

• ST. MARY'S •

POLISH Country FAIR

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND



Country Music Night

Fri. May 27 5 pm - 11 pm

Sat. May 28 11 am - 11 pm

Sun. May 29 11 am - 11 pm

Mon. May 30 11 am - 7 pm

Country Music Night

St. Mary's Prep Campus
3535 Commerce Rd.
Orchard Lake, Michigan

FREE Parking
\$6 General Admission
\$15 Families (up to 6)

WWW.STMARYSPOLISHCOUNTRYFAIR.COM

■ MUSIC ■ AUTHENTIC POLISH FOOD

■ VEGAS TENT ■ KIDS' ZONE ■ AND MORE

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Affirming Our Children

The definition of child abuse, as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is: *any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation of a child.*

Some of these actions are definitive and easily identifiable, but others, like *emotional harm*, are less obvious and open to interpretation.

For many of us, the effects of childhood abuse are life-long. Child abuse leaves us with beliefs about ourselves that prevent us from living life to our full potential. When we believe that we are not good enough, that we don't matter or that we are a disappointment, our actions reflect those beliefs in several ways.

For some of us, our actions are attempts to negate those beliefs by trying to prove our worthiness. For others, our actions unconsciously reinforce our beliefs through self-sabotage or self-criticism. For many of us, the belief that we are not good enough is so painful that we must adapt coping mechanisms to numb the pain. There is a broad array of these coping mechanisms, from using drugs or alcohol, to compulsive shopping or compulsive sexual behaviors. Workaholicism, perfectionism and overachieving can also be pain-numbing.

In my work as a psychotherapist, I help my clients gain awareness of their leftover childhood beliefs and the impact these beliefs have on their lives. Many people who suffer with negative beliefs about themselves do so in isolation because they don't think others have similar experiences. We now know that is incorrect.

Between 1995 and 1997, over 17,000 Kaiser Permanente health plan members voluntarily participated in a study to find out how their stressful or traumatic childhood experiences affected their physical health as adults. The instrument used in the study is the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaire. The test is composed of 10 questions that assess for childhood abuse or neglect and family dysfunction. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents in the study reported at

least one adverse childhood experience and, of those, 87 percent reported two or more.

The number of ACEs showed a direct correlation to poor physical and mental health outcomes in adulthood. As the number of ACEs increase, so do the risks for alcoholism and alcohol abuse, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression, health-related quality of life, illicit drug use, ischemic heart disease and liver disease. This

also includes increased risk for financial stress, domestic abuse, poor academic achievement and suicide attempts.

The ACE test is easily accessible online at www.acestudy.org, and many other websites. The results have been replicated in many studies across the U.S. The study reveals that many commonly occurring family behaviors and communication styles are damaging, with life-altering consequences for our children.

Another important finding of the study is that a high ACE score does not necessarily mean poor outcomes for the child. Some children are more resilient. This can be a result of their genetics or the presence of positive, affirming relationships that counteract the adverse experiences.

What does the ACE study mean for us as individuals? As parents, are we respectful and validating to our children? As grandparents, are we an affirming presence in the lives of our grandchildren? As aunts, uncles, teachers, mentors, neighbors, do we show respect to others, most especially children? It is easy to fall prey to our own negative belief systems and become critical or judgmental. Now that we know the consequences, we must try harder.

Understanding the ACE Study and its conclusions is empowering. The data tell us what we can do to create trauma-informed families and communities, where all people, children and adults can live in safety and love. When all children can reach their full potential, the limits are boundless for our Jewish and greater communities. ✱

Ellen Yashinsky Chute is the chief community outreach officer at Jewish Family Service.