

The background of the entire image is a teal sunburst pattern. Numerous rays of varying shades of teal radiate from the center, creating a bright, energetic effect. The rays are most prominent behind the central text.

The Power of
HOPE

A pocket full of science and happiness.

**Hope is the belief
that your future will
be better than today
and you have the
power to make it so.**

“If I pay attention, I hear the word hope every day”

Hope is all around us – we just don’t always notice it. But look at any blockbuster movie, like *Star Wars* or *The Lord of the Rings* – they’re all stories of hope and overcoming trauma.

Every morning you wake up with a goal and a way to get there. That’s hope in action.

It’s not some vague or spiritual idea. Hope is a real, measurable concept grounded in science.

This little guide gives you a glimpse into the science of hope – positive psychology, trauma, and how hope can be learned.

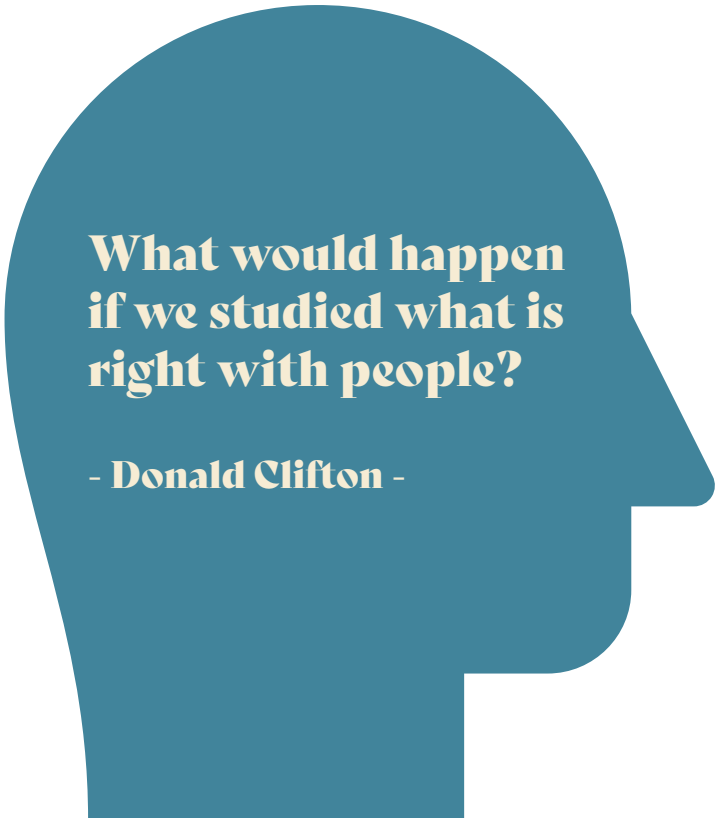
Whether you’re new to the topic or already know a bit, we hope this sparks something. Because the more hopeful people are, the happier they tend to be. And maybe, by the end, you’ll feel a bit more hopeful too.

Happy readings.



Hope is the best predictor of a meaningful life

Meanwhile, more than 2,000 studies have been conducted on the science of hope... and in every published study, hope is the best predictor of well-being, compared to other methods of trauma recovery.⁷



**What would happen
if we studied what is
right with people?**

- Donald Clifton -

Positive psychology

Positive psychology is a branch of psychological science, introduced by Martin Seligman in 1998.

Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what's wrong; it is also building up which is good.

Psychology is not just about illness or health; it is about work, education, insight, love, growth and play. And in this quest for what's best, positive psychology doesn't rely on wishful thinking, self-deception, or hand-waving; instead, it seeks to adapt the best of the scientific method to the unique problems posed by human behavior in all its complexity.²¹

“Positive psychology is focused on the study of **positive experiences, character strengths, positive relationships, and institutions** that facilitate their development and promote optimum functioning and wellbeing.”¹⁰

– Chan M. Hellman, PhD –

Positive experiences involve mindfulness, mental flow and emotions about:

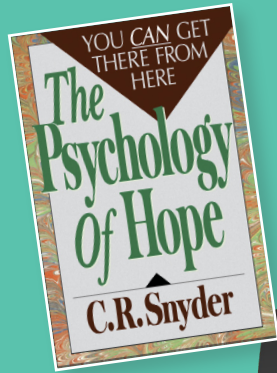
- the present (pleasure, contentment, laughter, etc.)
- the past (nostalgia, satisfaction, pride, etc.)
- the future (hope, optimism, etc.)

Positive relationships encompass those factors that increase meaning and well-being between couples, friends, colleagues and communities.

Positive institutions include positive education, work environments, healthy families, ethical leadership, virtuous organizations, and the development of civic responsibility.

Character Strengths are the positive parts of your personality that impact how you think, feel and behave. They are the impetus for action, desire and development. Scientists have identified 24 character strengths that you have the capacity to express. Of these, **HOPE** has the strongest connection to well-being.²⁴





“The science of hope assumes that human behavior is purposeful. We strive to achieve our goals and when we succeed, we experience happiness.”⁷

– Charles ‘Rick’ Snyder, PhD –

Psychologist and professor Charles ‘Rick’ Snyder developed the theory of HOPE and stated that hope consists of three elements: goals, the paths to the goals (*Pathways*) and the Willpower to achieve them (*Agency*).²²

1. GOALS

2. PATHWAYS

HOPE

3. WILLPOWER



I 'hope' it
doesn't **rain**.



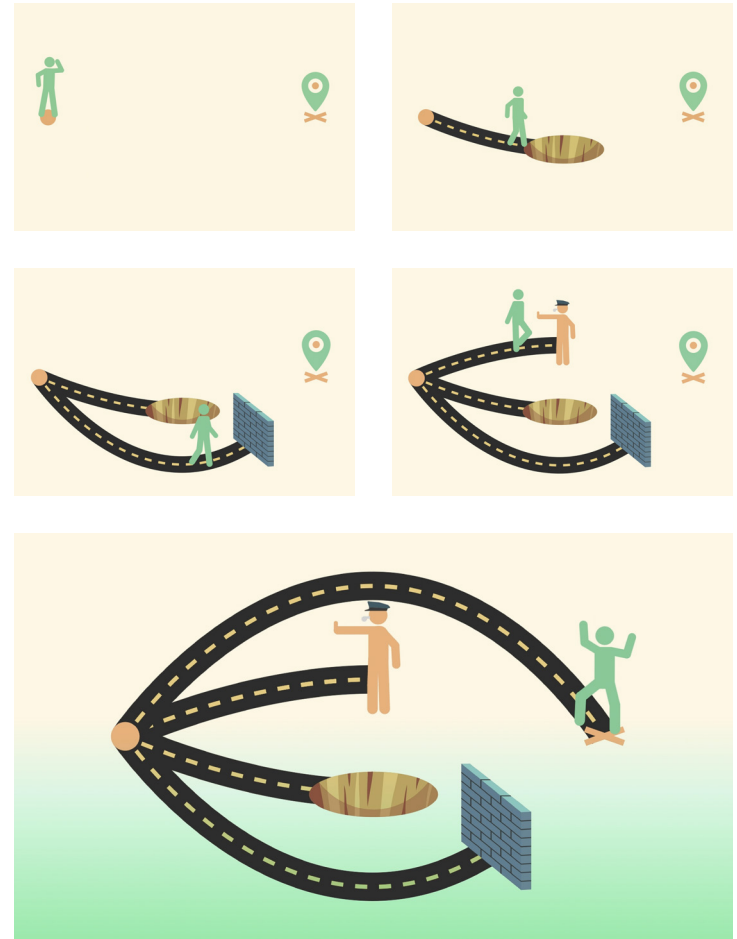
I hope I don't
get **wet**.



Many ways to success

Snyder found that hopeful people develop many paths to achieve their goals. That's because they anticipate obstacles and don't just expect it to be easy.

Hopeful people are highly engaged, which helps them persevere and maintain their motivation to achieve their goals. They know how to feed their energy and come up with plans and possibilities to overcome problems and obstacles.²²



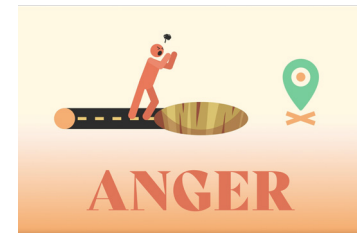
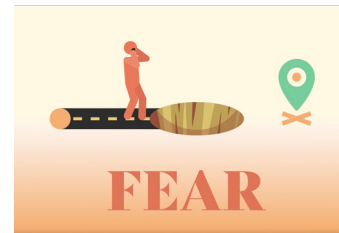
The loss of hope is a process

When people can't get past obstacles and reach their goal, it often leads to fear or anger. They then may become desperate or even despondent, precisely because they no longer can find a way to achieve their goal.



Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering.

– Yoda –



The negative impact of trauma on hope

Trauma has a negative impact on hope. To understand that, let's first explain a bit more about trauma itself.

The 3 E's of Trauma:^{12,18}

- **Events** cause trauma;
- Individual **Experiences** determine traumatic effects;
- These **Effects** can have physical, social, emotional and spiritual consequences.

Trauma shows up in many different ways:

- **Personal trauma** might be something like coming home to find your house has been broken into. Even if nothing major was taken, it can leave you feeling unsafe for a long time.
- **Community trauma** can hit when something affects a group – like during the lockdowns, when people couldn't gather to celebrate important religious holidays.
- **Organizational trauma** happens in groups or teams – take the death of basketball player Kobe Bryant, for example. It had a deep and lasting impact on the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team.
- **Historical trauma** is passed down through generations. A powerful example is the Holocaust, which still echoes in the lives of many today.



Trauma is a deep emotional wound that leaves a scar.

– Jamal Stroud, Big Homie Lil Homie Mentoring –

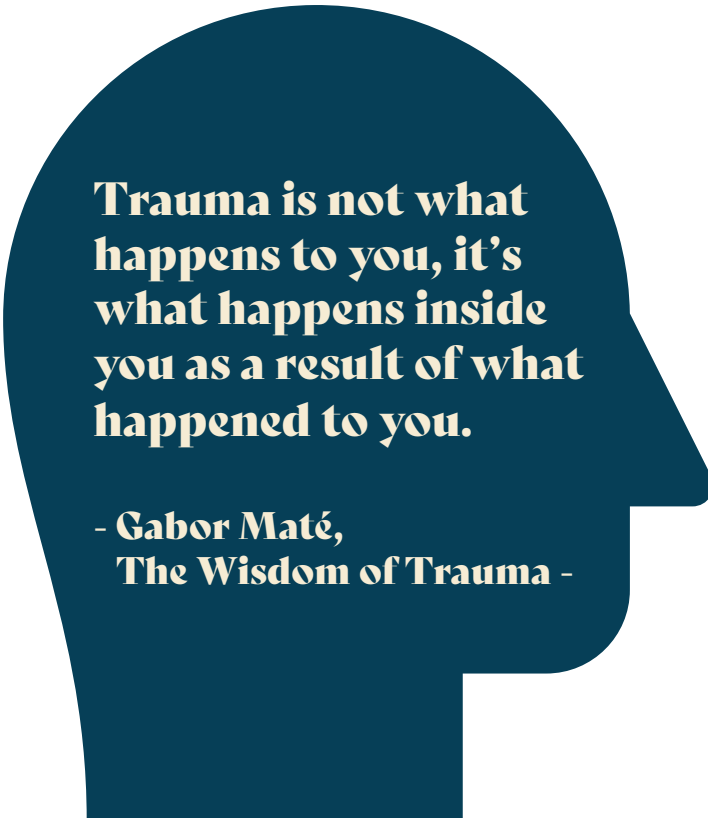


The effect of a trauma on an individual can be regarded as a normal response to an abnormal event.⁶

Trauma is scientifically described as:

Any distressing experience that leads to significant anxiety, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitude, behavior, and other aspects of functioning. Traumatic events include events caused by human behavior (e.g., rape, war, industrial accidents) and by nature (e.g., earthquakes) and often challenge one's perception of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place. (American Psychological Association)

The consequences of trauma vary on an individual level: intrusive thoughts or flashbacks, exaggerated emotional startle reactions, abrupt mood swings, nightmares, shame and low self-esteem, reduced ability to cope with stress, mental emptiness, avoidance, attraction to dangerous situations, self-mutilation, fear of dying or having a shorter life, and others.¹⁹



Trauma is not what happens to you, it's what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you.

**- Gabor Maté,
The Wisdom of Trauma -**

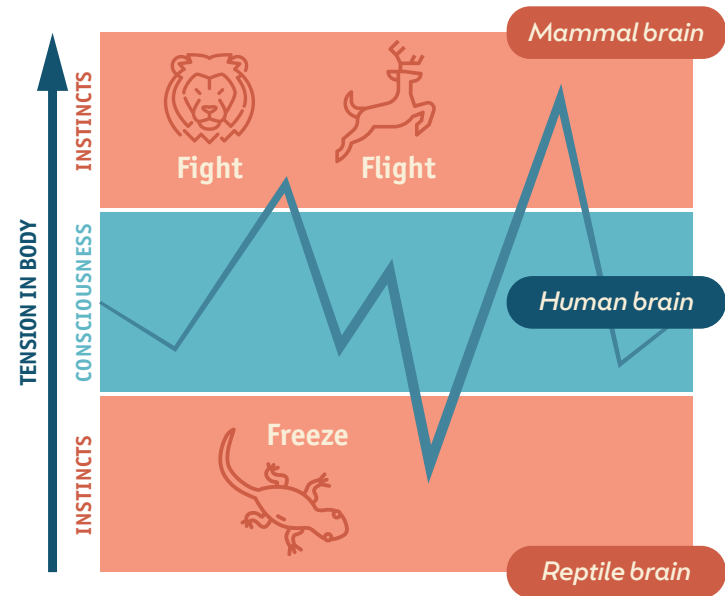
Fight, Fight or Freeze

When we're faced with sudden danger, our conscious thinking kind of shuts down, and our instincts take over to protect us. These are known as the fight, flight, or freeze responses.

In a fight or flight situation, the mammal part of our brain steps in. Adrenaline kicks in to make us stronger, and cortisol boosts our energy – while also suppressing things like the immune system, since survival is the priority.

But if the brain senses that there's no way to fight or escape, the body may freeze. This response – especially common in children – is driven by the more primitive 'reptilian brain'. Heart rate slows down, breathing becomes shallow, and the body can go stiff.

Once the danger is gone, our conscious brain takes back control. But if trauma happens again and again, these protective systems can stay on high alert – especially in kids, and that can really impact their development over time.



Window of Tolerance

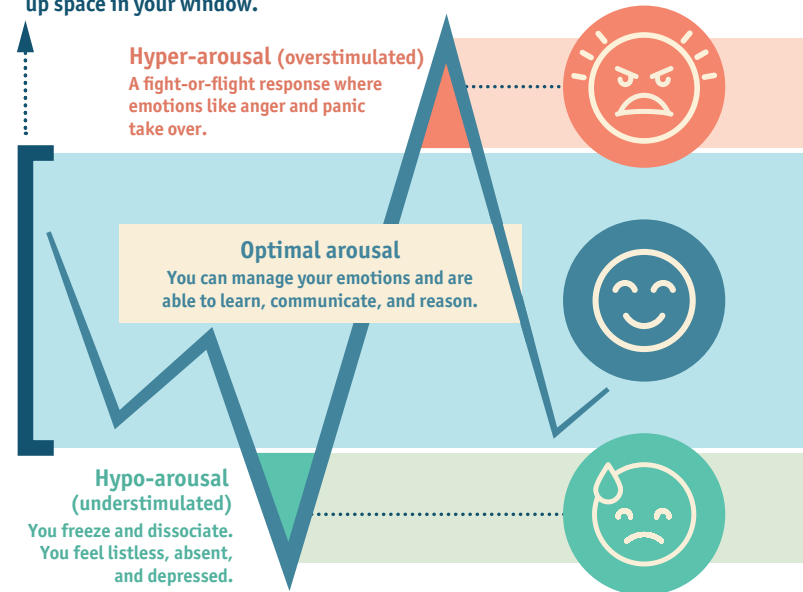
The window of tolerance¹ is the zone within which someone can handle stress well. If the stress increases in intensity or lasts longer than the tolerance window can handle, then it becomes problematic. In children, this happens more quickly if there is no calming adult around.

In people who experience long-term or one-off severe stress situations, that window becomes smaller, which leads to the stress system being set off more quickly, even in situations that are not dangerous. This reaction can manifest itself in two ways: overstimulation and understimulation.

When overstimulated, anger and panic take over. When understimulated one feels lethargic, absent and depressed. The sensitive stress system then reacts to the smallest stimuli, which leads to a constantly higher level of cortisol.¹

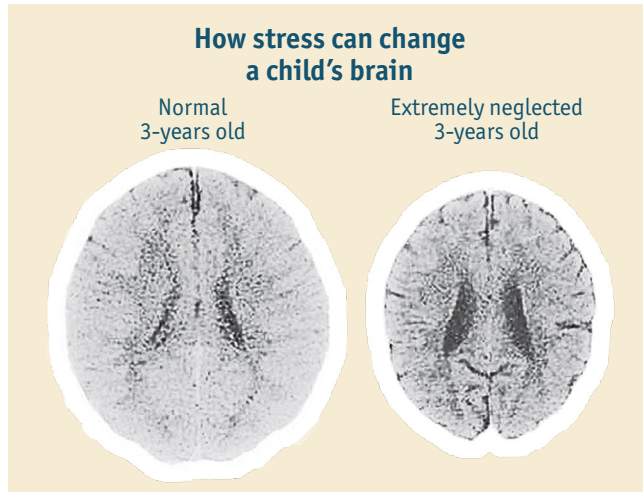
Window of Tolerance

This area is determined by your level of stress. The more stress you experience, the 'smaller' your window becomes. That's because all the unpleasant memories take up space in your window.



“Experience can change the mature brain, but experience during the critical periods of early childhood organizes brain systems.”¹⁴

– Bruce D. Perry M.D, Pfd –



Prolonged neglect and abuse creates lasting damage to the brain. This is not to say every child will be affected in this way, but there is higher likelihood the longer the abuse occurs and the less secure the attachment.

The effect of trauma literally rewires the brain and nervous system. Neural connections are disrupted. The brain can be smaller, areas such as the temporal lobes can be shut off, and their nervous system can be stuck in high alert even when they may no longer be in danger.²⁵

Impact of trauma on children

The toughest and most lasting kinds of trauma usually happen early in childhood.⁹ These early struggles can seriously affect how a child's brain grows, which then influences their thinking, emotions, and even how their body works throughout their life.¹⁰

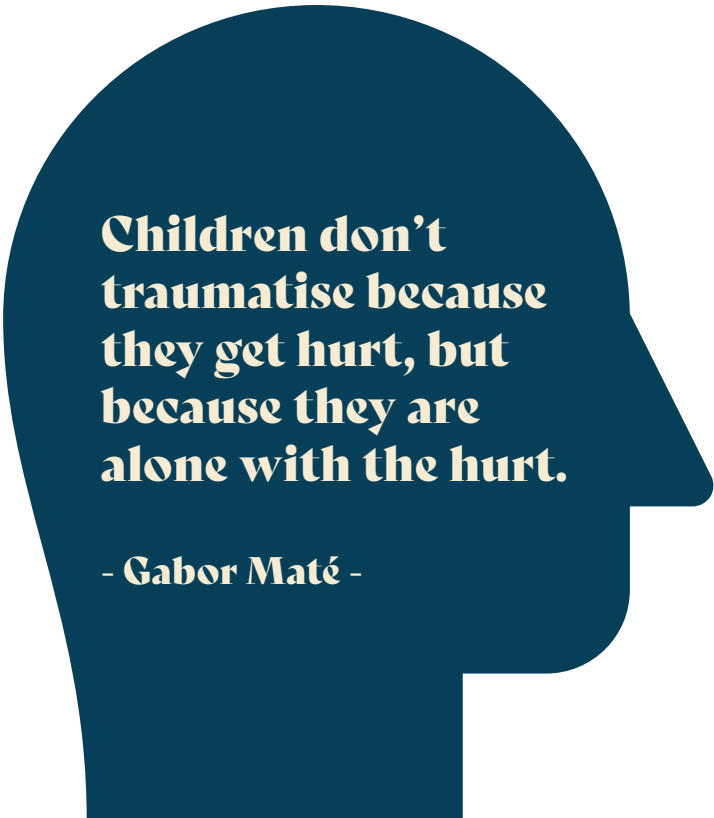
When kids go through trauma again and again, their bodies often stay stuck in a high-alert state, with stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol running constantly high.⁴ This ongoing stress is what experts call toxic stress.⁹

On the brain side, trauma can mess with important areas like the amygdala, which handles emotions and rewards, and it can slow down the development of the prefrontal cortex – the part that helps with things like planning and controlling impulses.⁶

Because of these changes, kids might act out more, feel more scared, or struggle to control their reactions.¹⁵ Plus, having too much cortisol for a long time can lower other important hormones, like those needed for growth, metabolism, and even reproductive health.⁹

New studies also show that trauma can actually change how genes work – and this can be different for boys and girls. For example, girls who witness violence seem to have more changes in their DNA than boys do.⁶ It's a clear sign of how trauma, biology, and gender all connect in complex ways.⁶

Restoring balance in the context of toxic stress requires a multifaceted approach. While adequate sleep is essential, additional factors such as integrated health care, proper nutrition, physical activity, and mindfulness practices (e.g., meditation) also play a critical role. In the case of children, the presence of a responsive and supportive caregiver – often referred to as a **buffering parent** – is particularly protective.^{6,12}



**Children don't
traumatise because
they get hurt, but
because they are
alone with the hurt.**

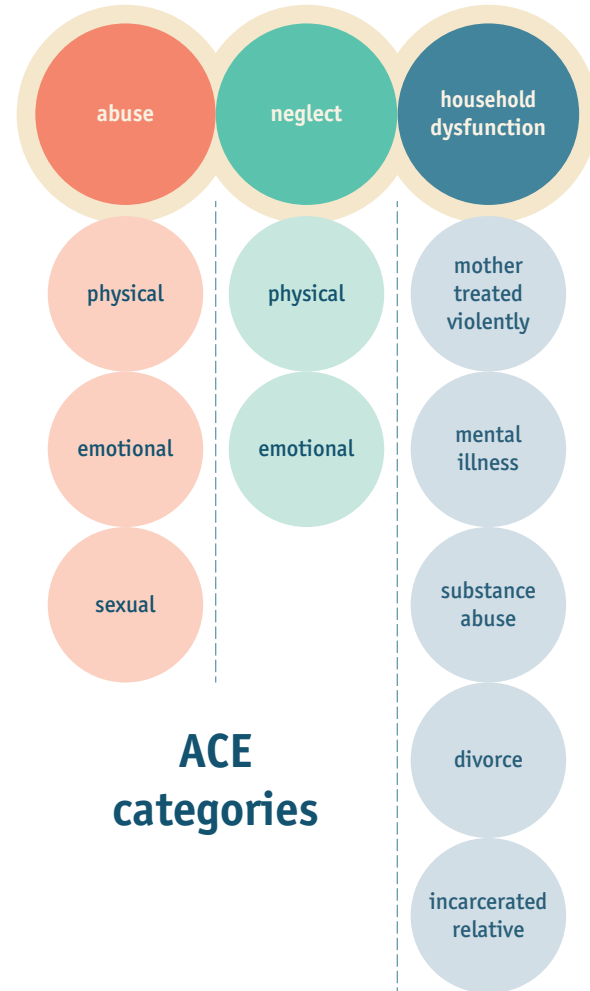
- Gabor Maté -

ACE

ACE = Adverse Childhood Experiences

Dramatic experiences during childhood can therefore have an enormous impact on children’s development. These traumas are known as Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs. Scientists have listed 10 categories of traumatic experiences.^{7,8}

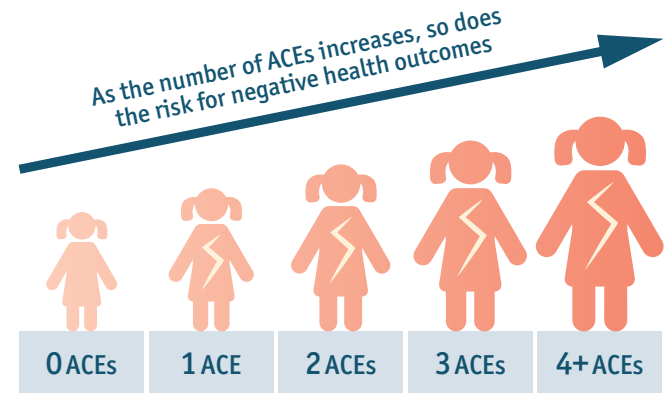
Experiencing child abuse – whether physical, emotional, or sexual – or witnessing domestic violence can result in significant and lasting emotional dysregulation.⁵ Research has shown that the psychological and cognitive impact of chronic interpersonal trauma, such as abuse or exposure to violence within the home, is considerably more severe than that of acute, non-interpersonal events such as natural disasters. For instance, studies indicate that children subjected to abuse or domestic violence may exhibit a reduction in IQ of up to 8 points – approximately double the decline observed in children exposed to a natural disaster.¹⁶



Impact of trauma

When it comes to how trauma affects health and behavior, the biggest problems show up in kids who've been through four or more traumatic experiences. For example, children with an ACE score of 4 or higher are over 30 times more likely to have learning and behavioral issues.⁴

The higher the ACE count, the greater the risk of adverse health effects.



Possible Risk Outcomes

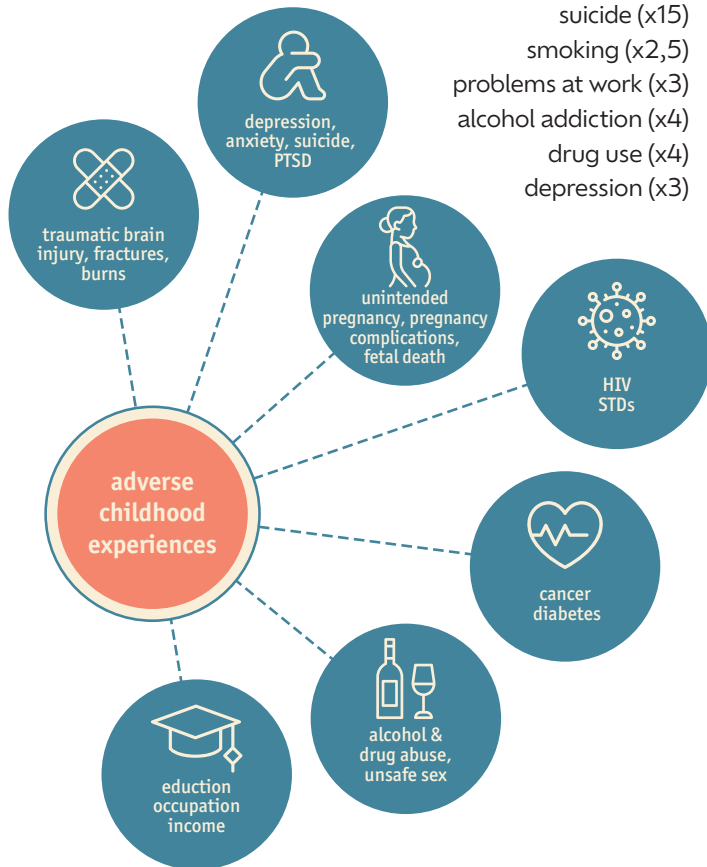
BEHAVIOR: Lack of physical activities, Smoking, Alcoholism, Drug use, Missed work

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH:

Severe obesity, Diabetes, Depression, Suicide attempts, STD's, Heart disease, Cancer, Stroke, Deafness, Broken bones

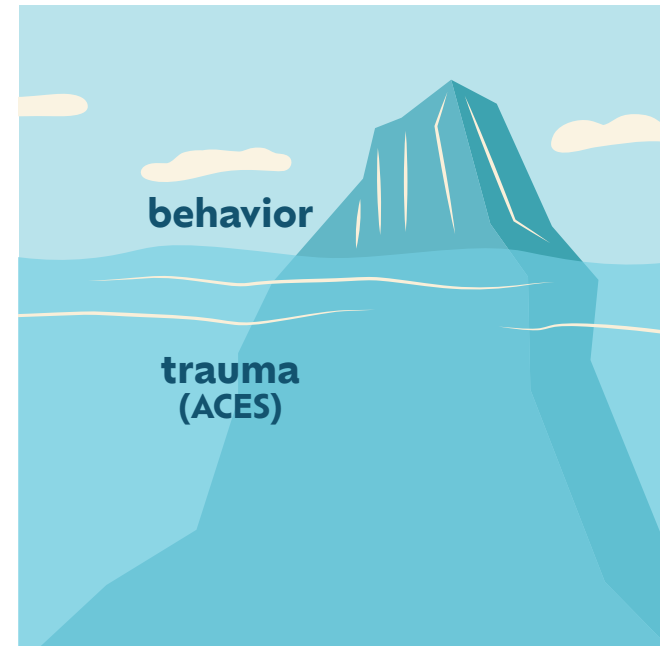
Increased risk

People who have experienced trauma in childhood have an increased risk in adulthood of:⁶



Underlying causes

The behavior we see from people is just the tip of the iceberg. We often miss the underlying causes, **hidden** in the subconscious mind through profound experiences in childhood.



Backpack and bandwidth

In social work, it's important to remember that many people carry a heavy load of past trauma — like a backpack full of hard experiences.⁹

Things get even harder when this is combined with what's called 'limited bandwidth'. This idea, from the book *Scarcity* by Mullainathan and Shafir, means that when people don't have enough time, money, or mental energy, it's harder for them to think clearly and make good decisions.

Responses from people with high trauma exposure (ACEs and polyvictimization)



Trauma already makes people stressed and worried about solving problems. When you add limited bandwidth, it's like they're looking through a tiny tunnel – their focus gets smaller, and they find it even harder to figure things out.^{9,13,14}

Knowing this helps us understand why some people struggle more, and how we can better support them.

Everyone has a role to play: one does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.

- Raul Almazar -

Trauma-sensitive working

Trauma-sensitive work means:

- Knowing that trauma is really common;
- Being able to spot the signs and symptoms;
- Using what you know about trauma in how you work and make decisions;
- Doing everything you can to avoid re-traumatizing people – like not making them tell their story again and again to every social worker or police officer they meet.

Principles of Trauma Informed Care:^{17,18}

- **Safety:** It's important to help both clients and employees feel like they're in control. This means creating a space where people feel physically and emotionally safe – where the environment is secure and interactions with others give a real sense of trust and comfort.
- **Reliable & Transparent:** Be open and honest about how things work in your organization. Make sure everyone knows their options and understands what's going on. Being authentic builds trust with both clients and staff.
- **Peer Support / Fellow Survivors:** Healing often happens best when people connect with others who've been through similar experiences. Peer support is flexible and

based on respect, empathy, and non-judgment. It works because it creates safety and hope, shows what healing looks like, and helps people feel stronger and more in control.

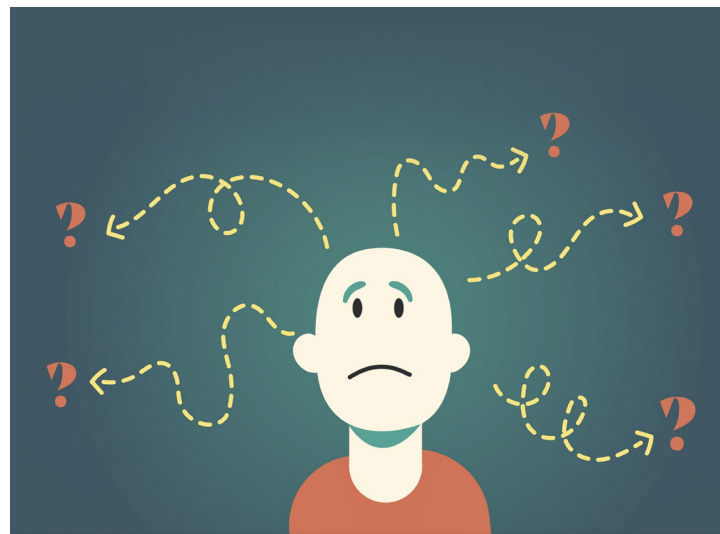
- **Collaboration & Equality:** Breaking down power imbalances between staff and clients – and even among staff – helps build better relationships. Sharing power and including people in decisions is key to real healing.
- **Empowering:** Focus on people's strengths and help them build on those. When clients feel like they have choices and develop new skills, it makes a big difference. Your organization should believe in people's ability to bounce back.
- **Diversity:** Go beyond stereotypes and cultural biases. Offer services that respect all genders, honor cultural traditions, and acknowledge historical traumas.
- **Humility:** Remember that people aren't just parts of a system or processes. Don't let efficiency or management control overshadow the real human experience inside your organization.

High ACE, low hope

People with high ACE scores usually feel less hopeful.⁷ They often don't have the motivation or tools to get through tough times – either because they never learned them as kids or because they don't trust social services or institutions. What happens in childhood really shapes how well someone does later in life.

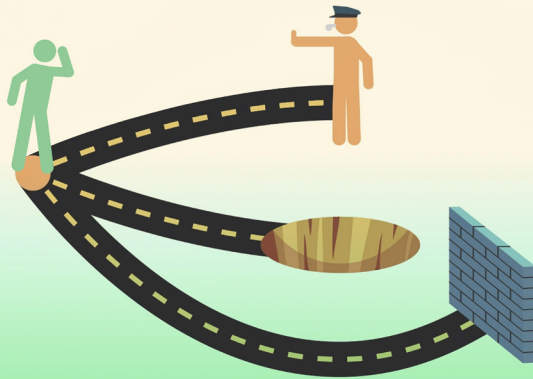
But here's the good news: hope is powerful. Even when ACEs have caused changes in DNA, hope, resilience, and proven practices can help heal or even change that damage.⁷

Not everyone with a will sees a way



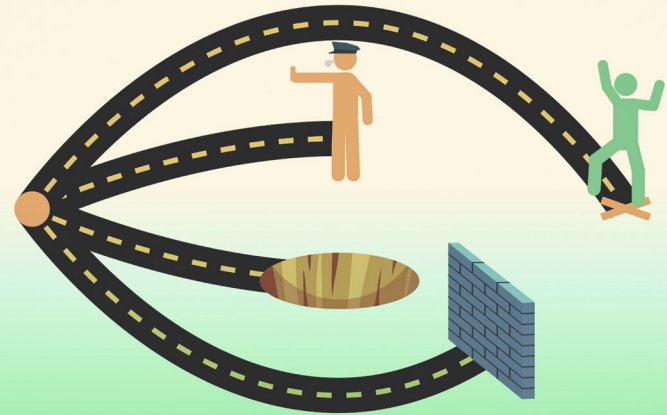
People with little hope often:

- Have a history of trauma;
- Find it harder to trust care providers;
- Focus more on the short term instead of the future;
- Tend to avoid challenges because it feels safer than risking something bad happening again.



People with a lot of hope:

- Think more long term;
- Want to achieve a goal;
- See multiple ways to get there;
- Have a greater will to achieve their goal.



How do you go from low to high hope?

Hope is a cognitive process that
can be learned step by step.



Goal

Pick a goal you want to work on, make it clear and specific, and set a deadline to go for it.



Pathways

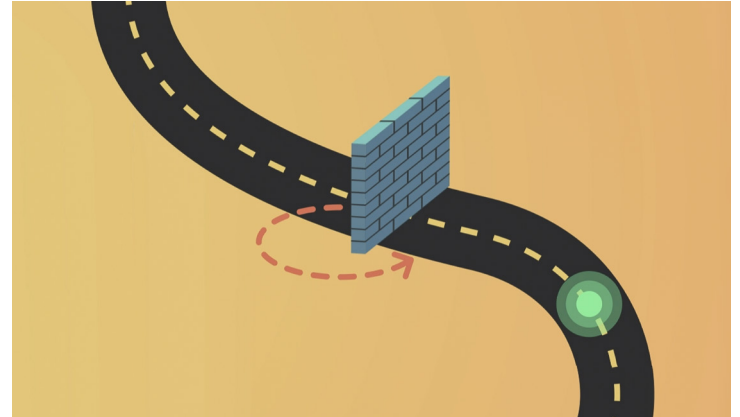
Think of pathways.



**What obstacles
might you encounter
to reach your goal?**

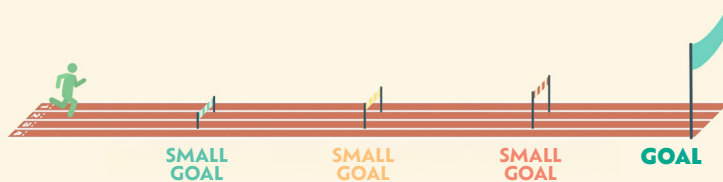
Bypass obstacles

Try to think of different ways to get around those obstacles. Have you ever faced a challenge and managed to get through it? What helped you overcome it, and what do you think worked best?



Regoaling

When goals feel out of reach or no clear path shows up, it's important to adjust the goals. Especially for people with trauma, it helps to take things step by step – guiding them without taking over. After all, hitting those small goals gives the motivation to keep going.



Imagination

Imagine how you would feel if you reached your goal. Fantasy is important and can contribute to the motivation to achieve the goal.⁷



“Hope is about taking **action**
to achieve your goals”
- Chan M. Hellman -

Hope Heroes – like friends, social workers, teachers,
or family – can help you reach your goals. They’re the
ones who give you that extra push when you need it.





**Strategies
to create
hope**

Introduce the science of hope

.....

Determine goal(s)

.....

**Discuss the ways to
achieve a goal**

.....

Recognize obstacles

.....

Find sources of motivation

.....

Visualize hope

.....

**It is always possible
to regoal**

Guiding principles in Hope Centered Work

- 1 Hope is a **cognition** not an emotion.
- 2 **Imagination** is the instrument of Hope.
- 3 Hope is **not wishful thinking**.
- 4 Hope **begets Hope**.
- 5 Hope is a **social gift**.
- 6 Hope **can be taught**.

“Change starts with understanding how things are going in your life right now and to imagine what life could be like.”

– Chan M. Hellman –



More information?

Visit www.efjca.eu/hope

Videos on Hope

[Chan Hellman: The Science and Power of Hope \(TED Talk\)](#)

Videos on Trauma

[Nadine Burke Harris | Speaker \(TED Talk\)](#)

[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\): Impact on brain, body and behaviour \(YouTube\)](#)

[Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Health Across the Life Course – Core Story: The ACE Study \(YouTube\)](#)

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Finding your own ACE score

While you were growing up, during your first eighteen years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often: Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? Or act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
Yes / No
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often: Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? Or ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
Yes / No
3. Did an adult or person at least five years older than you ever: Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? Or attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
Yes / No
4. Did you often or very often feel that: No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? Or your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
Yes / No
5. Did you often or very often feel that: You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? Or your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
Yes / No

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
Yes / No
7. Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? Or sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? Or ever repeatedly hit for at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
Yes / No
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker of alcoholic or who used street drugs?
Yes / No
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
Yes / No
10. Did a household member go to prison?
Yes / No

Now add up your 'Yes' answers.

This is your ACE score: _____

Source: <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>

The (Hope) Future Scale

Instructions

Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes you and put that number in the blank provided.

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 = Definitely False | 5 = Slightly True |
| 2 = Mostly False | 6 = Somewhat True |
| 3 = Somewhat False | 7 = Mostly True |
| 4 = Slightly False | 8 = Definitely True |



1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
2. I energetically pursue my goals.
3. There are lots of ways around any problem.
4. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.
5. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
6. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
7. I've been pretty successful in life.
8. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

Agency: _____

Add Scores on items: 2, 9, 10 and 12.

Scores range from a 4 to a 32.

Higher scores reflect higher agency.

Pathways: _____

Add scores on items: 1, 4, 6 and 8.

Scores range from a 4 to a 32.

Higher scores reflect higher pathways thinking.

Total Hope Score: _____

Add Score for Pathways to the Score for Agency.

Add the agency and pathway scores. Scores of 40 – 48 are

hopeful, 48 – 56 moderately hopeful, and 56 or higher as

high hope.

Sources:

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Hellman, C. M., Pittman, M. K., & Munoz, R. T. (2014). The first twenty years of the will and the ways: An examination of score reliability distribution on Snyder's dispositional hope scale. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14, 723-729.

“Hope Is A Social Gift: Just as despair can come to one only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings.”

– Nobel Prize Author Elie Wiessel –



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