Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are an experience of serious adversity or terror, or the emotional or psychological response to that experience. Examples of ACEs include:

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Incarceration of a parent
- Mental illness in a household member
- Substance abuse within the household
- Violence between parents
- Separated or divorced parents

ACEs can have negative impacts later in life, such as poor mental and physical health, lower academic achievements, and substance abuse. ACEs - along with experiencing community violence, racism, and other negative life events - can cause toxic stress. Toxic stress is the “excessive activation” of the stress-response system and can have long-term effects.

**PREVALENCE OF ACEs IN GEORGIA**

Nearly 6 in 10 surveyed Georgians reported having experienced at least one ACE.

In 2016, Georgia collected data from adults about ACEs they experienced as children, documenting the prevalence of the above eight types of ACEs in the state. Other types of ACEs not included in this research are experiencing neglect and having a family member attempt or die by suicide.

- 42% have experienced 0 ACEs
- 58% have experienced at least 1 ACE
- 2-3 ACEs 20%
- 4+ ACEs 17%

**Responses to Stress**

- **Positive Stress Response**
  - Characterized by brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in hormone levels - normal and essential to development

- **Tolerable Stress Response**
  - Activates body’s alert systems to a greater degree and is the result of more severe, longer-lasting difficulties

- **Toxic Stress Response**
  - Occurs when a child experiences strong, frequent, and prolonged adversity

**Impact of ACEs**

Children with ACEs are at increased risk of negative outcomes in multiple areas of their lives:

- **Health**
  - Substance use (alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs)
  - Risk-taking behaviors (gang membership and violent crime)
  - Sexual victimization violence
  - Economic hardship (unemployment, poverty, and homelessness)

- **Behavioral Health**
  - Mental illness
  - Behavioral health challenges

- **Education**
  - Decreased concentration
  - Decreased memory
  - Decreased language ability

**www.georgiavoices.org**
RECOMMENDATIONS

Research shows that one trusted and caring adult in the life of a child can make all the difference in preventing or mitigating ACEs. These recommendations build protective factors around families. In order to adequately tackle ACEs and toxic stress, an adequate support system for each child should be at the center of any child policy platform. In addition, policies must focus on a child’s developmental needs from birth.¹

**Early Care and Learning**
- Create an environment where the effects of toxic stress are buffered with appropriate supports to help children adapt and enhance cognitive and social development

**Early Intervention**
- Increase access to health care and home visiting support to promote healthy development and provide early diagnoses, appropriate care, and intervention when problems emerge

**Parental Health**
- Address parental mental and behavioral health to minimize, or even prevent a child’s exposure to traumatic environments

**Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs**
- Increase funding and prevalence for quality afterschool and summer learning programs like the Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs to increase access and ensure affordability

**Foster Youth Care**
- Maximize implementation of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act
- Develop procedures that enable continuity of behavioral health and primary care while youth are in foster care and after they’re transitioning out of the system

**Juvenile Justice and School Discipline**
- Provide environments that are safe and services that do not increase the level of trauma that youth and families experience
- Train Public Safety Officers who engage with children in child development and trauma awareness

**Workforce and Systems Development**
- Train caregivers and child-serving professionals on the effects of trauma and stress on children and youth to ensure they respond appropriately to behaviors and initiate effective interventions

**Nutrition**
- Increase funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Sources: [https://tinyurl.com/ACESChildhoodStress2020](https://tinyurl.com/ACESChildhoodStress2020)
Rev. 1/2020