

ACEs and Childhood Stress

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), or early negative experiences, can lead to negative impacts later in life, such as **poor mental and physical health, lower academic achievements, and substance abuse**. In the research discussed here, ACEs refer to these eight experiences:¹

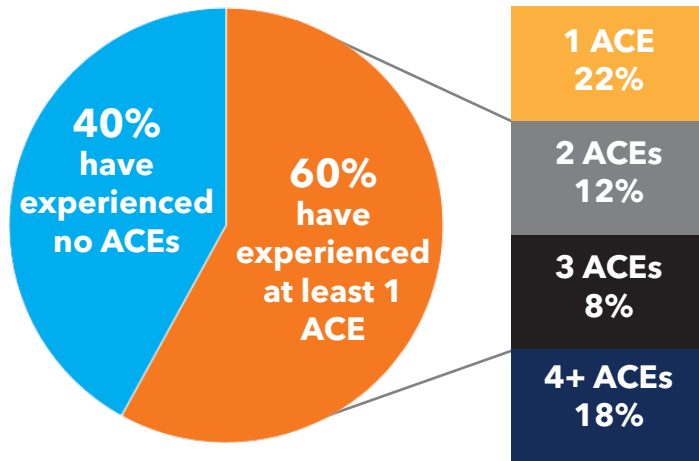
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Incarceration of a parent
- Mental illness in a household member
- Substance abuse within the household
- Violence between parents
- Separated or divorced parents

ACEs - along with experiencing community violence, racism, and other negative life events - can cause high levels of stress, or toxic stress, which can also have long-term effects on a child's development.

PREVALENCE OF ACEs IN GEORGIA²

Nearly **3 in 5** surveyed Georgians reported having experienced at least one ACE.

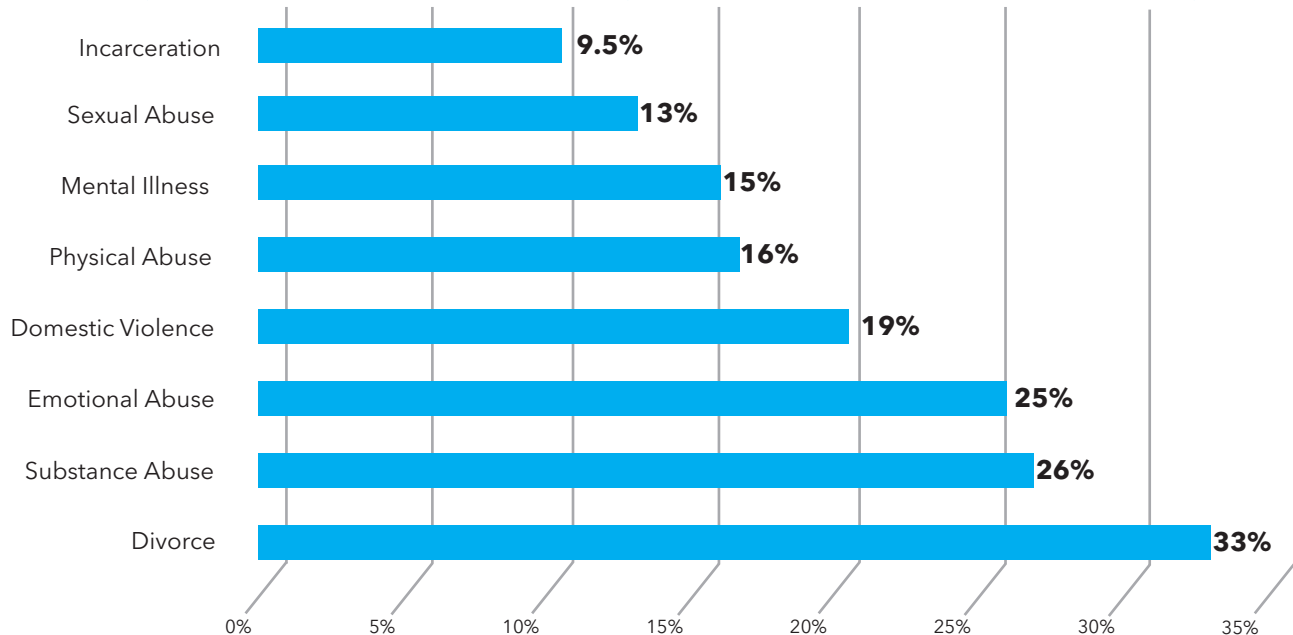
In 2016 and 2018, Georgia collected data from adults about ACEs they experienced as children, documenting the prevalence of the above eight types of ACEs. (Other types of ACEs not included in this research are experiencing neglect and having a family member attempt or die by suicide.)³



DATA ON DISPARITIES

While the likelihood of having four or more ACEs did not vary significantly by race or ethnicity in Georgia, White respondents were about **8 times** as likely to have experienced no ACEs as Black respondents, according to 2016 BRFSS data.

ACEs Among Adults 18 Years and Older, Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2018



IMPACT OF ACEs

Children with ACEs are at increased risk of negative outcomes in multiple areas of their lives:^{4, 5}



- Poor health, including mental health
- Substance abuse



- Depression
- Risky behavior
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions



- Poor academic achievement
- Employment problems

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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.



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 for ACEs and Childhood Stress

- 1 "Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences Through Positive Connections and Policies," Georgia Essentials for Childhood, 2020, <https://www.acesconnection.com/g/george-aces-connection/fileSendAction/fcType/0/fcOid/502912386532849732/filePointer/502912386532849745/fodoid/502912386532849742/Preventing%20ACEs%20through%20Positive%20Connections.pdf>
- 2 "ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions," Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, accessed December 6, 2019, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxicstress-frequently-asked-questions/>
- 3 "Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences Through Positive Connections and Policies," Georgia Essentials for Childhood. 2020, <https://www.acesconnection.com/g/george-aces-connection/fileSendAction/fcType/0/fcOid/502912386532849732/filePointer/502912386532849745/fodoid/502912386532849742/Preventing%20ACEs%20through%20Positive%20Connections.pdf>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions," Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, accessed December 6, 2019, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxicstress-frequently-asked-questions/>