

# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Why Ending Conflict Protects and Serves Clients and Children

- ## Overview of ACEs

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events before age 18 that shape health and behavior.
- The Original 10 ACEs (CDC–Kaiser): Abuse (Physical, Emotional, Sexual); Neglect (Physical, Emotional); Household Challenges (Domestic violence, Substance use, Mental illness, Divorce, Incarceration).
- Expanded ACEs: community violence, racism, bullying, poverty, chronic instability.
- The ACE Study (1995–1997): Kaiser Permanente & CDC, 17,337 adults; surveyed on 10 adversities; linked ACE scores (0–10) to health records.
- Results revealed cumulative, graded relationships between ACEs and adult physical and mental health outcomes.

# Key Findings and Impacts of the ACE Study

- 64% had at least one ACE; 21% had three or more; adversity is widespread across demographics.
- Higher ACE Scores linked to heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and early death.
- Increased risks of depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidality, substance misuse, and relationship instability.
- ACEs predict lifelong stress and relational instability—patterns often seen in family litigation.

# Neuroscience of Conflict and Family Law Context

- Toxic stress activates the HPA axis—constant cortisol release.
- Amygdala (fear) overactive; prefrontal cortex (reasoning) suppressed.
- Parents with trauma histories experience litigation as survival threat; children absorb this as danger.
- Family-court conflict can replicate ACE environments: instability, fear, helplessness.
- Predictability, safety, and closure are neurological antidotes to stress.

# ACEs, Parenting, and Litigation Behavior

- Parents with high ACE Scores struggle with emotional regulation, communication, and trust.
- Litigation becomes a maladaptive coping mechanism—a reenactment of trauma.
- Ending litigation = ending re-traumatization; predictability and structure reduce conflict behaviors.
- Stable systems calm nervous systems and improve parenting capacity.

## ACEs Not Transformed are Transmitted

### WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT ACEs?

Over the next few months, we will focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including loss of a parent or divorce, and how they effect not only your child clients now and in the future but also their parents and us as adults. In 1995, Kaiser-Permanente and the CDC conducted one of the largest investigations of childhood abuse and neglect and household challenges and later-life health and well-being.

The original ACEs Study included two waves of data collection during the next two years. Over 17,000 Health Maintenance Organization members from Southern California receiving physical exams completed confidential surveys regarding their childhood experiences and current health status and behaviors with startling results: a graded dose-response relationship between ACEs and negative health and well-being outcomes.

We screened the movie Resilience on October 25 and learned that though ACEs are common, it is the cumulative effect that is the crux of so many future ailments. 28% of participants had been physically abused, 13% witnessed DV, 1 in 5 had been sexually abused. As the count of ACEs increased, so did the risk of alcohol abuse, heart disease, smoking, and other health issues in a step-wise fashion. In fact, ACEs are a stronger predictor of heart disease, the number one cause of death in the U.S., than traditional factors such as high blood pressure or smoking.

Why does it have such an effect? Is it because early childhood trauma makes a person more likely to engage in high risk behavior? Yes. But that is not the entire story. Even if a person does not engage in high risk behavior, he or she is more likely to have heart and lung disease. As Dr. Burke Harris noted, this is because of the constant triggering of the stress response system which then becomes maladaptive and health damaging. Exposure to adversity and trauma literally affects the way a child thinks and feels.

We need to try to reduce the exposure of the children on our cases to ACEs not just because they are traumatic, but also for their future health and welfare. When we understand the mechanism, we can provide better prevention and treatment. It is my hope that the information we review over the next few months will increase our ability to understand our child clients, identify their trauma and needs, prevent further adverse experiences, and minimize the possible negative outcomes.

# ACEs

- ◆ Physical Abuse
- ◆ Emotional Abuse
- ◆ Sexual Abuse
- ◆ Physical Neglect
- ◆ Emotional Neglect
- ◆ Mental Illness
- ◆ Domestic Violence
- ◆ Divorce or Abandonment
- ◆ Incarceration of a Parent
- ◆ Substance Abuse



Pop Quiz... Does anyone know who this is?

### IF YOU MISSED RESILIENCE...

If you missed the Resilience screening CLE, don't fret! We will do an online screening on November 12th at 11:00a.m. so put your footie PJs on, get some popcorn, put your feet up, and join us! Katie will send out the registration link.



## DIVORCE IMPACTS LIFE SPANS

Divorce and separation from a parent affect children into adulthood. As one 2011 study noted, “[T]he long-term health effects of parental divorce were often devastating—it was a risky circumstance that changed the pathways of many of the young Terman participants. Children from divorced families died almost five years earlier on average than children from intact families. Parental divorce, not parental death, was the risk. In fact, parental divorce during childhood was the single strongest social predictor of early death, many years into the future.”

Howard Friedman *The Longevity Project: Surprising Discoveries for Health and Long Life from the Landmark Eight Decade Study* (Hay House, Inc, 2011).

*“You are ready to fight the bear or run from the bear. Which is wonderful, if you are in a forest, and you see a bear.” Dr. Nadine Burke Harris*

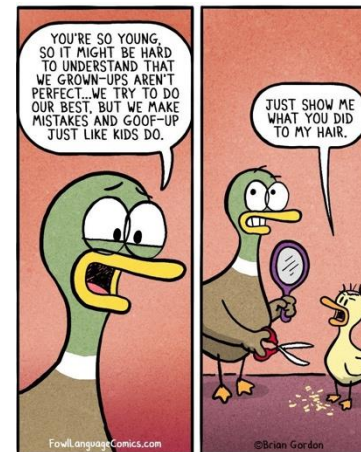
### THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE ON OUR CONFLICT CASES THIS YEAR!

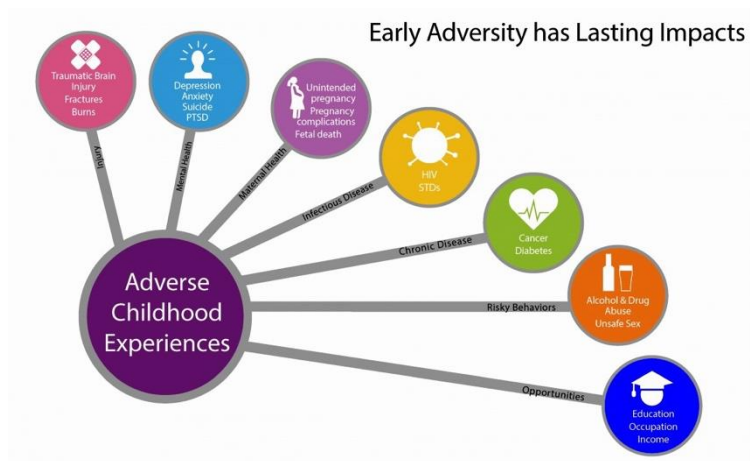
- \* ANN MARIE ALLEN
- \* DAVID BERCEAU
- \* JUDY BARKING
- \* LAURA CABANILLA
- \* KENYON DOVE
- \* NADINE HANSEN
- \* SHELEIGH HARDING
- \* NICOLE LOWE-MCBRIDE
- \* MALONE MOLGARD
- \* SOPHIA MOORE
- \* LISA NAGEL
- \* RYAN PETERSEN
- \* JENNIFER REYES
- \* BRENT SALAZAR-HALL
- \* JEANNINE TIMOTHY
- \* SOPHIA MOORE
- \* PAUL WALDRON

## ACES SHOULD INCLUDE REMOVAL & MULTIPLE PLACEMENTS (...AND PARENT HAIRCUTS?)

In addition, it has been posited that removal to foster care should be considered an ACE. “Qualitative data from African American and Latino youth support expanding the concept of childhood adversity to include community-level indicators such as: experiencing racism, witnessing community violence, living in an unsafe neighborhood, experiencing bullying, and a having a history with foster care.” Wade R Jr, Shea JA, Rubin D, Wood J. *Adverse childhood experiences of low-income urban youth*.

*Pediatrics*. 2014;134(1):e13–e20, Pachter LM, Bahora Y, Witherspoon M, Davis M, Smith-Brown C, Bernstein BA. *Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in an urban Latino community: a qualitative study*. 2014 Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting; Van cou-





*ACEs have a wide range of impacts.*

## ACES AND ADVERSITY TRENDS AMONG PARENTS

This year a new article came out in the Children and Court Services Review titled “Adverse childhood experiences to adult adversity trends among parents: Socioeconomic, health, and developmental implications” (Borja, et al.) The introduction notes that “Although there is now considerable evidence regarding ACEs and their effects, relatively less understood are the patterns and links of accumulation germane to the parent-child dyads.” Hence data gathered included ACE scores, AAE scores (Adult Adverse Experiences), household socioeconomic resources, and health and functioning to determine if there was a stacking effect.

While the majority of those surveyed indicated low ACE and AAE scores, study indicates that for those who experienced high AAEs after also having high ACE scores, “[t]he stacking of adversities such as the chronic lack of economic resources, exposure to health risk behaviors, physical and mental health challenges of parents and other related difficulties indicate a potentially ongoing exposure of children to stressful situations in their families.”

However, among those who experienced high ACE scores, over 2/3 of them had experienced low AAEs and subsequently reported fewer health-related impediments to employment and less parenting stress. Thus, the study suggests that the “resilience among those who have experienced higher ACEs can prevent heightened exposure of their children to adversity.”

This tends to show that ACEs not transformed are transmitted onto the next generation. Thus where there is early intervention to reduce parenting stress and socioeconomic adversity (access to jobs and healthcare) and increase resilience, the children are exposed to less ACEs and the stacking effect can be broken.

## PRO BONO ROCKSTARS

(TWO OR MORE  
CASES IN 2019)

- \* Allison Librett
- \* Lisa Nagel
- \* Sam Sorensen
- \* Melissa Bean
- \* David Berceau
- \* E. Jay Overson
- \* David Ward

Honorable  
Mention (One Case  
in 2019)

- \* Alison Bond
- \* Jessica Couser
- \* Kenyon Dove
- \* Laura Hansen
- \* Mindi Hansen
- \* Sheleigh Harding
- \* Shane Marx
- \* Cassie Medura
- \* Clark Nelson
- \* Celia Ockey
- \* Phil Reichenbach
- \* Orson West
- \* Jay Woodall

# THE AUDIT



## ANSWER FROM PAGE 1:

Chasing Aces broke the 52 year-old Del Mar track record for five furlongs in his second start of his career (:56.21) but was euthanized after pulling up into the stretch run of his third race as a result of a slab fracture in his knee. I found it so sad that when I searched for articles on ACEs, I was reminded of this guy who also had a premature death.

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Standing in the Shoes of the Child

The PGAL program recently underwent a legislative audit as a part of an audit of child welfare during divorce proceedings. I survived on a diet of caffeine and ice cream—but we came out okay!

The conclusion was that we have sufficient training and controls in place to protect children in divorce cases. I want to thank you all for your diligent work on keeping up with your training and providing quality representation for our child clients. Now if we can just get the issues resolved in the one year required by statute!

Here is a portion of a Deseret New Article by Ashley Imlay:

(the full article can be found at: <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2019/8/20/20814018/utah-courts-children-divorce-audit> )

...

Most court personnel — including judges, guardians ad litem, and commissioners — receive adequate training to handle cases involving child welfare, the report states.

“In contrast, it was difficult for us to evaluate if child welfare experts who are added to cases when conflict between parents escalates, such as custody evaluators, parent coordinators, and special masters, are meeting their annual training requirements,” auditors wrote.

“We credit the courts for responding to the changing needs of divorcing families with innovative practices and anticipate that they will continue to enhance child protections and improve court operations through additional efficiencies, as recommended in this audit,” auditors wrote.

Judge Mary T. Noonan, interim state court administrator, responded to the audit in a letter and said the findings were “consistent with actions the Utah courts are already in the process of implementing.”

## What is Your ACE Score?

Have you considered how your own childhood experiences may have affected your health and choices in life? I know I have.

My ACE score is one of those that is above four and it has shaped how I live both positively and negatively. If you want to take the ACEs test, click here:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/03/02/387007941/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean>

# Protective Factors Framework

- Protective factors buffer families against trauma and reduce court recidivism (Center for the Study of Social Policy / SAMHSA).
- Parental Resilience; Social Connections; Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development; Concrete Support in Times of Need; Social and Emotional Competence of Children; Positive School and Community Engagement.
- One stable, loving, predictable caregiver is the single most powerful protective factor— it can counteract multiple ACEs.
- Strengthening these factors reduces crises, conflict, and filings.

# Trauma-Informed Conflict Reduction

- Predictability = Calm; Transparency = Trust; Regulation = Resolution.
- ADR = Prevention; Professional Tone = System Tone.
- Structured parenting plans, clear orders, and calm advocacy reduce reactivity and promote closure.
- Goal: lasting resolution that protects children and serves clients.

# The ARC Framework and Book Summary

- Book: Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019).
- 20+ years of trauma treatment; ARC = Attachment · Self-Regulation · Competency.
- Attachment: nurturing, predictable caregiving restores safety and trust.
- Self-Regulation: skills and routines manage arousal and impulses.
- Competency: mastery and success build positive identity and resilience.
- ARC offers a practical roadmap for healing and conflict reduction in family systems.

# Practical Interventions and Ethical Imperative

- Early stabilization, ACE screening, continuity in school and activities.
- Structured communication, ADR-first, and scheduled post-decree reviews.
- Each filing adds emotional and financial strain—chronic litigation extends ACEs for children.
- Ending conflict is both an ethical and therapeutic act; professionals must reduce harm.

# Measurable Benefits and Implementation Timeline

- Trauma-informed programs reduce repeat filings by 40–60%.
- Improved compliance, satisfaction, and child functioning.
- Reduced professional burnout; healing families heal systems.
- Implementation: 0–3 months stabilize; 3–6 months reinforce protective factors; 6–12 months transition to closure.

# Collaboration, References, and Resources

- Collaborate across law, therapy, education; use strength-based language in reports.
- Key References: Felitti et al. (1998), Blaustein & Kinniburgh (2019), CDC ACEs, SAMHSA, NCTSN, AFCC.
- Professional Resources: ACEs Connection, CSSP Protective Factors, Resilience (KPJR Films).