequently used first and can act as an entryway to using other substances. They are frequently simple to obtain at home or inexpensive to purchase on the streets. Peer pressure to use substances frequently starts with the use of these gateway drugs (Brown, 2017):

- Alcohol
- Nicotine
- Marijuana

Who Is Likely to Give in to Pressure from Peers to Use Drugs?

Some factors make some teens more likely than others to give in to peer pressure to use drugs. These teens use drugs to cope with life stressors (Brown, 2017). They include teens with or who have:

- Alcohol or Drug-abusing Parent(s)
- Depression
- Financial Problems
- Low Self-Esteem
- Sexual, Physical, or Emotional Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Lack of Supervision
- Parental Divorce
- Emotional Neglect
- Loss of a Meaningful Relationship
- Stress

How Can Pressure from Peers Affect Drug Treatment Programs?

Counseling and therapy frequently fail because peer pressure is such a powerful influence that it can quickly undo the progress made in treatment programs and lead to relapse. If a person only spends a few hours per week in treatment but spends a lot of time with drug-using peers, imagine how hard it would be to progress toward a drug-free lifestyle. The one solution that seems to work is replacing the old peer group with a new, more positive one (Brown, 2017).

How Can One Refuse Peer Pressure to Use Drugs?

Although the majority of teenagers face peer pressure to use drugs at some point, some of them refuse to do so because they are aware of the harm that drugs can cause to their bodies and minds, and they have the self-confidence to stand up for what they think is best for them. They will employ the following strategies to resist peer pressure (Brown, 2017).

AVOID PEOPLE WHO USE OR SELL DRUGS

- The easiest way to refuse drugs is not to be around them. Stay away from people who use drugs and places where dealers sell drugs.

IGNORE THE OFFER

- Act like you did not hear the offer or are not interested in hearing more.

CHANGE THE SUBJECT

- Find something else to discuss.

SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES

- Offer to do something else—such as go to a movie or visit a friend who does not use drugs.

USE HUMOR

- Turn the offer into a joke and use laughter to make your point.

STATE YOUR OPINION

- Give your point of view, “I enjoy my life the way it is.”

KEEP YOUR RESPONSE SIMPLE

- Do not get into a debate. State your position in a few words. “Drugs are not for me.”

BE ASSERTIVE

- Stand tall, make eye contact, and emphasize your point. “I said no, and that is my final answer.”

LEAVE

- If the pressure to use drugs continues, just walk away. Some people will not take “no” for an answer.

As teens learn about boundaries, sometimes they will take them too far or won't erect them. Both scenarios can be problematic. Like most things, too much is not good either. Look at the following list. Do you fall into any of the following categories? If so, consider what you can do to make changes because these scenarios will lead to bad outcomes that can hold back your future (Gordon, 2021).

- Shutting people out of your life completely and not trusting anyone.
- Demanding friends or dating partners be there for you whenever you request it.
- Believing that others know what you are thinking or feeling and should respond accordingly.
- Giving in to friends or dating partners even when it goes against what you believe.
- Going against your values or beliefs to fit in, be liked, or please others.
- Allowing a romantic partner to make decisions for you or direct your life without ever standing up for yourself or questioning their behavior.
- Spending time with friends or dating partners who treat you poorly or disrespectfully.

One thing parents should also do is give their children ways to say no (Saprea, 2023).

When faced with a peer pressure situation, teens need to be confident in their answers and their decisions, and the way to do that is to rehearse them beforehand (American Addiction Centers, 2021). Parents can role-play situations with their teens or give them these different ways to say no, if needed. If parents are unavailable, do this role-playing with a peer or other family member, or, if nobody is around, in front of a mirror.

Respond with a reason why you don't want to drink or use drugs, suggested by American Addiction Centers (2021)



Where Can I Learn More about Drugs and Peer Pressure?

Knowing more about how drugs affect the mind and body may help you better understand the significance of saying “no,” as peer pressure to use drugs can sometimes be challenging to resist (Brown, 2017). Visit the following websites for further information:

- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information: www.ncadi.samhsa.gov
- Drug Free America Foundation: www.dfaf.org

Resources

How to engage in self-care:

- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>
- Your Healthiest Self: Wellness Toolkits (National Institute of Health): <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/your-healthiest-self-wellness-toolkits>

What is your ACEs score?

Take a survey at <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>.

**We all have a role to play
in preventing ACEs!**

Test Your Knowledge (answer yes or no)

1. ACEs can happen at any age.
2. ACEs have no relationship with physical health.
3. Racism is related to ACEs.
4. Caregivers or parents who have a positive relationship with their children may make up for some ACEs.
5. School-age psychosocial tasks include developing competence and a feeling that you can make it the world.

Answers: 1 = No, 2 = No, 3 = Yes, 4 = Yes, 5 = Yes.