

# Building Resilience: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Intervention Through Wellness Practices

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## Background

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events experienced before age 18 and are characterized as abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction that increase the risk for developing chronic illnesses in adulthood. In California, 61.7% of adults have 1 or more ACEs, while 16.7% have 4 or more<sup>1</sup>. The risk for developing long term health impacts from ACEs, increases in a dose response relationship; the more ACEs experienced, the higher the risk for disease<sup>2</sup>. These traumatic experiences contribute to toxic stress overtime and disrupt the function of physiological processes. The organs vital for survival are being over stimulated. Resilience to toxic stress has been found to be successful through the support of trusted adults, the practice of meditation, and exercise. Individuals who have been affected by ACEs can deflect the associated risk for disease by effectively managing stress. This project aims to increase wellness opportunities for high school students residing in San Francisco, CA during the 2019-2020 academic school year. These services are in an effort to mitigate the risk factors for negative health outcomes.

## Community Partners

College Track is a non-profit striving to increase access to college for underserved students in urban communities. The program selects students in 8th grade in a selective process prior to beginning high school. College Track provides students with tutoring, scholarships, internships, and application support to ensure they gain college admission. Many of the students who attend College Track have endured adverse circumstances and have a wide range of ACE scores. Currently, College Track hosts an 8 hour Trauma Informed Care training to educate staff on wellbeing, student mental health, crisis emergency protocols, and the impact of ACEs. Additionally, College Track has implemented a robust 6 pillar wellness practice for multilevel infiltration. These practices include individualized support for students, staff meetings to gauge students' needs, student strengths assessment, staff wellness training, and consultation.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Data Report: A Hidden Crisis: Findings on Adverse Childhood Experiences in California  
Induni, M, Ryan-Ibarra, S, Ewing, D  
<sup>2</sup> www.centerforyouthwellness.org

## Project Description

Goal: To decrease the risk for developing chronic illness by managing stress through wellness programming.

Target Population: San Francisco low income and first generation high school students

Methods:

- Koru Meditation
  - Students will be given the opportunity to participate in Koru meditation. Koru is an evidence based meditative practice, specifically designed for young adults and college students. Koru has been effective in improving sleep, increasing the ability to focus, and decreasing stress.
- Exercise classes
  - Students will be given the opportunity to attend fitness classes at the local YMCA at no cost. Classes include activities such as Zumba and hip hop boot camp.
- Goal Setting
  - Students will create their own personal SMART wellness goals for the semester and meet with accountability partners to ensure completion

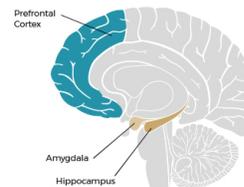


**Example:**  
First day of school or work.

**Example:**  
Loss of family member, but with supportive buffers in place.

**Example:**  
Witnessing domestic violence in the home, chronic neglect<sup>2</sup>

www.joiningforcesforchildren.org



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## Expected Outcomes

Although ACEs pose impacts on health that can manifest beyond the scope of this study, the goal is to equip students with practices that can serve them throughout their life. Our intention is that students will be aware of how they experience stress and how to combat stress in healthy ways to maximize wellness. Through this work, we hope that students will be exposed to a practice that suits them best. To evaluate the effectiveness of the various activities, we will conduct surveys asking students about their stress levels before and after the offering of these programs. Additionally, we will compare the academic records for students before and after participation in the activities to see if there are any associations between wellness and academic performance.

## Lessons Learned

Initially, I planned to coordinate an ACEs Patient Navigator role in clinical settings. In this role, a Patient Navigator would meet with patients and families to discuss the importance of ACE scores, how they are used, and answer any questions families may have. However, for various reasons this project did not align well with the timeline for this internship so I decided to change plans. As a College Track alum, I had already established a strong community of supporters and knew we could collaborate to lower the alarming risks at hand. Upon onboarding, College Track already had a solid framework to address wellness and I wanted to maintain this momentum and help improve where I could. From this experience, I learned to stay committed to the vision; not the mechanism by which I get there.

## Acknowledgement

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