



# Screening Tools Overview

**This fact sheet explains why providers should screen for ACEs and describes the tools that should be used to screen children, adolescents, and adults for ACEs.**

Screening for ACEs and toxic stress and providing targeted, evidence-based interventions for toxic stress can:

- Improve efficacy and efficiency of health care;
- Better support individual and family health and well-being; and
- Reduce long-term health costs.

## ACE Screening Tools

The tools used to screen children, adolescents, and adults for ACEs are available in de-identified and identified formats:

### For Children and Adolescents (Ages 0–19)

The **Pediatric ACEs and Related Life Events Screener (PEARLS)** was developed by the [Bay Area Research Consortium on Toxic Stress and Health \(BARC\)](#), a partnership between the Center for Youth Wellness, the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland.

The PEARLS includes an ACE screen (Part 1) as well as a social determinants of health (SDOH) screen (Part 2) — for a total of 17-19 questions, depending on child age (Figure 4). Only Part 1 is used to calculate a child's ACE score. Below is more information about the two parts:

**Part 1:** ACE screen—10 questions that screen for history of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction (Figure 1). The ACE score refers to the total number of ACE categories experienced, rather than the severity or frequency of any one category. The total score ranges between 0 and 10.

**Part 2:** It is recognized that social determinants of health (SDOH) other than ACEs are associated with health risks and may also be risk factors for toxic stress. These include community violence, food and housing insecurity, bullying, discrimination, and a caregiver's physical illness or death.

The social determinants of health also should be addressed with appropriate services as indicated, but they should not be added to the ACE score for the purpose of the toxic stress risk assessment, treatment planning, and billing. While validated odds ratios are available in large, population-based studies utilizing the 10 standardized ACE criteria, the strengths of association between these SDOH and health outcomes have not been similarly standardized.

There are three versions of the tool, based on age and reporter, for a total of 17-19 questions (10 ACE categories and seven to nine SDOH categories):

- **PEARLS child tool**, for ages 0–11, to be completed by a caregiver
- **PEARLS adolescent tool**, for ages 12–19, to be completed by a caregiver
- **PEARLS for adolescent self-report tool**, for ages 12–19, to be completed by the adolescent

Providers receive a single Medi-Cal payment if the adolescent OR their caregiver completes the PEARLS adolescent tool. However, the best practice is for both the adolescent and the caregiver to each complete a tool. When these yield different scores, the higher score should be used in toxic stress risk assessment, treatment planning, and billing.

## Figure 4. PEARLS – De-Identified for ACEs and Identified for SDOH

**Pediatric ACEs and Related Life Events Screener (PEARLS)**

CHILD - To be completed by: **Caregiver**

At any point in time since your child was born, has your child seen or been present when the following experiences happened? Please include past and present experiences.

*Please note, some questions have more than one part separated by "OR." If any part of the question is answered "Yes," then the answer to the entire question is "Yes."*

**PART 1:**

1. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who went to jail/prison?

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2. Do you think your child ever felt unsupported, unloved and/or unprotected?

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3. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who had mental health issues?  
*(for example, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD, or an anxiety disorder)*

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4. Has a parent/caregiver ever insulted, humiliated, or put down your child?

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5. Has the child's biological parent or any caregiver ever had, or currently has a problem with too much alcohol, street drugs or prescription medications use?

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6. Has your child ever lacked appropriate care by any caregiver?  
*(for example, not being protected from unsafe situations, or not cared for when sick or injured even when the resources were available)*

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7. Has your child ever seen or heard a parent/caregiver being screamed at, sworn at, insulted or humiliated by another adult?  
  
Or has your child ever seen or heard a parent/caregiver being slapped, kicked, punched beaten up or hurt with a weapon?

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8. Has any adult in the household often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped or thrown something at your child?  
  
Or has any adult in the household ever hit your child so hard that your child had marks or was injured?  
  
Or has any adult in the household ever threatened your child or acted in a way that made your child afraid that they might be hurt?

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9. Has your child ever experienced sexual abuse?  
*(for example, anyone touched your child or asked your child to touch that person in a way that was unwanted, or made your child feel uncomfortable, or anyone ever attempted or actually had oral, anal, or vaginal sex with your child)*

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10. Have there ever been significant changes in the relationship status of the child's caregiver(s)?  
*(for example, a parent/caregiver got a divorce or separated, or a romantic partner moved in or out)*

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Add up the "yes" answers for this first section:

*Please continue to the other side for the rest of questionnaire* →

Child (Parent/Caregiver Report) – Deidentified




Center for  
YOUTH  
WELLNESS





UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital  
Oakland

This tool was created in partnership with UCSF School of Medicine.

**Figure 4. PEARLS –  
De-Identified for ACEs and Identified for SDOH**

PART 2:	Please check "Yes" where apply. 
1. Has your child ever seen, heard, or been a victim of violence in your neighborhood, community or school? <i>(for example, targeted bullying, assault or other violent actions, war or terrorism)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Has your child experienced discrimination? <i>(for example, being hassled or made to feel inferior or excluded because of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, learning differences, or disabilities)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Has your child ever had problems with housing? <i>(for example, being homeless, not having a stable place to live, moved more than two times in a six-month period, faced eviction or foreclosure, or had to live with multiple families or family members)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Have you ever worried that your child did not have enough food to eat or that the food for your child would run out before you could buy more?	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Has your child ever been separated from their parent or caregiver due to foster care, or immigration?	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Has your child ever lived with a parent/caregiver who had a serious physical illness or disability?	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Has your child ever lived with a parent or caregiver who died?	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Add up the "yes" answers for the second section:</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	





This tool was created in partnership with UCSF School of Medicine.

Child (Parent/Caregiver Report) – Identified




## For Adults (Ages 18 and Older)

The **ACE Questionnaire for Adults** was adapted from the work of Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A version of the tool (Figure 5) has been compiled by the Office of the California Surgeon General and the Department of Health Care Services, in consultation with the ACEs Aware Clinical Advisory Subcommittee.

**Figure 5. ACE Questionnaire for Adults — De-Identified**

**Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire for Adults**  
*California Surgeon General's Clinical Advisory Committee*



Our relationships and experiences—even those in childhood—can affect our health and well-being. Difficult childhood experiences are very common. Please tell us whether you have had any of the experiences listed below, as they may be affecting your health today or may affect your health in the future. This information will help you and your provider better understand how to work together to support your health and well-being.

**Instructions:** Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please add up the number of categories of ACEs you experienced prior to your 18th birthday and put the total number at the bottom. (You do not need to indicate which categories apply to you, only the total number of categories that apply.)

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 yes responses.</b>


Do you believe that these experiences have affected your health?  Not Much  Some  A Lot

Experiences in childhood are just one part of a person's life story.  
There are many ways to heal throughout one's life.

Please let us know if you have questions about privacy or confidentiality.

**Figure 5. ACE Questionnaire for Adults — Identified**

**Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire for Adults**  
*California Surgeon General's Clinical Advisory Committee*



Our relationships and experiences—even those in childhood—can affect our health and well-being. Difficult childhood experiences are very common. Please tell us whether you have had any of the experiences listed below, as they may be affecting your health today or may affect your health in the future. This information will help you and your provider better understand how to work together to support your health and well-being.

**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 18<sup>th</sup> 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>	

Do you believe that these experiences have affected your health?  Not Much  Some  A Lot

Experiences in childhood are just one part of a person's life story.  
There are many ways to heal throughout one's life.

Please let us know if you have questions about privacy or confidentiality.

If an alternative version of the ACE Questionnaire for Adults is used, it must contain questions on the 10 original categories of ACEs to qualify for Medi-Cal payment (Figure 1). For 18- and 19-year-olds, either tool may be used. For patients 20 years and older, the adolescent self-report version of the PEARLS is also acceptable.

## Tool Formats

Both tools are available in de-identified and identified formats:

- 1. De-Identified:** Respondents count the number of ACE categories on the screening tool that they or their child has experienced, and indicate only the total score — without identifying *which* ACE(s) they or their child experienced.
- 2. Identified:** Respondents count the number of ACEs categories on the screening tool that they or their child has experienced **and** specify *which* ACE(s) they or their child experienced.

Find the [ACE Screening Tools](#) at [ACEsAware.org/screening-tools](https://ACEsAware.org/screening-tools).

For information on the clinical response to ACEs and toxic stress, see the "[Clinical Response to Adverse Childhood Experiences and Toxic Stress](#)" fact sheet at [ACEsAware.org/toolkit/clinical-response](https://ACEsAware.org/toolkit/clinical-response).

For information on Medi-Cal payment, see the "[Medi-Cal Certification and Payment](#)" fact sheet at [ACEsAware.org/toolkit/certification-and-payment](https://ACEsAware.org/toolkit/certification-and-payment).



Visit [ACEsAware.org](https://ACEsAware.org) and join us as we launch a movement — led by the Office of the California Surgeon General and the California Department of Health Care Services — to ensure everyone is ACEs Aware.