

FACES Assessment Guide for Youth-Serving Community-Based Organizations

Overview

The FACES Assessment is a population-level trauma screening tool designed to identify adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among youth engaged in community-based services. Implementing the assessment helps organizations tailor their programs, connect youth with the right supports, build partnerships, and advocate for policies that address trauma and promote equity.

Background: Expanded ACEs

The FACES Assessment expands on the original 10-item ACEs questionnaire by including 24 total items. This expanded list captures a broader range of adversities such as racism, community violence, housing instability, bullying, and academic pressure—experiences often encountered by youth served in community-based programs. It offers a more accurate and inclusive understanding of trauma in diverse populations.

Understanding ACEs in Community-Based Settings

Youth participating in afterschool programs, mentoring initiatives, shelters, or other wraparound services often experience higher rates of trauma. Unaddressed ACEs can influence mental health, behavior, school performance, and relationships. Using the FACES Assessment allows organizations to move beyond assumptions and create intentional, healing-centered environments that promote youth resilience and development.

The Value of Universal Screening

Screening all participants helps:

- Identify youth in need of additional support or referral
- Inform service planning, curriculum adjustments, and staffing needs
- Promote equity by ensuring interventions are need-based, not behavior-based
- Create data-informed partnerships with schools, clinics, and behavioral health providers
- Strengthen funding proposals and advocacy efforts by demonstrating need



Survey Administration

Delivery Methods

- Paper or digital format depending on youth access and staff facilitation capacity
- Administered individually or in small groups by trained staff

Sample Size

Aim to screen all youth involved in ongoing programming. Smaller pilot groups are acceptable but should be used with caution when generalizing findings.

Scoring and Interpretation

Each 'Yes' response is worth one point, for a total possible ACE score of 0 to 24. Follow-up questions offer useful insights but do not count toward the score. Youth scoring 4 or more are at higher risk for adverse outcomes and should be prioritized for trauma-responsive services or referrals.

Aggregate ACE scores across your program population can:

- Identify the most common adversities your youth face
- Guide training priorities for staff
- Support case planning and funding decisions
- Help establish or expand partnerships with mental health, housing, legal aid, and social service agencies

Integration Strategies

For effective use of the FACES Assessment:

- Train staff on trauma-informed approaches and survey facilitation
- Ensure privacy and emotional safety when administering the survey
- Have protocols for debriefing, referrals, or warm handoffs to support services
- Use findings to engage funders, boards, and community partners in systemic solutions

Citations

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Choi, C., et al. (2020). Validity of an expanded ACE assessment.

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Contact

For questions or implementation support, contact Jamie Freeny, DrPH, MPH at jfreeny@gmail.com

