

Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use:

I acknowledge the use of CoPilot [AI Tool URL] on 7th June 2026 to support research of well-being in theories.

I used the prompt(s):

1. What does this page say about "well-being"? (Linked to **Bandura's Social Learning Theory, 1971**)
2. [Prompt]
3. [Prompt]

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

Introduction to Adverse Childhood Experiences and Early Trauma.

Bore da, good morning, thank you for taking the time to listen to my presentation on health, well-being and lifestyle in the early years. Today I will be discussing trauma and adverse childhood experiences, often referred to as ACEs, however, NHS UK has now refrained from this acronym based on the feedback received from those who have experienced adversity (NHS UK n.d.). In the early years sector in Wales, work to reduce and support the effects of adversity on young children and families, the significance of this issue, along with key academic contributors, and what practitioners can do to support children (and their families) effectively continues (Welsh Gov 2021). The early years (typically defined as birth to age five) represent a critical period of physical and mental development. During this time, children's brains develop rapidly, and experiences (both positive and negative) have a profound influence on outcomes especially in later life. Increasingly, research has highlighted that trauma and adversity during this time can significantly affect children's physical health, emotional well-being, and long-term life chances.

What are Adverse childhood experiences and Trauma?

Adverse childhood experiences have been defined as stressful or traumatic events which have occurred during childhood, (NHS Cheshire and Merseyside 2026) these can be characterised as:

- abuse
- neglect
- witnessing or experiencing domestic violence
- a parent having experienced time in prison
- parental substance misuse, or
- mental illness within the household.
- And of course, in recent years, the impact of Coronavirus, with the pandemic's effects documented by Bryant (2023) extending beyond the immediate considered health consequences of the COVID-19 effects.

The experience of widespread illness, alongside the public health measures introduced to limit the transmission generated substantial challenges for parents, families, and children. These challenges contributed to increases in certain adverse childhood experiences and amplified parental stressors that could, in turn, give rise to additional adversities over time. Emerging evidence also suggests that aspects of the pandemic experience may have long-term health implications comparable to 'nontraditional adversities' such as exposure to community violence or incidents around racism.

These experiences can directly harm the child or disrupt the environment in which they live and evidence shows it can lead individuals to take up harming habits such as smoking, drinking etc. (PHW, NHS 2016).

The Welsh adverse childhood experience study, conducted by Public Health Wales in 2016, is particularly significant. It found that:

- 47% of adults surveyed in Wales have experienced at least one ACE,
- and 14% experienced four or more Adverse childhood experiences during their childhood.

This highlights that Adverse childhood experiences are not uncommon, but rather a widespread public health issue affecting a significant proportion of the population.

As a result, public services are under pressure due to the ongoing effects of adverse childhood experiences and the required care needed to support our society (PHW, NHS, Wales 2016).

Significance of Adverse childhood experiences in Wales

The significance of Adverse childhood experiences lies in their long-term and their increasing impact. Research consistently shows that they are strongly linked to negative outcomes across the life course.

For example, studies led by Bellis et al. (2014) demonstrate that individuals with higher levels of Adverse childhood experiences are significantly more likely to:

- engage in health-harming behaviours such as smoking and substance misuse
- experience mental health difficulties
- develop life-limiting, chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer

Additionally, Welsh Government (2021) reports that Adverse childhood experiences are often associated with:

- lower educational attainment
- increased involvement in crime
- reduced employment opportunities

In Wales, adversity is also associated with intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, meaning that children who experience adversity are more likely to raise children in similar circumstances, continuing the cycle of inequality. (PHW NHS 2016)

The significance is therefore not only individual but societal, with Adverse childhood experiences placing substantial costs on public services and communities.

Impact on Young Children

For young children specifically, trauma can have profound developmental consequences. Trauma results from these adverse experiences and can affect how a child thinks, feels, and behaves. Importantly, trauma is not just about the event itself, but about the child's emotional and physiological response to it according to NSPCC (2021).

Neuroscientific research highlights that early trauma can disrupt the brain development, affecting:

- stress response systems
- emotional regulation systems
- immune and hormonal systems (Public Health Network Cymru 2025).

When children are exposed to stress linked to adversity, sometimes referred to as “toxic stress”, their minds and bodies remain in a heightened state of alert. Quiñones, Gold & Ellis (2022). This can lead to:

- anxiety and behavioural difficulties
- difficulties forming secure relationships
- delays in language and cognitive development

Children having experienced adversity may appear:

- withdrawn or overly anxious
- aggressive or impulsive
- disengaged in learning environments (TIS UK 2018).

Research in Bangor University (2025) Wales also shows that children exposed to Adverse childhood experiences are more likely to experience poor mental well-being and reduced school engagement, with the effects often compounding over time. Behaviour and the impact on learning by peers in schools was shown as poor engagement, higher exclusion rates and difficulties with foundational academic and social skills. It was found that positive school experiences can lead to mitigating these adversities and improved reports of engagement, less bullying reports and an increased sense of belonging.

Impact on Families

It is important to recognise that adversities do not occur necessarily in isolation. They are often embedded within the dynamics of family contexts.

Families experiencing adversity may face greater challenges such as:

- poverty and deprivation
- mental health difficulties
- substance misuse
- domestic conflict

These negative experiences can affect parenting skills, making it more difficult to provide consistent, nurturing care.

Research highlights that children raised by parents who have experienced Adverse childhood experiences themselves may be at greater risk of becoming exposed to adversity, creating a cycle of trauma across generations. (PHW NHS 2016). However, it is crucial to note that this cycle is not inevitable. With the right support, families can build resilience and provide positive environments for their children.

What is Wales doing to address Adverse Childhood Experiences?

The ACE Hub Wales was developed and exists to position Wales closer to becoming a superior nation in adverse free childhoods. The Hub reports that their mission is to lead with knowledge and ideas and ongoing learning to challenge and change ways of thinking. They pledge to develop training so that with working collaboratively, the cycle of adversity can be broken.

In order to achieve this they report that they will promote the improvement of outcomes by:

- Spreading information and knowledge – this will ensure the voices of communities are considered and children and families can co-design solutions that will work for them.
- Sharing reports and evidence about what organisations can do more effectively to help prevent and relieve Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- Developing professionals by sharing knowledge and skill, providing training for to enable practitioners and their organisations to enhance their internal and external networks to change practice.

- Pulling knowledge and learning from individuals, organisations and broader agencies and sharing it through a range of action learning sets and groups of practice.
 - Driving change and transformative systems at community and national levels.
-

Theoretical Perspectives

Several key theorists help us understand the impact of trauma and Adverse childhood experiences in early childhood.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) – Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner emphasises that children's development is shaped by family, community, and the wider society suggesting these multiple interacting systems increase the supportive networks around children as they develop and grow. However, this can be considered weak in some areas in Wales, where social determinants such as poverty and poor housing, as reported by Nicol *et al.* (2019) can further influence adversity, and it's affects by financially hindering the immediate family network.

Bowlby (1969) – Attachment Theory

According to Behrens, Jones-Mason & Forslund (2025) Bowlby highlighted the importance of secure attachments. Trauma was considered to disrupt caregiver and child relationships, leading to insecure attachment, which is said to be linked to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Shonkoff et al. (2012) – Toxic Stress Theory

Conducted in America in 2012, Shonkoff's work on toxic stress rationalizes how prolonged exposure to adversity can affect brain development and potentially result in lifelong health and learning difficulties.

Bandura (1977) – Social Learning Theory

Bandura's theory suggests that as children we learn how the world works and resulting behaviours from our environment. Exposure to violence or harmful behaviours within the home can lead children to accept these behaviours as standard and go on to potentially repeat them.

Policy and Practice in Wales

Wales has taken a progressive approach to addressing Adverse childhood experiences.

The Welsh Government (2021) has prioritised Adverse childhood experiences through:

- the ACE Support Hub Wales, established to support, promote awareness and provide training for evidence-based practice (PHW NHS 2016)
- the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework (2023) which was developed to promote a whole-system approach to understanding and responding to trauma in children

Additionally, early years programmes such as Flying Start (2026) providing targeted support in disadvantaged areas, including:

- childcare provision
- health visiting services
- parenting support

These policies reflect a shift toward prevention and early intervention, recognising that addressing adversity early is more effective than responding later.

What Practitioners Can Do

Early years practitioners play a crucial role in supporting children affected by trauma and Adverse childhood experiences. A key approach is the adoption of trauma-informed practice.

Trauma-informed practice involves:

1. Recognising the impact and effects of trauma on behaviour and development
2. Identifying signs of trauma, such as dysregulation, emotional immaturity or withdrawal
3. Responding appropriately, utilising empathy and understanding (TIS UK 2018)

Key Areas of Support for Practitioners

1. Create Safe and Nurturing Environments

Children who have experienced trauma need to feel safe, secure and valued.

Predictable routines and calm environments can reduce anxiety and support emotional regulation.

2. Build trust and transparency

Consider how to establish relationships between children and emotionally available adults, consider respect, is the practitioner being respectful enough (Sunderland 2015), find suitable links to interests and motivators to support and encourage them.

3. Promote Emotional Development

Supporting children to recognise their emotions, express their feelings and develop effective coping strategies

4. Work in Partnership with Families

With genuine empathy, practitioners should adopt a non-judgmental, collaborative approach, recognising the challenges families may face and providing support where needed with suitable up to date training.

5. Adopt a Strengths-Based Approach

Focus on and celebrate children's abilities and resilience rather than those things they struggle with.

6. Develop a Multi-Agency Working approach

Collaboration between external services including health services, social services and education practitioners.

This will promote a consistent and holistic support for children and their families (WHO 2023).

The Role of Resilience

While Adverse childhood experiences have significant negative impacts, research also highlights the importance of resilience and protective factors.

Protective factors include:

- supportive relationships
- positive school experiences
- access to community resources

Studies show that children who have strong support networks and stable resilience factors are less likely to experience poor health and educational outcomes, even when exposed to early adversity (WHO 2023)

This reinforces the importance of emotionally available adults within the early years settings and using these settings as protective environments for vulnerable children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, trauma and adverse childhood experiences represent a significant challenge for some children in early years in Wales. Evidence demonstrates that although adversities are fairly common and have profound impacts on children's

development, health, and life outcomes, research also shows us that these impacts are not inevitable and can often be reversed through:

- early intervention
- supportive relationships
- trauma-informed practice

With guidance and training, practitioners can play a vital role in breaking the cycle of adversity.

Wales has positioned itself as one of the world's leaders in addressing these experiences and their effects through robust policy writing, research, and practice frameworks.

Moving forward, continued collaboration between practitioners, support agencies, policymakers and communities will be essential in ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their early experiences.

Diolch, thank you for your time and listening to my presentation today.

Reference List:

- Bandura, A. (1971) *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
[Bandura SocialLearningTheory.pdf](#) (Accessed 2. June 2026)
- Bangor University (2025), *New Study Highlights Impact of Childhood Adversity and School Experiences on Adult Health*. Available at: [New Study Highlights Impact of Childhood Adversity and School Experiences on Adult Health | Bangor University](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- Behrens K.Y, Jones-Mason. K. & Forslund. T. (2025) John Bowlby's theory of attachment and separation: revisiting his original visions after 50+ years, what we know today, and where to go from here? *Attachment & Human Development*, 27:5, 657-661, DOI: 10.1080/14616734.2025.2550829 Available at: [John Bowlby's theory of attachment and separation: revisiting his original visions after 50+ years.](#) (Accessed 10. June 2026).

- Bellis, M.A. et al. (2016) 'Adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with health-harming behaviours', *BMC Medicine*. Available at: [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(Adverse childhood experiences\) in Wales and their Impact on Health in the Adult Population | European Journal of Public Health | Oxford Academic](#) (Accessed 2. June 2026)
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press. Available at: [The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design - Urie Bronfenbrenner - Google Books](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- Bryant, D., Oo, M., Azcevedo, B., Damian, A.J. (2023). Adverse Childhood Experiences (Adverse childhood experiences) and the COVID-19 Pandemic. In: Portwood, S.G., Lawler, M.J., Roberts, M.C. (eds) *Handbook of Adverse Childhood Experiences. Issues in Clinical Child Psychology*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32597-7_13
- NHS (n.d.) Adverse childhood experiences and the lasting impact [Adverse childhood experiences and the lasting impact - NHS Safeguarding](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (2026), Mental Health Support for Children and Young People, *What are Adverse Childhood Experiences Adverse childhood experiences?* [What are Adverse Childhood Experiences Adverse childhood experiences? - Liverpool CAMHS](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- Nicol S, et al (2019). The full cost of poor housing in Wales, Building Research Establishment Ltd, Public Health Wales, Welsh Government, Available at: [The-full-cost-of-poor-housing-in-Wales.pdf](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- NSPCC Learning (2021). *How childhood trauma affects child brain development*, Available at: [Understanding child brain development | NSPCC Learning](#) (Accessed 10. June 2026).
- PHW NHS (2016). *Adverse childhood experiences*. Available at: [Adverse childhood experiences - Public Health Wales](#) (Accessed 2. June 2026)

- Public Health Network Cymru (2025) *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Well-being*. Available at: [Adverse Childhood Experiences and Wellbeing - Public Health Network Cymru](#) (Accessed 10. June 2026).
- Quiñones, M., Gold, S. N., Ellis, A. (2022) Chapter 3 - Defining trauma, adversity, & toxic stress, Editor(s): Akeem Nassor Marsh, Lara Jo Cox, Not Just Bad Kids, Academic Press, Pages 67-101, ISBN 9780128189542, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818954-2.00007-9>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780128189542000079>) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- Shonkoff, J. et al. (2012) American academy of paediatrics. *The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress*, *Pediatrics*. [The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (Accessed 2. June 2026).
- Sunderland, M. (2015), *Conversations That Matter, Talking with Children and teenagers in Ways That Help*. Cornwall. Worth Publishing
- Trauma Informed Schools UK (Wales) (2018) Available at: [Home — Trauma Informed Schools Wales](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- Trauma-Informed Wales (2023) *Trauma-informed framework*. Available at: <https://traumaframeworkcymru.com> (Accessed 10. June 2026).
- Welsh Government (2026) *Flying Start guidance*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales> (Accessed 10. June 2026).
- Welsh Government (2021) Review of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) policy: report, *How the ACE policy has performed and how it can be developed in the future*. [Review of Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACE\) policy: report \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).
- World Health Organization (2023). A practical handbook on Adverse Childhood Experiences (Adverse childhood experiences), *Delivering prevention, building resilience and developing trauma-informed systems A resource for professionals*

and organisations. Available at: [PHW-WHO-Adverse childhood experiences-Handbook-Eng-18_09_23.pdf](#) (Accessed 11. June 2026).