

4. Action for Change: Strengthening how your Organization Approaches ACEs and Resilience

Organizations benefit from taking the time to understand how their processes, policies and actions help or hinder the creation of an environment that prevents and reduces the effects of ACEs and builds resilience. Taking a more deliberate approach may help improve outcomes for clients, staff, and the community.

Stressful or potentially traumatic abuse, neglect or household dysfunction early in life are known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs can increase the risk of negative health behaviours and outcomes that can develop later in life.

What does action look like?

Preventing and reducing the effects of ACEs and building resilience requires all of us to take action within our spheres of influence.

At your job, you may spend most of your time working directly with clients, you may make decisions about the programs that are offered or policies that guide your organization. You may work in a setting that is focused on prevention, intervention and/or treatment. You may work for a small organization or a level of government. All of this helps to determine your sphere of influence – where you have the power to take action to address ACEs and build resilience.

Actions at all levels is critical to achieve the collective impact we are all working toward: *A resilient community that prevents and reduces the effects of ACEs.*

Actions to address ACEs and build resilience in your community may take many forms. The actions you take may depend on your role within an organization, input from your colleagues, and the resources available. Actions may affect service delivery and interaction with clients, and/or policies and procedures within your organization. Actions may also target change at a broader systems level (e.g., citizen engagement, municipal, provincial, or federal policies).

Below are examples of action that be taken at the individual, program and organization, community, and system levels:

Individual (clients you work with)

- Integrate principles of Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) and Person-Centered Care (PCC) into your interactions with clients (you will find more information about TIC and PCC in [Section 7](#) of this toolkit).
- If appropriate, talk with your clients about the impacts of adverse childhood experiences, other forms of adversity and toxic stress. Whenever you talk about ACEs also offer information about resilience.
- Share information and resources to support clients to build their own and/or their children's resilience.
- Teach skills and offer tools for parents, children and individuals to learn how to deal with stress, resolve conflict and manage emotions.
- Refer youth to mentoring programs.
- Consider the impact of raising awareness of ACEs, and the potential for staff to experience secondary trauma or trigger their own trauma histories while working with clients. Ensure counselling is available or implement mindfulness classes and other supports to help staff manage their stress.

Program and Organization

- Integrate principles of Person-Centered Care and Trauma-Informed Care into your organization.
- Organize a training session about ACEs and the role of service providers in building resilience to raise awareness and inspire behaviour change among staff.
- Refer your colleagues to acescoalition.ca to do an online training about ACEs and Resilience
- Modify existing programs and develop new program practices that aim to prevent and reduce the effects of ACEs and promote resilience. For example, add content regarding brain development to evidence-based home visiting and parenting education programs that support the healthy development of infants and young children (e.g., Healthy Babies, Healthy Children).
- Screen current policies and procedures to identify those that don't reflect an understanding of ACEs or resilience, and may inadvertently promote negative interactions with clients.
- Develop and implement organizational policies that create a welcoming and safe space for clients and program participants. Consider how policies can promote protective factors and positive experiences for clients.
- Review employee job descriptions, modify employee orientation sessions, and add professional development opportunities to ensure staff understand the impact of ACEs, the importance of resilience to buffer the effects of ACEs, and their role in promoting resilience.

Community

- Develop and implement a public education campaign to promote social norms that protect against violence and adversity. Public education campaigns are one way to shift social

norms and reframe the way people think and talk about ACEs and resilience.¹

- Provide leadership, decision-making and problem-solving opportunities for youth to meaningfully contribute to your community.
- Provide low or no-cost activities for families so that income is not a barrier to participating in their community.

System

- Find networks of strategic allies to advocate for systems and policy change:
 - Learn about the ACEs Coalition of Guelph and Wellington.
 - Develop a Coalition in your own community.
- Support policies and/or advocate for funding for interventions that support and enhance people's access to protective factors (for example, positive school environments, safe communities).

Ideas for action were developed by drawing on the experiences of others, including the [Centers for Disease Control](#) and the [Change in Mind](#) project.

Follow these steps to identify how your organization might take action on ACEs and build resilience.

Identification – Start at the Beginning

How are you a part of building resilience? This process will help you and your team identify, define, and analyze the current state to identify areas for improvement. Alone, or with your team, answer the following questions:

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019). Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: Leveraging the Best Available Evidence. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How are people who have experienced ACEs treated by staff and considered in your processes and policies?

How do we talk about ACEs? How do we talk about resilience and protective factors?

How is an understanding of ACEs and resilience incorporated into our organization today?

What people, places and processes within your organization are impacted by your current approach to people who have experienced ACEs?

How are they impacted?



What are the consequences of those impacts to the people involved?

What are the consequences of those impacts to the organization?

What are the consequences of those impacts to the community?

What has been done to change this so far?

Who can help make the change happen?



Considering the above, write a statement that describes the current way your organization approaches ACEs and building resilience. This statement should be as complete and specific as possible. Stick to the facts, and focus on the **Who, What, Where, When, Why & How**.

This statement doesn't replace your earlier findings, instead, it should help you conceptualize where the biggest opportunities for improvement lie.

Justification –Develop a Rational and Emotional Case for Change

Considering the statement, you've created above, develop a rational and emotional case for change (Why do you want to see change in your organization?). Many people are capable of building a rational case for change, but are less adept at leveraging an emotional appeal. Understanding the emotional case for change will make people feel truly committed to the change instead of only creating another "program of the month". It will also help people connect to the goals personally, rather than only thinking about it from the organizational level. An emotional grounding will build momentum for a real transformation.

Rational Case for Change

Emotional Case for Change

Manifestation – Drive Real Change

Start with the end in mind. What does your organization look like when it addresses ACEs and resilience-building in the best way possible? Compose a SMART goal that outlines how you and your team can help your organization make ACEs and resilience priorities in the organization.



The Physical Environment

Does your space have any barriers for people who have experienced ACEs? How does your space act as a protective factor for people? How does it not?



Training and Development

Do you provide adequate staff training on ACEs and resilience? Do you have ACEs and resilience resources for staff and/or clients?

Supervision

Do supervisors understand the effects of ACEs and the importance of resilience? Is there an opportunity to talk with a supervisor about how your efforts to prevent and reduce the effects of ACEs and build resilience are making a difference?

Communication

Are there any internal or external communication practices that may be detrimental to folks who have experienced ACEs? Could you start any new practices to emphasize resilience?

Team Environment

Is your team open to doing things differently to better address ACEs and build resilience? Do you have the necessary resources to support your efforts?

Leadership

Do organizational leaders understand their role in addressing ACEs and building resilience? Is there appropriate accountability for actions that may be detrimental to those living with and/or who have experienced ACEs?

Values

Do the current values of your organization support preventing and reducing the effects of ACEs and building resilience?

Overall

Drive Real Change by Identifying Roles

Making your goals a reality takes action. With your team, think about who will be responsible for each goal. Ambiguity at this stage can lead to missed opportunities to achieve your goals.

A good model for thinking about responsibility is the RACI model, though you can use your own model too. The RACI model helps you quickly work out the level of involvement required of various team members.



Responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The person who actually carries out the process or task assignment ● Responsible to get the job done
Accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The person who is ultimately accountable for process or task being completed appropriately ● Responsible person(s) are accountable to this person
Consulted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● People who are not directly involved with carrying out the task, but who are consulted ● May be stakeholder or subject matter expert
Informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Those who receive updates on the process or task, or who have a need to stay informed

Monitor and Adapt

Now, decide when you're going to follow up on your goals next. Will it be in a month? In a quarter? In a week? If your SMART goals are well written and time-bound, they may suggest a natural time to reconvene.

Write down the date of your next progress update here:

When you meet again, remember that momentum is the most important thing. Your first idea to solve an issue may not have worked as planned, but that's okay. This meeting is a great time to reassess strategy based on new information.