



# Trauma Overview

*Preservice*

## Learner Guide

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## Table of Contents

Learning Objectives	3
Trauma Defined	3
Toxic Stress	6
Trauma and the Brain	6
Impact on Development and Attachment	7
Acknowledging Your Trauma	8
ACE Questionnaire	10
Resources	11

- Define trauma and toxic stress
- Describe how the brain adapts based on experience
- Describe how trauma impacts attachment and development

**Please take care of yourself  
during this course.**

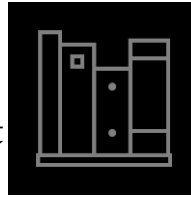
Certified foster caregivers are required to be **trauma-informed**. The term means:

1. Realize the **prevalence of trauma**
2. Recognize how **trauma affects all** individuals
3. Respond to trauma by putting this **knowledge into practice**
4. **Resist re-traumatizing** the individual

[illegible]

# Trauma Defined

As you listen to the childhood experiences of **Alex**, write down what you think are important details.



## Notes:

**Adverse experiences** like Alex's are called **traumas**. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) define trauma using the 3 E's:

- **Event** or series of events or a set of circumstances
- **Experience** an individual perceives as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening
- Lasting, adverse **effects** on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

It is the experience **and** how a person perceives the experience which makes it traumatic.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)** are one way to categorize childhood traumas. The ten categories of ACES are:

### Abuse

1. Physical
2. Emotional
3. Sexual

### Neglect

4. Physical
5. Emotional

### Household Dysfunction

6. Mental illness
7. Mother treated violently
8. Divorce
9. Incarcerated relative
10. Substance abuse





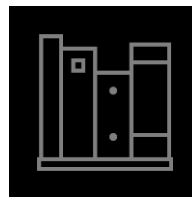
**Unaddressed toxic stress** can lead to:

- Difficulty reasoning and problem-solving
- Chronic or recurrent physical complaints
- Sensitivity to sounds, smells, touch, or light
- Difficulty identifying and managing emotions
- Unhealthy coping mechanisms

## Trauma and the Brain

Consider Dr. Siegel's hand analogy to remember **three areas** of the brain.

1. **Brainstem** (palm): basic survival
2. **Limbic System** (thumb): emotional center
3. **Cortex** (knuckles and fingers): executive functioning



Because the cortex continues to grow and develop for a long time, it is the **most susceptible** part of the brain to change based on experiences.

**Brain Architecture** video notes:

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To rewatch the videos on toxic stress or brain architecture, go to the [Center for the Developing Child's website](#).

Children with positive experiences and a nurturing caring adult build and strengthen neural pathways that help them grow and learn.

**Notes:**

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As a foster caregiver, how will you **identify** toxic stress in the children placed in your home? How can you help children build neural pathways that help them **grow and learn**?

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## Impact on Development and Attachment

Toxic stress keeps the brain focused on **survival instead of development**. Since development is cumulative, missing earlier stages of development impacts later developmental stages.

**Attachment** is **learned** in infancy but expands beyond the primary caregiver as we grow and develop. Love and nurturing allow a child to grow a **neural network** that gives them the ability to **love and nurture** others.

What could a child's **worldview** look like if they don't have a present, attentive, and responsive caregiver? How might this impact their **behavior**?




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### Notes:

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# ACE Questionnaire

It is important to address any personal trauma histories prior to the placement of children in your home

Take a few minutes to complete the ACE questionnaire on the next page to identify your adverse childhood experiences.

**Instructions:** Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18th birthday. Then, please add up the number of categories of ACEs you experienced and put the *total number* at the bottom.

Did you feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect or take care of you?	
Did you lose a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or other reason?	
Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide?	
Did you live with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs, including prescription drugs?	
Did your parents or adults in your home ever hit, punch, beat, or threaten to harm each other?	
Did you live with anyone who went to jail or prison?	
Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?	
Did a parent or adult in your home ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way?	
Did you feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?	
Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or oral/anal/vaginal intercourse/penetration)?	
<b>Your ACE score is the total number of checked responses</b>	

*Adverse Childhood Experiences Revised Questionnaire,  
California Surgeon General's Clinical Advisory Committee*

## Resources

Dr. Nadine Burke Harris' Ted's Talk, How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime

[https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime)

Building Adult Capabilities to Improve Child Outcomes (Center for the Developing Child): [https://youtu.be/urU-a\\_FsS5Y](https://youtu.be/urU-a_FsS5Y)