



EXTENSION

How Parents can Heal from Childhood Adversity: PACEs for Parents

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ACEs and Parenting

Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are traumatic or stressful events or conditions, such as abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and parent substance abuse. These events occur before the age of 18. ACEs are common; most adults report having at least one. Experiencing ACEs as a child can have a negative impact on your health as an adult. These experiences can even influence how you parent. Parents who have experienced ACEs report greater parenting stress and irritability. However, positive experiences as parents can help reduce these effects. We refer to these Protective and Compensatory Experiences as PACEs because they help protect and make up for the negative effects of ACEs.

PACEs and Parenting

PACEs are positive experiences that can help parents overcome childhood adversity and begin to heal. These experiences include:

- spending time with friend(s)/family
- connecting to a community
- volunteering/civic engagement
- sharing positive childhood memories
- eating healthy, regular meals
- engaging in some type of exercise
- getting enough sleep each night
- practicing mindfulness
- having an enjoyable hobby
- finding opportunities to learn

Spend time with a friend or family member

Friendship and family support have been shown to decrease stress for adults who have experienced ACEs.

Practical suggestion: Set a time each week to spend with a close friend or family member, either in-person or on the phone. This can be a chance to share your feelings in a safe space. Utilize naptime if your child is young.

Connect with your community

Being a member of a community group or organization can decrease feelings of loneliness and increase life satisfaction.



Practical suggestion: Take part in informal community gatherings, religious/spiritual events, parent groups, or other social groups when you have time. Reach out and talk with neighbors and community members.

Engage in civic or volunteer work

Like community involvement, civic and volunteer work can increase social connection. Volunteering with your child can be especially helpful.

Practical suggestion: Take part in clean up days in parks or your neighborhood. Join a walk in your area to benefit a charity. Serve dinner at a homeless shelter. Religious organizations often have many volunteer opportunities available for parents and children.

Share positive childhood memories

Recalling positive memories from one's own childhood may help to buffer the negative effects of childhood adversity.

Practical suggestion: Take time to share or think about special, positive memories from your childhood when you felt loved and cared for.

Eat healthy, regular meals

Eating meals each day with fruits and vegetables is good for your health. Also, regular mealtimes provide an opportunity to eat as a family.

Practical suggestion: Set a regular time for family dinner during the week to connect and share about each other's day.



Engage in exercise

Physical exercise is also important for physical and mental health. Exercise can decrease feelings of depression and anxiety.

Practical suggestion: It can be difficult to engage in regular exercise. Make small adjustments: Take the stairs. Park far from the building. Stand at your desk or walk during your lunch break.

Get enough sleep

Getting too little sleep can increase parenting stress, irritability, and fatigue.

Practical suggestion: Try to get 8 to 8 ½ hours of sleep per night. Establish a regular bedtime for your children and yourself. Avoid using your phone 30 minutes before bed.

Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of being present and noting your feelings and thoughts. Practicing mindfulness can reduce parenting stress and increase positive parenting.

Practical suggestion: Mindfulness can be easily added into your busy day. Free audio and video meditation guides can be found at: <https://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/mindfulness/programs/mbsr/Pages/audio.aspx>

Engage in an enjoyable hobby

Having a hobby can increase feelings of competency, self-esteem, and reduce stress. A hobby you can share with your child can increase connectedness.

Practical suggestion: Set aside time for your favorite hobby each week. If you don't have a hobby, think about activities you enjoyed as a child, or ask others about their hobbies to gain ideas.

Continue to learn

Continuing to learn about new topics or gain new skills can be exciting and confidence-boosting. It is also good for your brain!

Practical suggestion: Fun ways to learn can include reading, having a trivia night, or learning new skills from friends and family. Let your children teach you something new.

“The best thing we can do for the children we care for is to manage our own stuff. Adults who’ve resolved their own trauma help kids feel safe.” – Donna Jackson Nakazawa

Additional Resources for Parents

ACEs Connection

<https://www.acesconnection.com/>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<https://www.nctsn.org/>

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