



# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) - A toolkit by young people



Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen

2018/2019



## About Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen

Healthwatch gives people a powerful voice locally and nationally. At the local level, Healthwatch BwD helps local people get the best out of their local health and social care services. Whether it's improving them today, or helping to shape them for tomorrow, Healthwatch BwD is all about local voices being able to influence the delivery and design of local services.

Healthwatch was created under Health and Social Care Act, 2012. We are part of a network of local Healthwatch organisations which help to ensure that the views and feedback from patients and carers are an integral part of the design and delivery of local services.

Find out more at: [www.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk)

### Amplify

Amplify is Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen's dedicated Young Person's Project, designed and delivered by young people to allow them to share their views and experiences on the things that keep them happy, healthy and feeling good in order to shape local health and social care provision.



### Acknowledgements

Healthwatch volunteers

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### Project Summary

As part of the Mental Health project Amplify Champions formed a group to work on Adverse Childhood Experiences. They underwent training by Sue Irwin - Blackburn with Darwen ACE's consultant to become 'ACE informed'. Upon completion of the training, the group created a guide for adults, in particular, teachers, youth workers, support workers and parents. The guide was created to inform adults on how young people would like to be approached and supported when discussing ACE's.

The group felt it was important to inform other young people of ACE's, with the view to recognise traumas in their life to ultimately 'break the cycle'. They felt it was important to have creative and alternative ways to educate young people around ACE's. To address this need, the group collectively wrote a spoken word following the journey of a young person with multiple traumas. They aim to present the spoken word together with the resource for adults on best ways to have a conversation at future ACE's events and schools. The resources are also available on Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen's website.





### ACE's Spoken Word

27/08/02, My birthday

Just another day, what can I say?

Tryna find a way to run away.

Had to remind it's my day

But all the drugs are leading her astray

Anyway...

I couldn't attend school the other day.

Doctors called and said its going to be okay.

Keep pestering me, saying it can go two ways.

"Dad I need you to take your medication otherwise we won't have you for much longer...okay."

He keeps talking about this thing that keeps shadowing over him

It keeps calling his name, telling him that he's lame, he's useless he's got nothing to his name.

As he looks at our ... picture frames he's going insane, causing him pain

'where did I go wrong? Why am I in shame?!'

Social services are on our back, I just want my brother back, my mother is no help, she's too busy taking crack. No money in my pocket, not enough for a snack.

My friends are useless they don't say ...

Sitting in a class feeling like a clown, teachers are asking me why I'm feeling so down.

Telling me, listen to my voice. Put your blade down.

I know you think that's your only escape now

These scars on your arm ain't worth the pain now.

The inner you will regain your main sound.

NOW



## The views and experiences of children on Adverse Childhood Experiences

Taking me to therapy, telling people they are there for me. Now I'm finally feeling free. See you later anxiety.

Caught up in my thoughts, tryna run away, in this dark place. Isolated all day, with no one to tell me it's going to be okay.







### WHAT ARE ACES ?

- Adverse childhood experiences are traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on behaviour.
- Aces includes being physically emotionally and sexually abused as a child and growing u in a house with domestic violence, mental illness, alcohol or drug abuse or criminal problems.
- Children who have abusive or otherwise stress filled childhoods are more likely to develop conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer or other health and social problems through their adult life.

If children are brought up in a house where they have grown up to see abuse, violence and bad parenting they will start to think this is normal. They will grow up to see this being the way of life.

- They are experiences in a child that are unhappy, unpleasant or hurtful. Sometimes they are referred to as toxic stress or trauma.
- ACES can be growing up in a household with the following types of abuse.
- Physical abuse

Emotional abuse

Sexual abuse

Emotional or physical neglect

A substance abuser

Someone who is depressed, suicidal or mentally ill

Mother has been treated violently

No parents.



### WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF ACES?

The warning signs of aces in a child could be depressed, mood swings, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, risk taking behaviour, eating disorders, early pregnancy, weight problems, substance misuse, suicide attempts.

Its very important to be able to spot the warning signs of aces. This is because the quicker the signs are spotted, the quicker something can be done about it, children that may be at risk of having aces will receive the help they so desperately need. More people should be educated about how to deal with a child that has aces.

Members of the public should be more aware of aces and more understanding towards children that have aces. They didn't choose the people they were brought up by or alongside. They weren't able to do anything about the experiences that they were put through. If an adult is worried that a child has aces, they should try to speak to the child about their feelings. This is important so that they are able to identify the root of the problem. You can't just jump into a conversation with the child, you need to find out more about them. Become their friend, ask them how their days been.

One of the case studies about aces was an older woman. She was at the hospital recovering from alcohol and drug addiction. She was 3 years sober. As her health started to improve, she was able to talk to her nurse.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIORNMENT WHEN YOU ARE SPEAKING TO A CHILD WITH ACES?

Its important to create the right environment when you are talking to a child with aces. Children will usually feel more comfortable in an



environment where they are used to being around. Taking a child to an office will make them feel on edge, like they are being interviewed. Instead of this you could take them to a park, you could ask them about what they like doing in their spare time, basic questions like do they enjoy school? If they don't enjoy school, why not? Do they like listening to music, what type of music do they enjoy. Little things like this can give major hints about a child and their upbringing. You mustn't do it too forcefully especially if it is a touchy subject. When you are speaking to a child about their wellbeing and mental health it is important to start with an open question. This could be something as simple as how have things been at home. You could also ask about parental wellbeing.

### **WHY SHOULD CHILDREN TALK ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS?**

Children should talk about their feelings because it helps them to grow up in a safe and loving environment. This will help them to grow up and become confident adults. They should always know that they've got someone to speak to whenever they're feeling down, small bite-size conversations with a child make the world of a difference.

Children that have ACEs usually prefer to isolate themselves, they don't even think about speaking to someone because they have started to believe that this is the new norm. It's normal to go through what they've been through and this is what leads them to treat their own children the same as how they've been treated when they eventually do end up having them. Naturally children will speak to their parents when they are experiencing any difficulties, or they are going through a tough time. However,.....

### **HOW IS CHILDHOOD TRAUMA LINKED TO ACEs?**



Childhood trauma is linked with aces. The kind of childhood trauma I am talking about is not failing a test or losing a football game, its threats that are so harmful they literally get under our skin and start to change the way our bodies work. These are things like abuse or neglect or even growing up with a parent who suffers with mental illness or substance dependence

Sometimes when a child is overactive or they suffer with behavioural issues, most people link it to ADHD. No investigations are carried out and the child isn't given any actual support in their area.

When the weight from adverse childhood experiences starts to build up. It can start becoming too much for a child to deal with.

Some children grow up in a supportive happy environment where positive relationships can make them feel safe. Others grow up in an unhappy environment which can have long lasting negative impacts which effect what kinds of adults they will become and what kinds of health care issues they will face in the future.

The first aces study ever found that as several stressful experiences in a child increase, so does the risk of experiencing a range of healthcare conditions when you're a grown up. Stressful experiences in a childhood include different forms of abuse. The different types of abuse can include physical and emotional neglect and things that can happen to your family like domestic violence, adults in the home who suffer with alcohol issues or drug addiction, parents splitting up, having a mum or dad with a mental illness or having someone from your home in prison.



### BUT HOW DOES THIS AFFECT SOMEONE WHEN THEY GROW UP?

This can affect an individual because the more aces they have now the more they will be at risk of suffering when they become an adult. If a person has 4 or more aces, they are more likely to suffer from a heart disease, develop type 2 diabetes, be in prison, have committed violence and they may also take part in things which will cause them to do damage to their own bodies. These types of things include smoking, drinking or even drug addiction.

### WHAT KINDS OF THINGS CAN HAVE LONG LASTING EFFECTS ON A CHILD'S HEALTH?

These include being bullied at school, losing a parent, not having a home or being poor.

### WHAT THINGS CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT ACES?

You must talk about them, this is because the more that people know about aces the more, they can think about them and everything that they do.

### HOW CAN PEOPLE THAT WORK WITH CHILDREN DO?

If you work with children, then it is important that you think about aces and what effects it can have on a child. The chances are that you might have experienced an ace, maybe more than one and what impact it has had on your life. Was there anyone that you could speak to about it? Research shows that having an adult that you can speak to about your problems can reduce the negative effects of aces.

### TALKING ABOUT COPING STRATEGIES IN REGARD TO ACES

Even though aces are related to health and social care issues that may arise later in life, they aren't a guarantee that something will happen.



The negative effects of aces can be tampered with when people have a strong support system and the skills to successfully cope with life's challenges.

There are many ways that an individual can build resilience and help lessen the chances and the consequences of aces.

Part of overcoming aces is to recognise your past hurt and work through the pain. This can work wonders on a person's health. This along with a healthy diet, exercise and medical help can help an individual to overcome aces.

There are some steps which you can take in order to overcome aces and reduce the likelihood of you passing aces on to someone else. The first few steps to overcoming aces are as follows:

1. RECOGNISING YOUR PAIN

There is an online ACE survey which can be taken. Once complete, the survey will give you a score. The ace survey is a great starting point in talking with medical professionals when receiving help.

2. RECOGNISE THE SITUATION

Some parents can't show their children the love and support that they need. This is because they suffer from depression or the pain that they are going through themselves which may affect their ability to do a good job parenting. Other parents' parent their children how they were parented themselves, this can sometimes be the root of the problem.

3. FIND HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

Research has found that when children see their parents turning to coping strategies like alcohol, smoking or drugs, the child is more likely to turn to the same methods of coping with stress and sadness. Alongside this, researchers have found that the higher the persons ace score the more likely he or she will



## The views and experiences of children on Adverse Childhood Experiences

develop smoking related diseases. Smoking is usually thought to be the problem, but it is used as a coping strategy to deal with a problem. Choosing healthier ways to deal with stress rather than this is important for a parent's health and for their children's health.