



ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES BRISTOL

Developing An ACE Aware City

This document sets out our proposed approach to addressing ACEs in Bristol. If you have comments or would like to get involved please contact us at ACE@bristol.gov.uk



Developing an ACE Aware City

The approach set out here has been developed with local and regional partners and is relevant to everyone who works in Bristol; everyone has a role to play in understanding and responding to vulnerability.

What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are negative experiences in early life and childhood that can have an impact on health and wellbeing throughout life. There is no universally agreed definition of an adverse childhood experience, but studies addressing the issue have mostly converged on a similar set of experiences¹:

- direct harms: physical, emotional or verbal abuse and physical or emotional neglect
- indirect harms ('household challenges'): domestic violence, parental drug/alcohol misuse, parental criminal behaviour/incarceration, parental mental illness and bereavement (linked to death or separation)

Why ACEs matter:

There is a significant and growing body of evidence that stressful experiences during childhood have a profound impact on an individual's life chances. Research has shown a relationship between ACEs and poor physical and mental health and socioeconomic outcomes. Surveys by Public Health Wales have reported a significantly increased prevalence of problems including health-harming behaviour, poor mental wellbeing and chronic disease among those who had suffered four or more adverse childhood experiences compared to those who had suffered none². Similar results have been found from large-scale surveys in England.

Although most studies focus on a broad range of health-related outcomes, links have also been reported between ACE exposure and experience of wider social problems, such as reduced educational attainment, worklessness, diminished social mobility, lower socioeconomic status and increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system³

¹ Hughes et al., 'The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: a systematic review and meta-analysis', *Lancet Public Health* vol 2 (2017)

² 16 Public Health Wales, 'The Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study' (2016)

³ House of Commons, Science and Technology Committee, Evidence-based early years intervention, Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19

According to a UK study⁴ those with 4 or more ACEs are:

- 2x more likely to be a high-risk drinker and 3x more likely to smoke
- 6x more likely to have caused or had an unintentional teenage pregnancy
- 7x more likely to have been involved in violence in the last 12 months
- 11x more likely to have been incarcerated or use crack cocaine/ heroin
- 2x more likely to have visited a GP or visited A&E in the last 12 months
- 6x more likely to be diagnosed with an STD
- More at risk for disease including: cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, type 2, diabetes, stroke and cancer
- More likely to report poor health and have a lower sense of wellbeing

In this study, 50% of homeless people and 64% of those in contact with substance misuse services had 4 or more ACEs.

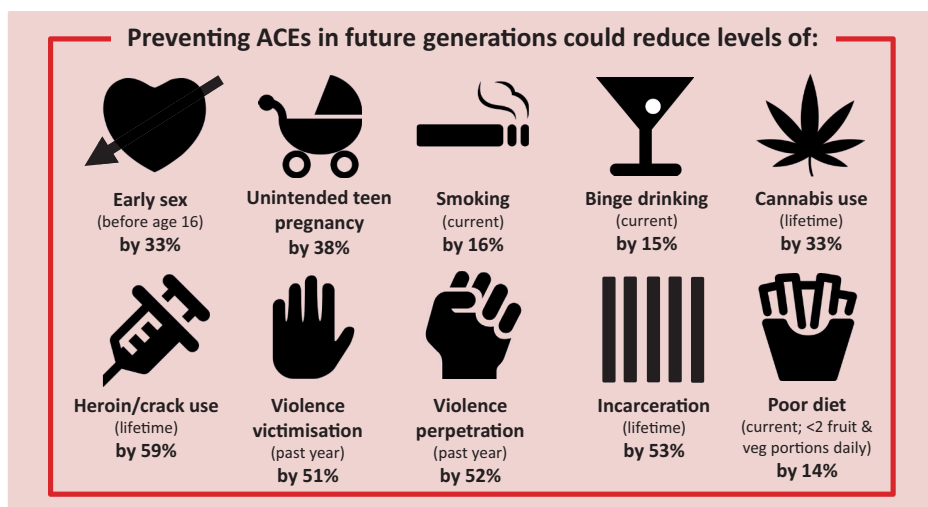
Those with 6 or more ACEs were:

- 35x more likely to die by suicide
- 46x more likely to be an intravenous drug user
- Likely to die 20 years earlier than those with no ACEs.

Reducing ACEs and the impact of ACEs

There’s nothing inevitable about ACEs, some people who have experienced multiple ACEs do well. Research has identified a number of preventative factors that can help to increase resilience across the life course and reduce the impact of ACEs. These include secure attachment with a trusted adult, community support, cultural connections and financial security⁵

Recognising ACEs early can help children and young people to receive timely and appropriate support. This can also help young adults to break the cycle of ACEs when they become parents. Evidence suggests that preventing ACEs can reduce health harming behaviours, as well as reducing, for example, unplanned teenage pregnancies, binge drinking, violence perpetration and incarceration:



As well as increasing the health and wellbeing of individuals, there are economic benefits to an ACE informed approach through increased employment levels and reduction in the involvement of the health, social care and criminal justice systems.



4 Bellis et al., 'National household survey of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with resilience to health-harming behaviors in England', BMC Medicine vol 12 (2014)
 5 Hughes et al, Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood experiences, Bangor University and Public Health Wales January 2018
 6 Bellis et al., 'National household survey of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with resilience to health-harming behaviors in England', BMC Medicine vol 12 (2014)



An 'ACE Aware' approach in Bristol

Research on ACEs has highlighted the importance of childhood experiences on development and the potential life-long consequences associated with childhood adversity or trauma. The ACE framework helps to provide a common language for practitioners working in different sectors. Research has highlighted the non-deterministic impact of ACEs and cautions against simplified approaches.

In Bristol, being ACE aware is not about a set of new interventions or the use of checklists to guide the support offered to specific individuals. Rather, it is a commitment to developing a holistic ACE approach across the city, with a focus on recognition, prevention and early intervention and the 'cultural' change that may be needed to support that. It is the umbrella under which a range of evidence-based interventions and programmes sit, supporting therapeutic conversations with a common language around understanding how experiences have, or are likely to, shape people's lives.

In Bristol we will take a long term transformational approach. We will work together to:

- prevent ACEs in future generations, including breaking the cycle within families
- recognise the signs and symptoms of ACEs to enable appropriate early intervention
- recognise the impacts of ACEs already experienced in children and adults and help them to receive support
- support and build resilience in communities, families and children who are at risk of exposure to ACEs

There are three main elements of an ACEs approach:

Primary Prevention aims to significantly reduce the likelihood of ACEs occurring, and therefore avoid the consequences. This includes recognising and addressing social exclusion and the socio-economic influences that may lead to ACEs (including poverty) as well as proactive work to develop resilience and protective factors to prevent ACEs occurring.

Identifying ACEs early (secondary prevention) aims to identify children who have already had ACEs as soon after the experience as possible. This will help to reduce the likelihood of the medium and long term impacts occurring, which would require more complex or specialist assistance later.

Supporting those with historic ACEs (tertiary prevention) aims to identify and support young people and adults who have already experienced multiple ACEs and are struggling with the longer term impacts. This includes identifying where complex or specialist assistance can reduce the impact of past ACEs on current ill health and wellbeing. It also helps break the cycle by reducing the likelihood of multiple ACEs in their children. This highlights the significant role that specialist schools, antenatal and parenting programmes, specialist adult services and the Police and Criminal Justice Service play.

Principles

We will place great value on understanding lived experience and work to understand and address inequality and discrimination. We will take a life course approach that is:

Strengths Based • Evidence Informed • Sustainable

Priorities for progress towards an ACE Aware Bristol

The following initial priorities have been identified by partners across the city. These work across our aims and will lay the foundations of a long term approach to transformation.

1. A Structured Approach

We will establish an ambitious and well-coordinated long term programme of work, develop a case for change, and deliver successful outcomes. Lived experience will be at the centre of our approach; we will work with the public and communities, and learn from them. We will develop an infrastructure for an ACE practice network and a programme of research and evaluation which will add to our local knowledge and understanding, and ensure we evidence our collective impact.

2. A Whole System Response

We will work together to achieve greater alignment of organisational strategies and commissioning across the city to promote a consistent response to vulnerability through all our work. We will invest on an invest to save basis, to enable us to move from a system that focuses on the symptoms of ACEs to one that is designed to be proactive in preventing and supporting recovery from them.

We will ensure our approach and systems do not encourage a reductionist view of very complex experiences.

We will build on existing best practice and identify gaps in provision at particular points along the life course and in system integration. We will require consideration of ACEs in the development of all strategies, plans and relevant transformation programmes, ensuring the risks associated with exposure to such adversity is recognised and understood. This includes for example, housing, city planning and the inclusive growth agenda.

3. An ACE Aware Workforce

We will recognise the skills and knowledge we have across the city and identify gaps in awareness. We will work together to embed a common language and approach across a competent, confident workforce that is able and supported to take an ACE informed approach in responding to vulnerability.

4. Integrated Locality Arrangements

In addition to our central multiagency safeguarding hub we will further develop our integrated locality arrangements so that we have an ACE informed approach that signposts, supports, safeguards and supports recovery. We will provide seamless pathways organised around adult, children and family needs.

5. Resilient Communities

We will recognise the strength in our communities and the ability of families and individuals to break the cycle of ACEs ; drawing on their knowledge, experience, interests and assets. We will find ways to support the community, families and individuals to understand ACEs and their impact. We will pursue our city ambitions to ensure that everyone has opportunities to develop positive relationships, access community support, to develop cultural connections and take part in sport and recreation.

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, audio, large print, easy English, BSL video or plain text please contact ACE@bristol.gov.uk

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