

# Insights, Benefits and Risks of an ACE Approach 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019

## 1. Comment cards

### Insights

Response to Alan Sinclair's thought - Don't we love our children? From my experience it's not a lack of love. It's the lack of feeling love. So many desperate parents want their children to be "fixed" and when you try to involve the parents they look at you – they feel blamed (then paralysed by shame). Often they then say "but what about me?" "I experienced worse and I'm fine" "Where is the support for me?"

Considering the social currency of adversity. Key thoughts that I encounter -

- Lots of people are worse than me...(not accepting they deserve help)
- I'm still getting on with it (stiff upper lip ideology)
- Well you think that's bad, my experience is... (people thrive on one-upmanship)
- I find some people don't cognitively associate/accept and find it hard to engage with their experiences and judge others

Importance of play and how it is adapted for use with older children who become identified within the care sector

Direct link to poverty housing crisis

Complexity of people and how they develop

That there is a strong argument made against ACEs

We need to hear more of the critical voice – so glad of Jane Callaghan and Gary Walsh

We need to collect ACE data for Scotland

How do we change our view of children as citizens now to be commonplace within education?

Play –

- Promising relationships
- Agency
- Developing resilience

Continue the conversation in all of our spheres!

New BBC Scotland channel – can this be utilised to educate?

A person's behaviour is everyone's responsibility

Relationships->co-regulation->self-regulation

That there is a hunger clearly to make sense of experience: ACEs provides a way of doing that

Alcohol is numbing our nation

We need better services to provide EMOTIONAL SUPPORT for children, so that we can ask them

Feels like the ACE approach can bring the nation of Scotland together

An informed understanding of risks and benefits of an ACE approach will inform thinking and ultimately benefit society

Worried that this might become another 'umbrella' Framework

Teaching at nursery Primary self-regulatory skills

Model too rigid. What about trauma which does not fit into model e.g. severe childhood illness

Important that we keep momentum and being ACE Aware is not just the current 'buzzword' that is then forgotten in daily practice.

What value can ACEs research add?

Agency matters! Children are full humans, not passive blobs absorbing stuff

Underestimates meaning making

Gender balance of ACES highlighting of single mother

"Adversity is not a destiny" Sandra Bloom

Strength of play in developing resilience

For me it was the total indulgence of "corporal punishment" that was most damaging

It promotes reductionism and does not recognise complexity

ACEs don't determine future outcome – it's about the probability of risk

Needs to be coupled with a rights based approach

Some of us were brought up to believe "suffering" was desirable – the more we suffered the greater the chance of getting to heaven!

There are many ways of "numbing pain" though doesn't necessarily relate to alcohol consumption

Importance of recognising protective factors for children

Importance of acknowledging ACEs and moving to recovery process

Children's rights: legal minimum standards and participation

Potential to drive policy change

How do we as school help/support families?

Impact of profit encouragement towards childhood trauma and upset

Engrained culturally (Transgenerational trauma)

Impact of Resilience film. Great way to convey

Importance of relationships and play (positive connections)

'Love' is the key!

Building resilience of key staff working with children to have the biggest impact!

Support children in primary school and support teachers to support children

The most important emotion is hope

The ACEs movement started in 2005 with VRU

Good to get the 'ACEs history'. I have a question about the relationship between ACEs and safeguarding (long story)

How to get the "Positive ACEs" message out. Can we still call it ACEs? Or is it love (attachment) and play really?

Useful to compare the "zeitgeist" between Scotland and England. The Government in Westminster is a HUGE problem for the English

Impact of cultural/collective core belief around self-worth

Lose egos and professional identity

We need to consider the interpretation and meaning attributed by the individual to their adverse experience

How can the predictive factors against ACEs be enhanced – practical measures eg play

The power imbalance between adults and children

The voice of the child – listen to children

The importance of creativity and the arts – helps define narrative of lives

Importance of power influences and meaning making

Difference of the Scottish vs English context. BUT ACEs focus is pertinent in England

In order to support children we need to address the needs of adults – seems obvious but sadly fragmentation of services individualise problems

So many different conceptualisations of “ACEs” (questionnaire or general theory) – difficult to know which one I’m meant to be critiquing in terms of risks and benefits

Beware the ACEs movement being drawn into certain policy strands that can go awry

1. Risk management
2. Intrusive/inadequate early intervention
3. Troubled families/family units → everything reduces to family

## **Benefits**

Looks at the child’s experience not just behaviour

Awareness and linking to poverty

ACEs is a blunt instrument BUT great to see it helping shift how we think of criminal justice, homelessness etc.

Much benefit of us just being generally nicer/kinder (trauma aware or whatever we call it)

Play is powerful for children and owned by them

Have at least one stable adult care-giver. Relationships.

Prevention – of course we have to think of all those affected by childhood trauma but how can we prevent it

More and more awareness of the needs of children and the needs of parents

How do we support children with ACEs?

Prompts us to consider the moral purpose of education challenging our moral compass

Promotes relationship led practice within children’s services (schools etc.)

Opportunity to talk to each other about the importance of relationships

It contributes to a wider picture of supporting well-being

It helps understanding others and their behaviour. “What happened to..?” not “what’s wrong with you?” (I don’t see it as a predictive tool!)

Let’s not get distracted from the positives – v. convenient for the 1% if we do!!!

## Benefits

1. Raising awareness
2. Empowerment of children
3. Value for self-regulation
4. Helpful for informing relationships within families and almost every social interaction

It is important to talk about trauma and adversity – good to have public discussion

Religion/sectarianism. Poverty

We lead and shape our generation

Modern use of word “ACES” impactful – “Attachment” and other psychoanalytic words too far in past?

It starts a conversation and opens it to bigger things such as social determinants of health

Adults can take ownership of themselves and regulate. This will let us co-regulate our children

ACE movement highlight the importance of connection emotion and relationships

‘Normal’ people understand that they can make a difference

Refocus on experiences rather than adverse ‘event’

Shift from medical/clinical/family assets-focused to systemic/social models

The ACE framework is a good starting point to help people start thinking about a hard issue

Not confined to one sector or place. Not alone in interest, participation. Public attention

Relationships need to be front and centre!

Open opportunity to make positive change

Provides a common language

We mustn’t forget that we’re doing this to help people recover from trauma

Promotes sharing of beliefs

We offer hope to young people and provide a therapeutic environment to think and develop

ACES is sparking HOPE

Importance of relationships. Emotional buffering

Rights focused. Relationship centred.

Talking about parents – but no blame! (Transgenerational)

Encourages discussion amongst practitioners on what is important to children

“Self-regulation then co-regulation then relationships”

ACES

1. Insights re human experience and behaviour
2. Driving professional practice change
3. Potential to drive policy change
4. Sparking hope

ACEs are not just about “the poor” (We need to be concerned about the well-being of all children)

How to get the message around a nation like England. (Politics, regionalisation and size)  
VERY DIFFICULT.

ACEs and schools – a complex relationship? A place for resilience building and care at best, a place for stereotyping and tick boxing at worse

Potential for creativity around developing resources to support people where they are

Childhood adversity discussion is reducing stigma

A greater understanding of why people may behave in certain ways – Trauma informed.

Can have ACES aware approach – also aware

Recognise children as agentic and as experiencing trauma. Recognising trauma as personal AND political

If the English Schools inspection agency can paper over a practice like “unflattening the grass” we are so far away from being ACES and trauma aware

## **Risks**

We must remember recovery, nobody is too ‘damaged’ to be completely beyond help and support

Scoring and trying to categorise

Not talking about parenting – from school I developed a subconscious anxiety about getting pregnant – could tell you how not to get pregnant but the message was pregnancy = shameful. I believe we need to look at how to celebrate parenthood and teach key messages about relationships, attachment, love etc.

Major distraction from damage of neoliberal economics and current political ideology

How do we support teacher to discuss trauma within their own context? How do we support them to do so?

Strawman arguments

The original study was based on a middle class study. This is a weakness not a strength! It is WHY socio-economic context is inadequately represented

Risks of a top-down centralised approach

Vital that those supporting people affected by ACEs are supported and their mental wellbeing is looked after through containment and models of supervision

Lack of resources resulting in unqualified and untrained staff dealing with v. complex trauma

Predict negative health outcomes

Risks being deterministic and individualising

Risks ignoring structural inequalities – POVERTY

Awareness without service and resource is not enough

ACES will be used as a diagnostic tool because we are a procedural and process driven society!!

2020 expansion doesn't consider ACE/TRAUMA RELATIONSHIPS

Obscures social and political context

Could potentially individualise what are societal issues and structural issues

Failure to protect discourse becomes the norm

Why is everyone so interested in ACEs? Need to think more about this question

Bandwagon?

Ignores the political and social context of the child

Uninformed professionals being asked to “score” children and young people

Using ACE scores in schools. I think this is really dangerous. Schools are not therapeutic places. Power relations for example.

Gain no use it as a rigid assessment tool to predict?!

Diminishes the strength of the child

Takes hope away

Pathologising stuff which can't be measured in 'units'

Family

How as a Practitioner in EYEs – can we focus on ACES at an early intervention stage...

Interpret

Teachers are feeling expected to contain trauma when they are not trained – good point!  
More harm than good.

INCLUSION – important not to group those with ACES together. It's not about them, but us  
(as Suzanne said!)

Stigma and labelling

ACE MODEL DEFICIT. Must take into account the uniqueness of individual. One size doesn't  
fit all.

Trap-doors! MUST BE MINDFUL

Don't let the powers that be relinquish their responsibility to children by focusing on 'bad'  
families

Children become stigmatised and their traumas are highlighted to others

STIGMATISING

I think there is a risk that the focus on challenging the ACE model may, perhaps, cloud the  
commonality between perspectives

Can become dismissive of the health harming behaviours in children without ACES

Taking my teddy bear to Bristol to talk to EY Practitioners. Lets see how it goes. But I think  
we have to see England in the context of regions

Under-estimating children's agency – which may be in conflict with Scotland's emphasis on  
children's rights

Is message being oversimplified in a potentially damaging way? (Look for positive simple  
messages?)

Potential for "blaming parents"

Have been concerned about establishment testing.

Like the balance between optimism and caution – definitely the way to approach it. NO  
ACES SATS!



Without better understating of C-PTSD/developmental trauma some of the 'simple' measures being put in place in classrooms eg mindfulness, which may be overwhelming for some children.

Risks of overlooking or minimising impact of the small 't' traumas such as birth/early trauma through separation necessary for health/physical survival of a child which may be a factor in capacity to cope with later potential ACE events.

Ignoring protective factors

Ignores protective factors

- ACEs are adult themes. Assessing ACEs erodes childhood
- Focus on 'what's wrong'
- No impetus to measure without prior concerns

Measuring everyone ACEs –

- Ignores other sources of trauma
- Secondary trauma for participants
- Intervention based on scores not needs
- Intrusive
- Measures frequency of events not experience of them
- Vicarious trauma of assessors

Danger of further stigmatising or increasing guilt for parents who are aware of their role in children's ACE/trauma history (especially if we fail to make political link with poverty).

## **2. A Year of Conversation 2019 comment cards**

Keep talking and questioning!

CONNECTION CONNECTION CONNECTION. Let's look after our amygdalas!

I think this conversation today is a sign of a maturing national movement. I celebrate it. Social change requires conversation.

An understanding of the risks and benefits of an ACE approach is vital to inform thinking and as a doorway to our own stress systems. We are all in this together so we must be kind.

Fundamentally we are all humans – ACES or no ACES – life involves adversity, vulnerabilities and difficulties. Changes in relationships, language used and social environments will ultimately provide support for all in our communities and society.

YOU MATTER! To make changes, choices and chances

Trauma and ACE Awareness into education!

To know, feel and have a shared vision that you matter to make change, choices and chances all supporting the whole person approach in GIFREC

Regardless of the way forward as far as ACEs/questionnaires etc. etc. are concerned, as discussed, the widening awareness across the population (and from my point of view, the teaching profession) must continue to be pushed and the idea that it is good to talk driven forward.

Is the child really at the heart of the Scottish Government expansion? Love and attachment must be at the centre to support ACES and most importantly recovery!

Is 1140 hours Getting It Right For Every Child? Or is it for parents 'votes'!

How does the early years 1140 hours expansion provide what is best for children?

It's not black and white! (let's make it tartan 😊)

I came to this afternoon's event with no knowledge of the subject but have found it incredibly insightful. Not only on a professional but also a personal level. How can we get people involved from all walks of life?!

What we are being asked to do (to me and put simply) is to consider the complexity of human experience. What I would add is that the use of kindness to one another (again simple) can go so far.

So much to take it. Such an interesting topic – let's all be a little kinder.

"Adversity is not destiny!" "ACES is not about diagnosis and labelling, it's about relationships and self-regulation through co-regulation" Our practice in Scotland's schools should be rights focused, relationship centred and full of love and kindness!

We have known what is required for our well-being – attachment, relationships, love, warmth, food, interactions. We are now more aware of ACEs and how these can affect us. What about our partners? Parents/families

I think the conversation needs to continue to be broadened, but also to be focused: a conversation between say, two who hold different views.

Creativity is the key. Let's get it back on the curriculum agenda.

Very informative but such a huge subject and no right or wrong.

Thank you Carol and team. Another event with panel discussion and opportunity for more in-depth discussion. Brilliant afternoon.

Building on Gandhi! 'Be the change you want to see (as far as you can!) and demand the socio-cultural change we need'

The ACEs movement for all its shortcomings gives us hope.

This was a great, thought-provoking afternoon – thank you. I have much food for thought that I'll carry through to my development work in my role.

What, if anything, can an ACE-informed approach bring to the table that has added value over a trauma-informed approach?

The ACEs movement is so much more than the model. Let's de-couple the two and recognise the evolution of this campaign. It's opened a door – but it doesn't need to come with us.

An ACEs conversation needs to involve everyone and not get too hung up on the language – by all means use the language that you are comfortable with but don't use it as a weapon to beat up 'others'. We are all in this together, so kindness to each other is needed.

*Note: some cards had to be eliminated as they were illegible.*