

What Is Trauma?

Trauma is a distressing event or set of experiences that can have immediate and long-term impacts on a child's mental and physical health. Trauma is common in children and can result from:

- Abuse or Neglect
- Community or Family Violence
- Stressors of poverty
- Bullying

How Common Is It?

Up to 30% of children in California have experienced one or two adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), a way of defining traumatic events. ACEs are measured through a 10-item questionnaire and can include emotional abuse or losing a parent due to incarceration or divorce.

Almost 17% of adults in California report having experienced four or more ACEs as a child. A person with four or more ACEs is **12 times more likely to attempt suicide** and **seven times more likely to be an alcoholic.**



What Are Typical Symptoms?

Symptoms of trauma include:

- Depression, anxiety, or suicidal behavior.
- Poor emotional control or an emotional response that is out of context.
- Difficulty paying attention, poor memory, and “black or white” thinking.
- Confrontational behavior.
- Poor or changed academic performance or attendance.
- Increase in impulsive, risk-taking behaviors, such as drug use or unprotected sex.
- Physical symptoms, such as a stomach or headache.

Symptoms may also be triggered by circumstances in school, such as:

- Unpredictability or transition in the classroom.
- Being rejected or confronted by peers or adults.
- Sensory stimulation, such as particular sights, smells, and sounds.

For more information about starting a school-based mental health program, please contact the California School-Based Health Alliance at 510-268-1260 or via email at info@schoolhealthcenters.org.

Supporting Students So They Can Succeed in School

Your School Can Support Youth Who Have Experienced Trauma

Take these steps to support students both inside and outside of the classroom:

- Implement school-wide positive climate programs, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports or Restorative Practices
- Provide safe and supportive enrichment activities and after-school programs for students.
- Provide awareness training and consultation for adults on campus.
- Assess the classroom environment to reduce unpredictability, offer coaching to teachers, conduct classroom community building activities, and immediately intervene in situations of bullying.
- Offer easily accessible mental health support, including individual and group services.
- Work with youth identified as living with trauma to develop behavior and crisis plans.
- Ensure youth have at least one caring adult to support them on campus.
- Help adults to build positive relationships with youth.

Resources: Creating a Supportive School Climate

- **California School-Based Health Alliance** | Webinars, Presentations | www.schoolhealthcenters.org
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences** | ACE Questionnaire, Research, FAQs | www.acestoohigh.com
- **Center for Youth Wellness** | Pediatric Screening & Prevention | www.centerforyouthwellness.org
- **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction** | Trauma Toolkit | ssp.wi.gov/ssp_mhtrauma
- **Adolescent Health Working Group** | Trauma & Resilience Toolkit | www.ahwg.net

**Learn more about school-based mental health care.
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