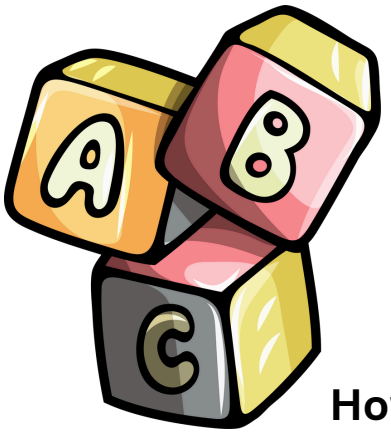

What Are ACEs?

How does childhood still affect me now?

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are stressful or traumatic events that happen before the age of 18.
They can shape how a person thinks, feels, and reacts as an adult — not because they're weak, but because their brain and body were still learning what safety meant.
ACEs don't define who you are, but they can explain why certain things feel harder than they should.

Examples of ACEs

- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Neglect (not having basic emotional or physical needs met)
- Growing up around domestic violence
- Parental mental illness or addiction
- Loss of a parent through death, imprisonment, or separation
- Exposure to crime or community violence
- Constant fear, instability, or emotional absence in the home

These experiences can overload a child's stress system — teaching the brain to stay in survival mode long after the danger is gone.

How ACEs Affect Us Later in Life

- Difficulty trusting others or forming relationships
- Low self-worth or people-pleasing
- Anxiety, depression, or emotional numbness
- Physical health issues (fatigue, chronic pain, autoimmune symptoms)
- Overreacting to stress or shutdown under pressure
- Feeling unsafe even when life is calm

The body remembers what the mind forgets — this is the impact of early, chronic stress.

Why Awareness Matters

Understanding ACEs isn't about blame — it's about healing.

When we recognise how trauma shapes our emotions, relationships, and bodies, we can finally respond with compassion instead of criticism.

It also helps adults recognise signs in young people — and intervene early with empathy instead of punishment.

Healing from ACEs

Healing doesn't mean erasing the past — it means learning safety in the present.

Helpful steps include:

- Therapy or trauma-informed coaching.
- Building supportive, safe relationships.
- Grounding techniques and body regulation.
- Setting healthy boundaries.
- Practising self-compassion and slowing down guilt cycles.

Remember

What happened to you is not who you are.

Your past may explain your pain — but it never limits your potential.