

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF ADVERSITY

If you are currently living with or processing a trauma, consider skipping this exercise to avoid being further triggered.

THE IMPACT

While there is no way to signify the impact experiencing adversity has on a person, the exercise below provides an understanding of the more profound psychological burden one may carry the more they have encountered challenging circumstances. The exercise also exemplifies how depending on your life's events; one situation can lead to another, and the amount of adversity one experiences starts to stack up quickly.



Indeed, it is true you can't change your past circumstances, yet, you want to be able to recognize the added stressors you experienced in the past, in addition to any stressors you are currently experiencing. Events from your past and present challenges impact your stress levels, emotional well-being, and mental health. The opportunity in this exercise is to recognize the psychological impact of experiences you have or are currently facing to bring greater self-compassion and empathy toward others, as you often have no idea what they have or are facing in their life.

This exercise cannot calculate trauma's actual psychological toll on an individual. Assigning numerical values to past or present traumatic experiences cannot describe the totality of one's experience. The idea is to provide context to the diversity of challenges and the ripple effect adverse experiences may have on our emotional well-being and mental health.

EXERCISE DIRECTIONS

For each of the experiences below, if you are the one who faced the listed adversity, give **2 points** for each experience.

If you witnessed your loved one (parent, spouse, child, sibling) experience any of the below challenges, give **1 point** for each experience.

If this experience is recent for you, within the last 1-3 years, add an additional **2 points**.

Then rate the emotional intensity on a scale of 1-5 that represents the emotional impact you are experiencing from a particular adversity today. **(1 = slight impact...5 = impact is disabling)**

Total each row under column “Row Totals”. Add up each row total to determine your grand total.

ADVERSITY FACED	EXPERIENCED YOURSELF (2 points)	EXPERIENCED WITH LOVED ONE (1 Point)	RECENT EXPERIENCE (2 points)	EMOTIONAL INTENSITY RATING (scale 1-5)	ROW TOTALS:
Poverty					
Racism					
Substance Addiction					
Incarceration					
Physical Health Challenges					
Mental Health Challenges					
Divorce					
Physical Abuse					
Emotional Abuse					
Sexual Abuse					
Inability to read/speak language					
Lack citizenship where you live					
Violence					
Trauma					
Bullying					
Death					
Sexual orientation biases					
Gender biases					
Job loss					
Other					
GRAND TOTAL:					

WITH EACH ADVERSITY, YOUR INTERNAL SENSE OF SAFETY WAS THREATENED.

To survive, you find ways to adapt. Those adaptation strategies supported you to endure difficult experiences psychologically. Although the adaptation strategies were once helpful, when you carry them with you into the present, those same strategies may become maladaptive.

Remember: Just because you can't see the challenge doesn't mean there isn't a psychological impact.

The bottom line is that stress shows up if we are not meeting our physical, mental, and emotional needs, whether those needs stem from our past, present, or a combination of both.

When we ignore our needs and cope instead, we either feel more numbed out toward life or our unprocessed feelings overwhelm us. Worse yet, ignoring our needs means we also turn our back on ourselves, our dreams, and our desires.



SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What did this exercise bring up for me emotionally?

How can I provide myself with self-compassion for the emotions that arise?
