

# 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 experiences:<sup>1</sup>

- Homelessness
- Involvement in child welfare system
- Medical trauma
- Natural disasters
- Neglect (physical/emotional)
- Discrimination (including racism and sexism)
- Community violence

ACEs, along with 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.<sup>2</sup>

## IMPACT OF ACEs

Children with ACEs are at increased risk of negative outcomes in multiple areas of their lives:<sup>4, 5</sup>



- Poor health, including mental health
- Substance abuse



- Depression
- Risky behavior
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions

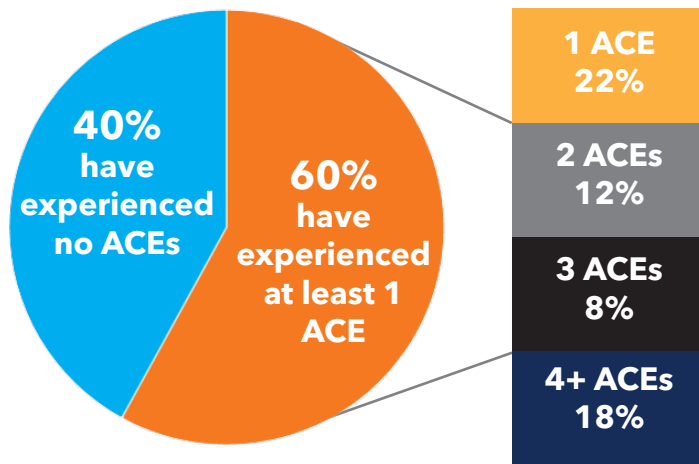


- Poor academic achievement
- Employment problems

## PREVALENCE OF ACEs IN GEORGIA<sup>3</sup>

**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. (ACEs not included in this research are experiencing neglect and having a family member attempt or die by suicide.)<sup>6</sup>



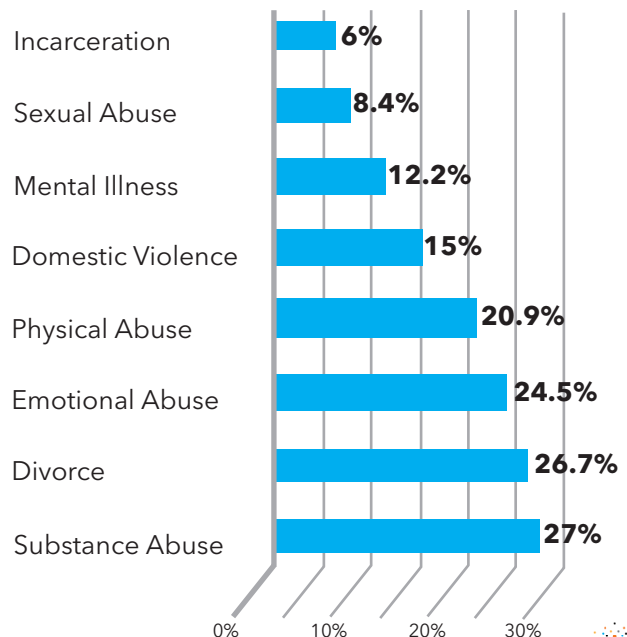
**In 2020, 14.3% of Georgians surveyed reported having experienced at least four ACEs.\***

\* The Department of Public Health is analyzing updated data, which is expected in December 2022.

## 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, 2020<sup>7</sup>



## 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)



### Stable Housing

- Improve Georgia's renter protection laws to reduce incidents of unsafe housing and eviction (FFPSA)

Thanks to these partners  
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this factsheet:

American Academy of Pediatrics  
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Georgia Chapter



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## Sources for ACEs and Childhood Stress

- 1 "Understanding ACEs," Paces Connection, 2021. Accessed November 1, 2022. [https://www.pacesconnection.com/ws/Handouts\\_UnderstandingACEs\\_EN.pdf](https://www.pacesconnection.com/ws/Handouts_UnderstandingACEs_EN.pdf).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 "Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences Through Positive Connections and Policies," Georgia Essentials for Childhood, 2020, <https://www.acesconnection.com/g/georgia-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 November 3, 2022. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxicstress-frequently-asked-questions/>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Emory University, Injury Prevention Research Center. Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: Data to Action. Accessed November 7, 2022. <https://iprce.emory.edu/pace-d2a.html>.