Connecting Resilience & Adverse Childhood Experiences

What are ACEs?
Adversity is normal and necessary in a child’s development, but an over exposure to stressful or traumatic events or relationships can impair the development of a child’s physical and emotional development. These events are called Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs. ACEs can have long term affects to a person’s health and well-being making them more likely to adopt high risk behaviors and suffer from chronic diseases or mental illness. By practicing and teaching resilience, we buffer the effects of ACEs and reduce that chances of passing them on to the next generation.

What is Resilience?
We all experience stressful situations in our lifetimes. Resilience is the ability to withstand or recover from those situations that cause significant stress. Resilience can be learned and practiced through self-care, supportive relationships and mindfulness. These techniques are easier learned as children due to the rapid brain development that occurs in the first five years of life, but adults can and should practice resilience as well.

Have you experienced ACEs?
From 1995 to 1997, a study of 17,000 people was conducted to evaluate the correlation between the participants’ ACEs and their current physical and behavioral health. Two thirds of participants had experienced one or more ACEs. By evaluating the trends displayed throughout the study, a 10 question evaluation was created that determines an “ACE score.” Typically, the higher the ACE score, the more likely a person is to be at risk of health consequences. You can find this questionnaire and other resources online at acestoohigh.com.

Over 64% of Alaskans have had one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences. That is 2 out of every 3 people in the state.
How can you practice resilience?

Self Care
Taking care of oneself is the very base of building resilience. We must take care of our physical selves in order to take care of our emotional selves.

- Develop a regular sleep routine with adequate amounts of rest.
- Eat healthy food that fuels your body and gives you energy.
- Stay active and spend time in nature.
- Keep a reflective journal.
- Make time for your favorite hobbies and activities.

Supportive Relationships
When a person is cared for and supported by healthy relationships, they are likely to have a better sense of well being.

- Prioritize close relationships with partners, family etc.
- Talk to the people that care about you when you are struggling.
- Develop friendships that are empathetic and encouraging.

Mindfulness
Being mindful means having a sense of perspective beyond the day-to-day of life. Practicing mindfulness can help you react calmly and rationally in stressful situations by conditioning your mind to see things in the present moment.

- Engage in reflective practices like meditation.
- When you feel yourself stressing about the past or the present, redirect your attention to the present moment.
- Practice yoga or deep breathing to strengthen your focus.

How can you help support others and reduce ACEs in Alaska?

Breaking the cycle of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Alaska is no small task, but there are steps we can all take toward making a difference.

- Learn more about ACEs and resilience. You can read about the ACEs study and more online at acestoohigh.com, acestudy.org and alaskachildrenstrust.org.
- Support programs that encourage healthy relationships and parenting practices such as family support groups and home visiting programs.
- Teach others about ACEs and trauma-informed practices.
- Evaluate and overcome your own ACEs by practicing resilience.

Together we can reduce ACEs in Alaska and create a healthy, supportive and safe community for future generations to come.