Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are preventable, traumatic events that occur in childhood, that can potentially lead to negative near- and long-term health outcomes (CDC, 2019).

Key Points:
- Trauma informed supports can mitigate the effects of adversity by fostering inclusion and helping families and children manage stress
- Promoting positive social norms about parenting and acceptable parenting behaviors or destigmatizing mental health care can reduce the incidence and limit the harmful impact of ACEs.

How this factsheet can help prevent ACEs

The data presented are measures that influence the occurrence of ACEs, but they are not ACE scores. These measures help spot potential areas of improvement and make decisions on the best line of action.

Strategy 1: Increase access to evidence-based or research-informed programs for parenting skills and support that help parents/caregivers understand all stages of their child's development.

Adults that witnessed domestic violence between their parents are at greater risk of abusing their partner or children.

Between 19.6% - 20.6% adults in this region, when they were 18 years old or younger, lived with parents or caregivers that slapped, hit, kicked, or punched each other.

Parenting skills are important to end generational cycles of violence. This and other approaches that support healthy family relationships can help reduce known risk factors for child abuse and neglect and protect children from engaging harmful behaviors such as substance use and physical fighting.

19.6% - 20.6% of adults who, when they were < 18 years old, lived with parents or caregivers that slapped, hit, kicked, or punched each other.

Data Source: Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 2016 and 2018.

Strategy 2: Expand trauma-informed practices and resources across the state as well as increase understanding about the prevalence and impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and adverse community environments (jointly referred to as the Pair of ACEs)

Students in this region have self-reported experiencing anxiety, depression, and traumatic events like bullying, fighting, etc. These events can impact the ability to concentrate in school or make meaningful positive relationships. Promoting trauma-informed training can help school personnel identify and respond to the trauma students are experiencing. Trauma-informed practices can create a more inclusive school environment that fosters resilience and supports positive childhood experience.

The map below shows the percentage of students in grades 6-12 who were above the state median of a composite score that reflects student behaviors associated with ACEs. The measures considered in the composite score are from the Georgia Student Health Survey (2019) and are related to the behaviors - bullying, fighting, substance use, anxiety/depression, and self-harm. A higher percentage represents a greater rate of students in grades 6-12 reporting behaviors that have been associated with ACEs or that are ACEs.

Interventions that address these behaviors (i.e., bullying, fighting, etc.) will have the greatest effect on reducing the ACE composite score. The top three leading contributors to the composite score in all counties in this region are anxiety/depression, bullying, and self-harm, in that order.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Essentials for Childhood: Steps to Create Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships and Environments
SAMHSA’s Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative, 2014.

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Data source: Georgia School Health Survey
Preventing the Impact of ACEs
The most impactful prevention strategies, such as those found in the CANPP, offer real solutions at the family, society, and community levels. Communities that have affordable housing, opportunities for economic mobility, and low occurrences of violence have the most potential to create healthy and vibrant environments where children can thrive. Policies and programs that promote early education, mental health, and caring relationships can lessen the stressful load some families experience and by doing so, limit exposure to and prevent the negative impact of ACEs.

Evidence-based Prevention Programs
Evidence based programs are scientifically proven to promote health and prevent disease. Listed here are just a few evidence-based programs that lessen the harms of ACEs:

- Clayton County Board of Health: https://www.claytoncountypublichealth.org/
- Clayton County Cooperative Extension: https://www.claytoncountyga.gov/government/extension-services
- Cobb and Douglas Public Health - South Cobb Public Health Center: https://www.cobbanddouglaspublichealth.com
- Communities In Schools of Marietta/Cobb County, Inc.: https://cismcc.org/WP/
- Latin American Association- Lawrenceville: https://thelaar.org/
- HEARTS for Families: https://heartsforfamilies.org/

Helpful Resources
- Belonging for Hope: www.belongingforhope.org
- Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan: abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/canpp/
- Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/preventingace-datatoaction.html
- Prevent Child Abuse Georgia: abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu
- Essentials for Childhood: abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/essentials/

Looking for more ACE and ACE-related data like the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS), Georgia Student Health Survey (GSHS), and other sources?

Visit our website at https://iprce.emory.edu/pace-d2a.html

This work is funded by the Georgia Department of Public Health through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: Data to Action (CDC-RFA-CE20-2006).