



REMEMBER

- Over 70% of Canadians experience at least one traumatic event in their lifetime but trauma doesn't ensure damage. For children the impact depends on factors such as the severity of the event, the response of caregivers, and the resilience of the young person.
- Teens who have experienced a traumatic event often try to ignore or hide from talking about what has happened. They can have difficulty acknowledging, processing and expressing what has happened and feel like talking will take them back to the horrible experience they are trying to forget.
- No one who has suffered trauma is irreparably damaged. Neuropathways can be healed and the presence of even 1 caring adult can help to reverse and prevent the effects of trauma. As we step in, we can introduce young people to the concept of Biblical peace - the restoration of wholeness from brokenness - and to the One who came to bring this kind of peace into their lives.



RECOGNIZE

- Trauma is a response to deeply disturbing experiences that significantly impact our sense of safety. Trauma challenges our core view of God, people and ourselves.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (A.C.E.'s) are traumatic events that happen in the home such as abuse, divorce, violence against a family member, or having a substance abusing mentally ill, suicidal, or imprisoned parent. A.C.E.'s create toxic stress which impacts the structure of the developing brain. The more A.C.E.s a young person has experienced, the higher likelihood of future physical and mental health difficulties in adulthood.
- Outside of the home, trauma may occur if the person has experienced or witnessed an event that involved actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence. Things like rape, intense bullying, racism, a serious accident, or natural disasters can all cause traumatic stress.
- Stress from trauma can get in the way of engaging freely in life and building relationships. It can continue long after the event has passed. Watch for things in teens like too much or too little emotion, along with things such as nightmares and difficulty sleeping or eating, problems attaching to or trusting others, hyper vigilance, and chasing risky behaviours as a few indicators of possible previous trauma.



RESPOND

- Recognize that there is often more** to the young person's story. If their behavioural or emotional reactions seem confusing or incongruent, leave room for the possibility that they may be self-protecting because of a perceived threat. Shift from judgment to curiosity. Instead of asking what's wrong with the teen, ask what's going on with the teen.
- Educate yourself.** Learn to recognize the symptoms of traumatic stress so you can differentiate between a teen who is having a fear response and one who is just being willful or difficult.
- Practice sensitivity** when teens respond out of proportion to the situation. They may be unexpectedly reminded of former trauma by persons, places, things, situations, feelings or anniversaries and may not even realize they are being triggered. Tell them what you've noticed and ask what would be helpful for you to do or not do.
- Be open to hear** about the difficult things in their story without pressure to resolve their pain. Sometimes we don't communicate openness because we are uncertain that we will know how to respond. You can't fix yesterday but you can compassionately listen today.
- Consider how to adjust** the physical and relational environment for young people who feel easily threatened. Notice whether your meeting area offers places of escape, add choice and control in decisions, and ask for their help in defining what "safe" looks like for them.
- Choose not to take responses personally** - especially defiance, withdrawal or aggression - because it may not be about you at all.



RESOURCES

acestoohigh.com/aces-101 - All the info you are looking for to understand trauma, A.C.E.'s, toxic stress, and resilience.

developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress - A collection of brief videos, infographics and articles leading through the research and responses to toxic stress.

Dr. Anita Phillips - Search "trauma" on Youtube with this name and find helpful videos that sit at the intersection of mental health, Christianity and culture.