



Why Are We Asking You To Screen For **ACEs**?

ACEs stands for Adverse Childhood Experiences. ACEs are stressful things that occur prior to our 18th birthday. ACEs are common, nearly half of children have at least one ACE, and nearly two-thirds of adults have at least one ACE.

We are learning that ACEs can lead to illness, both physical and mental. The good news is there are proven ways to decrease the effects of ACEs, and it is never too late to start! This clinic has begun asking all our patients of select ages to complete an ACEs Screening. Learning your ACE score will help your healthcare team better serve your individual healthcare needs.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us about ACEs.

Stress Busters to Decrease the Effects of ACEs:

Our medical teams are still learning about ACEs. However, there is agreement among professionals that all of us who are facing challenges do better if we have at least one stress buster in our lives. Learning how to reduce the effects of ACEs can improve both your /your child's physical and mental health. Talk to your healthcare team if you have any questions or concerns. It is never too late. Proven reducers of ACEs stress are:

- Getting regular quality sleep
- Eating healthy food
- Getting regular physical activity
- Practicing mindfulness like yoga, meditation, and deep breathing
- Spending time in nature
- Gaining access to behavioral healthcare services
- Building and having supportive relationships



Thanks to ACEs Aware, and for more information visit [ACEsAware.org](https://www.acesaware.org).

This project was funded from the Tennessee Department of Children's Services.





Getting A Good Night's Sleep

Getting a good night's sleep plays an important role in children's mental health, physical health, and overall well-being. Quality sleep is just as important to children's development as nutrition and physical activity.

Studies have shown children who get a good night's sleep are sick less frequently, focus and behave better in school, and manage stress more easily.

Ideas to help get a good nights sleep:

Keeping routines regular

Children benefit from predictable routines. Doing the same activities with your child at naptime and bedtime can help relax your child into sleep more easily. Reading, singing a quiet song, or talking quietly with your child are good ideas and can help your child toward getting a good night's sleep.

Keeping bedtimes and wakeup times regular

Our bodies are healthier and our brains work better when our sleep schedules are regular and predictable. It also helps bedtime go more smoothly when kids know what to expect.



Keeping the sleeping space restful and calm

We sleep better where the light is dim, noise levels are low, and temperature is cool (high 60s to low 70s). Avoid television, phone, laptops in the sleep space. Studies show the light from these devices keep us from feeling sleepy.

Staying active during the day

Making physical activity like a walk to the park, visiting a playground, or playing a favorite sport will help children have an easier time going to sleep.

Seeking support from a healthcare provider

Talk to your pediatrician if your child experiences frequent nighttime awakenings, nightmares, or sleepwalking.

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Improving Nutrition

Predictable, healthy routines can help your child feel safe and trusting of the world around them. Mealtimes are a great way to practice routine, and it allows you to influence what your kids eat.

Being stressed increases our craving for foods high in sugar and fat. Over time, this can lead to obesity, mood, and sleep problems. The good news is knowing about and doing simple things can reduce these risks.

Ideas to help your nutrition:

Eating together as a family

Set aside times for meals and eat together as often as possible, even bring babies to the table. This is a great time to build healthy eating habits and strong family bonds. Tell your kids about your day and ask them about theirs. Try to avoid screens at the table and try to be mindful of each other during this time.

Drinking water with every meal and snack

Limit juices, sodas, and sugary drinks. Instead, help your child develop the healthy habit of drinking water.

There is an app for that

There are apps and websites full of helpful information. For help on making better food choices, go to [MyFitnessPal](https://www.myfitnesspal.com) or [AuntBertha](https://www.auntbertha.com), and a website to locate local Farmers Markets is [LocalHarvest](https://www.localharvest.org).



Starting every day with a healthy breakfast

Eating a healthy breakfast complete with fruit, grains, and protein will help your child start each day with good energy. Studies show children and adults who eat breakfast daily are less likely to be overweight.

Knowing how to add healthy foods

- Make your child's sandwiches with wholewheat bread.
- Serve fresh, frozen or canned colorful fruit and veggies.
- Increase lean protein such as eggs, fish, and chicken that are not fried.

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Building Supportive Relationships

All families face difficulties. Some challenges are too intense or too frequent for a child to cope. When this happens, a child may experience toxic stress that can negatively affect them throughout their life.

But negative effects do not have to happen and there are things you can do to help. Loving, supportive relationships help you and help your child reduce the affect of toxic stress. So, seek out the supportive relationships you need, and know our office staff is here for you.

Ideas to help find and build supportive relationships:

Making supportive relationships a priority

Parents and children both need reliable supportive relationships to share thoughts and feelings. Look around your community to find and build strong relationships by connecting with family, friends, faith communities, mentors, and local organizations such as parenting groups. Making healthy supportive relationships a priority can help you to do the following:

- Treat everyone in your household with respect.
- Keep all adults in your household from using abusive or violent behavior directed at or around your child.
- Avoid physical discipline with your child.
- Set age-appropriate limits, clearly state expectations, and be consistent with appropriate discipline that focuses on teaching instead of punishment.
- Recognize desired behavior.
- Use daily routines to help your child feel safe and confident.
- Let your kids know when there will be changes to their routine and what it will mean for them.
- Teach your child to use words to describe how they are feeling, such as: happy, sad, angry, or scared. Labeling and understanding our feelings is an important step in managing them in a healthy way.
- Pay attention to your child, and enjoy time with them through play, drives home, mealtimes, stories, and bath-time.
- Look into your child's eyes, this lets them know you see them.
- Make sure to hug your child.
- Model for your child. When kids see us recognize and manage our own stress in healthy ways, like taking 3-5 deep belly breaths, they learn to do the same.



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Practicing Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness is being aware of the immediate or present feelings, thoughts, and sensations inside you, and can help turn the stress response down.

Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness can reduce all kinds of stress in you and your child, including the stress of parenting.

Ideas to bring mindfulness into your life:

Paying close attention to details when you are with your child

While playing, walking, sharing meals, or driving home pay attention to the details. Practicing being mindful can happen anytime, anywhere.

Bringing mindfulness into your life is easier when you practice everyday

Practicing mindfulness everyday will help build the habit faster while also helping calm down your stress response. Give yourself a break from what happened yesterday or could happen tomorrow by putting your attention on what is happening now.

There is an app for that

Helpful resources can be found at [SmilingMind](#) and [AuntBertha](#).



Learning and teaching deep belly breathing

Deep belly breathing is a good path to a relaxed state that you can teach your child and try yourself.

- Have your child sit or lie down.
- Have your child place one hand on their belly, and one hand on their chest.
- Have your child breathe in through their nose while feeling their belly rise.
- Have your child breathe out through their mouth while feeling their belly lower.
- Repeat this three to five times and try to keep it fun.
- Model this with your child by setting a good example. For instance you might say, "I'm so stressed by this traffic, but I can't change it. Please help me calm my mind and body by taking a few belly breaths with me." You and your child can talk later about how it felt, and how it helped you feel better.

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Getting Exercise

Getting daily exercise helps improve children's behavior and concentration, boosts their immune system, eases feelings of anxiety and depression, and reduces stress hormones in their bodies.

Being physically active with your children is even better, it is healthy for your brain and body, and it can be a lot of fun for both of you!

Ideas to help your child get enough exercise:

Turning off the screens

Children benefit from limited screen time, including: phones, televisions, laptops and other electronic devices to one hour or less per day. For children under 18 months old, screen time other than video chatting with family or friends should be discouraged. Children 18-24 months old should not watch screens alone.

Building play into your schedule

Making physical activity a priority will help make it happen regularly. Put play on your calendar, and plan active family outings. Playing together is great for bonding!



There is an app for that

There are apps and websites full of helpful information. An app that can help you find playgrounds is [PlaygroundBuddy](#) and websites with helpful information are [KidsHealth](#) and [AuntBertha](#).

Providing active toys

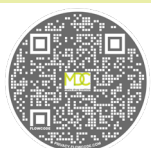
Think about balls, hula-hoops, tricycles, bicycles, and ride-on toys. Several popular websites and social platforms even provide opportunities to buy used bikes.

Knowing how much playtime each day is enough:

- Kids and teens should exercise or engage in physical activity for 60 minutes or more.
- Toddlers should have 60 minutes or more of active playtime. Their play should spread out across the day.
- Preschoolers should have 120 minutes or more of active playtime. Their play should spread out across the day.

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Improving Mental Health

Tending to our mental health is just as important as tending to our physical health. Seek help as soon as you notice a problem. You can talk to your primary health care provider or pediatrician to help find mental health services.

Our medical community is learning how many chronic medical conditions result from unaddressed toxic stress occurring during childhood. Let's work together and bring an end to untreated toxic stress in our children.

Ideas to help your child's mental health:

Sharing worries and concerns with your health care providers

Being willing to share worries and concerns about your or your child's struggles is a great first step toward healing and wellness.

Seeking help

If your child has experienced struggles or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), or someone has expressed concern about your child's behavior you might consider seeking professional help. Another reason to consider seeking help is if your child's medical health seems to be affected. The medical community is learning more everyday about the role stress and toxic stress has on many medical conditions. Some concerns for your child include:

- Gets colds, or ear infections, or stomach aches often
- Has sleep troubles, such as difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep
- Screams and cries a lot
- Has symptoms of asthma that get worse when stressed
- Has frequent tantrums or is defiant
- Is anxious or is easily upset



There are steps you can take that can result in your child having a healthier body and brain. Counseling and other mental health services can be helpful for children who have faced difficulties. This kind of care may also help you if you experienced trauma as a child or adult. A helpful resource in finding services is [AuntBertha](#).

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Experiencing Nature

Experiencing nature helps reduce stress which helps our bodies and brains. What we see, hear, and experience affects our mood and how our nervous, hormone, and immune systems work.

The stress of an unpleasant environment can make us feel anxious, sad, or helpless. A pleasing environment can reverse that. Exposure to nature can act as a buffer for life stresses and increase our ability to cope.

Ideas to help your child experience nature:

Getting outside and into nature

Exposure to nature helps us feel better and also helps our physical health by reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and stress hormones.

Helping us focus

Enjoying nature or green-spaces can also help improve our attention. Research shows children with ADHD have better attention spans after time in nature.

There is an app for that

There are apps and websites full of helpful information. An app that can help you find playgrounds is [PlaygroundBuddy](#) and a website to find a park near you is [ParkFinder](#).



Turning off the screen

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Being creative to add nature to your life

Nature can be found all around us, encourage your child to play an outdoor sport, reading next to a window, or taking a walk around the block.

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