

1. What is an ACEs & Resilience Champion?

Do you have ideas about how to prevent ACEs and increase resilience? Do you want to lead change in your organization and/or in your community? If yes, then you are an ACEs & Resilience Champion.

The actions of an ACEs & Resilience Champion may look different within and across organizations. Regardless of the intervention, champions are enthusiastic and confident in their ideas, get the right people involved, and persist despite adversity.

An ACEs & Resilience Champion informs others that ACEs can be prevented, and their effects can be reduced; they drive change by working to build healthy communities full of protective factors. A champion knows that ACEs awareness and action must be achieved individual-by-individual, organization-by-organization and community-by-community.

ACEs & Resilience Champions know that health includes physical, mental and social wellbeing. They have an understanding of ACEs and the impact of toxic stress on wellbeing. They understand that ACEs can have an impact on brain development, as well as physical and mental health. ACEs & Resilience Champions know that resilience can be built at any stage in life, and that people who have experienced ACEs can rebound and thrive.

ACEs & Resilience Champions understand that their interactions with other people matter, and that everyone has a right to feel safe and to be heard. They know that self-awareness and commitment to reflection and learning are critical to move them along their ACEs & Resilience journey.

An ACEs & Resilience Champion sees it as their role to help people in their own organization become informed about ACEs and resilience. They work to activate the organization to take action to address ACEs, and to implement ACEs- and resilience- informed practices within their sphere of influence.



ACEs & Resilience Champion Examples

Mike Anderson, Principal of Brant Avenue Public School in Guelph, Ontario is an ACEs & Resilience Champion. Mike understands that many students and their families experience ACEs and other forms of adversity. With an understanding of ACEs and the power of resilience, Mike works with his team to do really tangible things to support safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments that are the foundation of a mentally healthy school.

Through simple policy and program changes (like no line-ups at recess!), Mike and his team prioritize physical and emotional safety for their students. They focus on teaching students, rather than subjects, and regularly remind students of their value and potential.

Dr. Melanie Bluhm, Family Physician at the Guelph Community Health Centre, is an ACEs & Resilience Champion. After a decade of practice, Dr. Bluhm was discouraged that she wasn't seeing more positive outcomes for some of her patients who were struggling with long-standing mental health and addictions issues, despite access to medical and psychotherapy treatment. Even more concerning, she was starting to see these issues passed down to the next generation, with her patients stuck in the cycle of trauma, parenting and attachment struggles, and poverty. With her knowledge of ACEs and resilience, Dr. Bluhm has shifted conversations with her patients away from, “what’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?” and begun to think outside of the traditional medical model approach. Today, Dr. Bluhm practices Trauma-Informed Care. When it makes sense to do so, she asks her patients questions about their childhood experiences, using this information to guide conversations about health issues they and/or their children may be experiencing today. Her revised approach supports patients to:

- understand how childhood adversity can impact their health and wellbeing; and
- prevent ACEs from happening in their own families by increasing resilience through interventions and supports that make sense to them.

