



FaithWorks Counseling

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UNDERSTANDING ACE SCORES

What Are ACEs?

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are potentially stressful or traumatic events that happen before the age of 18. These experiences can affect how the brain and body develop, and may influence health, emotions, and relationships later in life.

The ACE Study identified 10 major types of childhood adversity, grouped into three categories:

1. Abuse

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse

2. Neglect

- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

3. Household Challenges

- Living with a family member who had mental illness
- Living with someone who abused substances (alcohol/drugs)
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Having a parent who was incarcerated
- Parental separation or divorce

What Is an ACE Score?

Your ACE score is the total number of these experiences you faced before age 18. Scores range from 0 to 10.

The score does NOT:

- Predict your future
- Tell your whole story
- Determine who you are as a person
- Measure your worth, strength, or resilience
-

It is simply a tool to help understand patterns and support healing.

Why Does the ACE Score Matter?

Research shows that higher ACE scores increase risk for certain physical and emotional concerns, such as:

- Anxiety, depression, and PTSD
- Difficulty with trust or relationships
- Challenges with emotional regulation
- Increased stress responses (“fight, flight, freeze”)
- Higher risk for heart disease, diabetes, and chronic health issues

BUT—this is only one part of the picture.

What Balances ACEs? Protective Factors

Many people with high ACE scores live healthy, fulfilling, and stable lives. This is because protective factors strengthen resilience.

Protective factors include:

- A caring adult (parent, teacher, coach, relative, mentor)
- Supportive friendships
- Access to counseling or mental health support
- Faith, spirituality, or a sense of meaning
- Safe neighborhoods, schools, or community connections
- Healthy relationships in adulthood
- Skills in coping, communication, and problem-solving

Healing is possible at any age.

What Your ACE Score *Does Not* Measure

- Resilience
- Resourcefulness
- Intelligence
- Compassion
- Faith
- Motivation
- Healing progress

ACEs describe what happened to you, not what is “wrong” with you.

How We Use ACE Scores in Counseling

Your ACE score helps us:

- Understand patterns of stress and triggers
- Explore how early experiences may still affect daily life
- Build a treatment plan that promotes healing and growth
- Identify strengths and protective factors unique to you
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ACEs help guide treatment—they do not define it.

Moving From Awareness to Healing

Having ACEs does not mean you are broken. It means:

- Your nervous system learned to adapt to stress
- You may have developed survival skills that helped you then
- You can now develop new skills that help you thrive

Healing includes:

- Learning regulation skills
- Developing healthy boundaries
- Processing past experiences safely
- Strengthening supportive relationships
- Building new patterns that support the life you want