

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND RESILIENCE

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events in childhood that can have lasting negative impacts on physical and mental health, academic achievement, and overall well-being. Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) can help counteract the effects of ACEs by fostering resilience, which is the ability to recover and thrive despite challenges.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Prevalence in Georgia

Data from the Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) shows **16.4%** of Georgia adults experienced at least 4 of the following ACEs: ^{1, 2, 3, 4}

- **Abuse:** emotional, physical, sexual
- **Neglect:** physical, emotional
- **Bullying**
- **Community violence**
- **Discrimination**
- **Household challenges:** substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence
- **Loss:** parental separation, divorce, death
- **Natural disasters**

Impact on Health & Life

ACEs increase the risk of: ^{5, 6}

- Poor physical and mental health
- Substance abuse
- Depression
- Risky behavior
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Poor academic achievement
- Employment problems

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF ACEs

Resilience is the ability to recover from challenges and can help reduce the lasting effects of ACEs. Caregivers play a key role in building this resilience by creating safe, supportive environments, and modeling healthy behaviors, such as:



Model healthy coping and relationships



Respond with patience and care



Strengthen social connections



Meet basic needs



Understand child development



Teach social and emotional skills

POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) help mitigate the harm of abuse and help build resilience. The Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences, or HOPE, framework has four building blocks: ⁷



Relationships: supportive peers and adults



Engagement: social or civic activities



Environment: safe, equitable, and stable environments, at school and home



Opportunities: play, sports, arts, music

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations strengthen protective factors for families and place a strong support system for every child at the core of any policy response to ACEs and toxic stress.

Early Care and Learning

- Create an environment where the effects of toxic stress are buffered with appropriate supports.

Early Intervention

- Increase access to health care and home visiting support, including screening, diagnosis, and intervention.

Parental Health & Education

- Educate parents on building resiliency and protective factors to mitigate adverse experiences.
- 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

- Train school resources officers and 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.
- Educate professionals on building resiliency and protective factors to mitigate adverse experiences.

Stable Housing

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



REFERENCES FOR CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND RESILIENCE

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