

Unit I : What is trauma?

Trauma is a serious issue! It is nothing to make fun of!

It results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are **emotionally disturbing** or **life-threatening**.

These event have a **lasting adverse effects** on the **individual's functioning** and **mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being**.

(Source: Trauma Informed Care Information Resource Center, 2025)



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Unit 1 : What is trauma?

9

What are traumatic experiences or events?

Experiences that may be traumatic include:

- Physical, sexual and emotional abuse.
- Childhood neglect.
- Living with a family member with mental health or substance use disorders.
- Sudden, unexplained separation from a loved one.
- Poverty.
- Racism, discrimination and oppression.
- Violence in the community, war or terrorism.

Trauma does not have anything to do with social status, economic background etc. – it can happen to anyone!

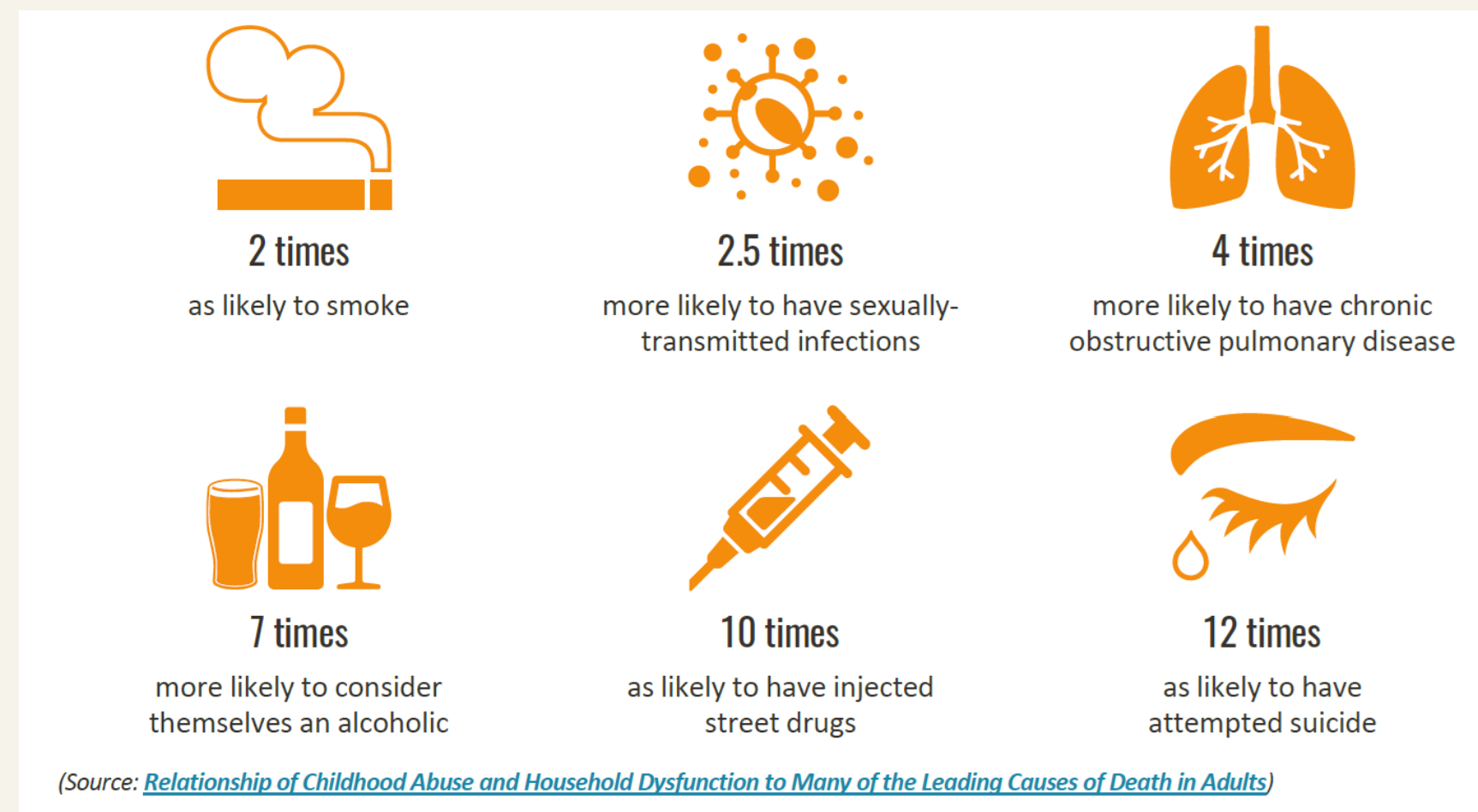
Although trauma can occur at any age, it has particularly debilitating long-term effects on children's developing brains.
This is often referred to as **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**.

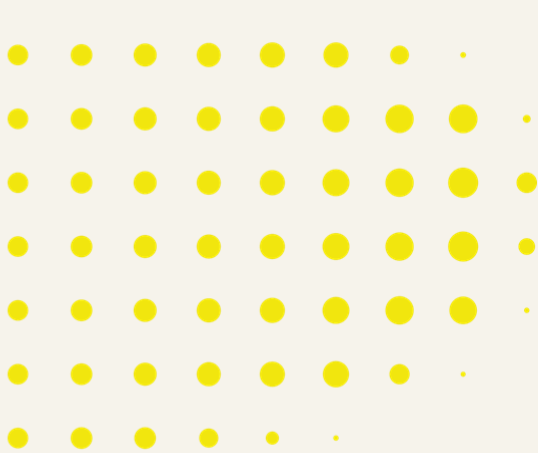
Unit 1 : What is trauma?

10

What are long-term effects of trauma on health and a person's life?

Studies in the United States on **ACE** and trauma-experience asked people to indicate the number of traumatic events they had experienced prior to age 18 and provided them with a corresponding “ACE score.” Compared to people with no ACEs, individuals with an ACE score of four or more were approximately:





Unit 1 : What is trauma?

11

What is the relationship between trauma-experience and health-risks?

People affected by trauma may develop coping mechanisms to help alleviate the emotional and/or physical pain they feel as a result of trauma. **Sometimes, these strategies involve maladaptive behaviors** — such as unhealthy eating, tobacco use, or drug and alcohol use. These coping mechanisms may provide some relief, but they can also simultaneously contribute to anxiety, social isolation, and chronic diseases.

How does trauma influence a person's relationship?

Regardless of the type of trauma a person has experienced, **traumatic experiences impact relationships**. This includes, but is not limited to, relationships between people, communities and the delivery systems that support individuals' health and social needs. When a person experiences trauma, he or she may feel unsafe, betrayed and/or have difficulty trusting others. This can lead to heightened emotions, like anger or aggression, or a tendency toward shame, numbing and/or isolation. Within the context of health care, this can negatively impact the bond between a patient and their provider, or between you and your peers; and thus a with a person's engagement in care.

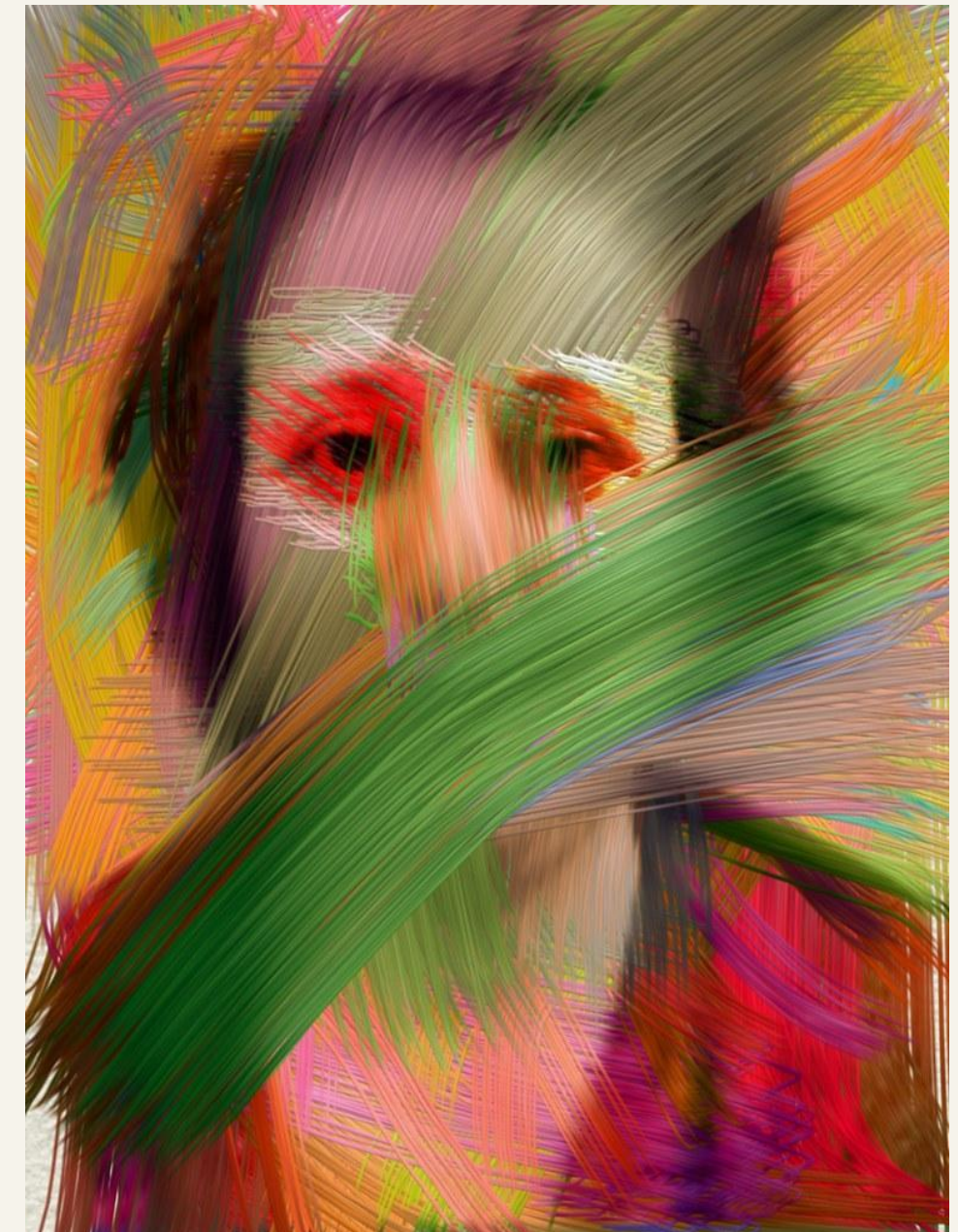
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Unit I : What is trauma?

12

Can the effects of trauma be avoided or addressed?

- Protective factors, including supportive relationships with family members, a teacher or others in the community, can help to shield individuals from the effects of trauma and build **resilience** to help overcome adversity and confront challenges.
- **Trauma-informed approaches to care**, including **relational healing** and **trauma-specific treatments**, can help people begin processing their experiences in a healthy way.
- Note: You need to have an understanding of trauma-informed-care in order to work with people suffering from trauma! However, professional treatment always needs to be provided by professional psychologists, certified therapists or medical and mental health professionals!



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Unit I : What is trauma?

13



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Trauma and toxic stress

- Trauma causes toxic stress on a person and the negative long-term effects of **toxic stress** on health is well-researched and understood.
- Toxic stress is an emotional and/or physical response that occurs when a person experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity without adequate support.

(Source: Trauma Informed Care Information Resource Center, 2025)

Unit 1 : What is trauma?

14

How to note if someone suffers from trauma

- Adults who experienced trauma in childhood or during i.e., migration or seeking refuge, are often “wired” differently than those who did not. Their brains, primed to deal with nearly ***constant stress***, can struggle to respond appropriately to situations that would otherwise appear normal and non-threatening.
- This partly explains why many **adult trauma survivors struggle** with ***depression, anxiety and other issues related to emotional regulation***. These resulting mental health issues can contribute to long-term difficulties maintaining healthy relationships and lead to problems at school and/or work.

(Source: Trauma Informed Care Information Resource Center, 2025)

Exercise



Do you know anyone you might have experienced trauma or do you yourself sometimes remember traumatic situations?

If yes, try to identify potential signs of trauma and rank them on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 = low to 10 = high/often noticed):

- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Always being stressed (even about minor challenges).
- Forgetfulness.
- Aggressive behaviour (verbally, physically).
- Symptoms like high blood pressure, skin disorders, digestive problems, constant headaches, social isolation.