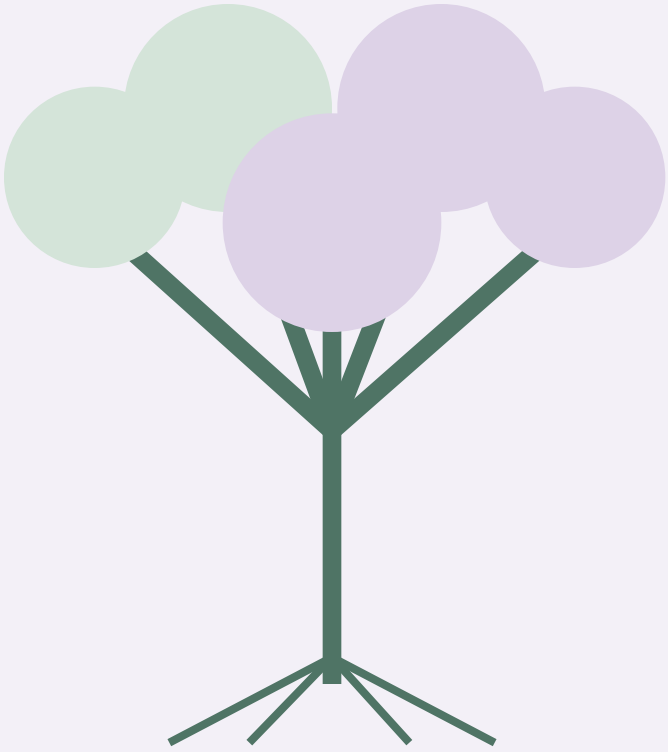
Safe Childhoods

Understanding ACEs and Building Resilience

Small actions. Supportive relationships.
More possibilities for every child.



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English edition | 26 pages | Ages 0-6

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ACEs: experiences, not identities

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic experiences before age 18. Examples include abuse, neglect, violence and disruptions in the household that affect safety or connection. Other adversities, such as unstable housing, can also matter. [1]

Use respectful, specific words

Describe what happened or what support is needed. Avoid calling a family dysfunctional or a child damaged. A family structure, a diagnosis or receiving public assistance does not tell you a child's story.

A practical shift

Instead of "This child has ACEs," try "This child needs a predictable arrival routine and an adult who follows through." You can offer support without collecting a trauma history.

Rewrite a label as an observable need:

No child is responsible for the adversity they experience. [4]

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Co-regulation: support before instruction

Co-regulation combines a warm relationship, a supportive environment and help practicing skills. Adults adjust their support as children develop. [7]

An original four-step practice

1. Check safety. Reduce immediate hazards and keep the group supervised.
2. Approach calmly. Stay at a comfortable distance. Use fewer words.
3. Offer support. “I’m here. Sit near me or stand beside the shelf.”
4. Teach later. When the child is ready, practice one useful skill.

Offer touch only when welcomed and appropriate. Do not demand eye contact, a hug, an apology or a breathing exercise as the price of receiving comfort.

Words I can say in a difficult moment:

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Words that connect and set limits

Hitting

“You’re upset. I won’t let you hit. Let’s move where we have more space.” Protect children, then teach a safe way to ask for help.

Refusing a transition

“It is hard to stop playing. First shoes, then outside. Choose the red shoes or the blue shoes.” Offer only choices that are truly available.

Crying at goodbye

“You miss your grown-up. I’ll stay nearby. We can look at your family photo.” Do not promise that crying will stop quickly.

Repairing after an adult mistake

“I spoke too loudly. That was my mistake. I will try again in a quieter voice.” Repair does not remove your responsibility to change the pattern.

My respectful limit:

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Practice case: Sofia’s goodbye

Fictional situation. Sofia, age three, recently began arriving with a different adult. At goodbye she holds the door, cries and refuses breakfast. Once she starts drawing near a familiar educator, she joins play. You do not know why the arrival arrangement changed.

1. Record only what you observed, without guessing a cause.

2. Plan one arrival support and a respectful family question.

Possible response: arrange the same greeting adult when feasible, show a short arrival sequence and offer drawing nearby. Ask the family what goodbye routine is familiar. This is one option, not a diagnosis or a guaranteed solution.

3. What will tell you whether the support is helping?

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Review your environment

Mark each item: In place / Try next / Need help. Choose one priority instead of changing everything at once.

Relationships

[ ] A familiar adult welcomes each child.
[ ] Comfort does not depend on eye contact or touch.
[ ] Family names and languages are respected.

Predictability and access

[ ] Children can see what comes next.
[ ] We adapt waiting time, noise and materials.
[ ] A supported pause is available without isolation.
[ ] Supports include children with different communication needs.

Adult systems

[ ] Staff know the safety and reporting process.
[ ] We have a realistic coverage plan.
[ ] Records and family conversations stay private.

My priority / first step / person who can help: