Adverse Childhood Experiences

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

Key Points:
- Trauma-informed practices recognize and respond to the signs, symptoms, and risks of trauma to better support the needs of people who have experienced ACEs. Trauma-informed care is an approach defined by treating the whole person, considering past trauma and resulting behaviors and health outcomes (Resilient GA).
- 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.

GA Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan (CANPP)

The data presented align with select strategies from the GA Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan (CANPP). To learn more about the CANPP, visit: https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/canpp/

The following CANPP strategies were selected to implement in this region by a team of community stakeholders:

1. Promote trauma informed training for all school personnel and/or youth serving programs
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Expand specialty/accountability courts (drug, mental health, family treatment) with an emphasis toward ensuring access to behavioral health treatment for all families.

How this factsheet can help prevent ACEs
The data presented are measures that influence the occurrence of ACEs. These measures represent potential targets for interventions and are presented to help communities make decisions on the best lines of action.

Strategy 1: Promote trauma informed training for all school personnel and/or youth serving programs.

Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported that adults in their school treat all students with respect, by school district

School District	Percent
Douglas County	88.7
Paulding County	90.6
Polk County	91.2
Rome City	91.9
Cartersville City	92.6
Bartow County	93.1
Floyd County	93.6
Haralson County	94.2
Bremen City	95.0
Georgia	**90.8**

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

Trauma can impact a child's ability to concentrate and succeed in school. Further, strict disciplinary actions in schools can themselves be re-traumatizing for students with existing trauma or ACEs (SAMSHA 2014). Trauma-informed training increases school personnel's compassion for students and understanding of their behavior and improves their ability to meet students' academic and emotional needs.

Students in this region felt **respected by adults** in their school, with at least 88% of students in every school district reporting they feel that adults in their school treat all students with respect.

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Strategy 2: 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.
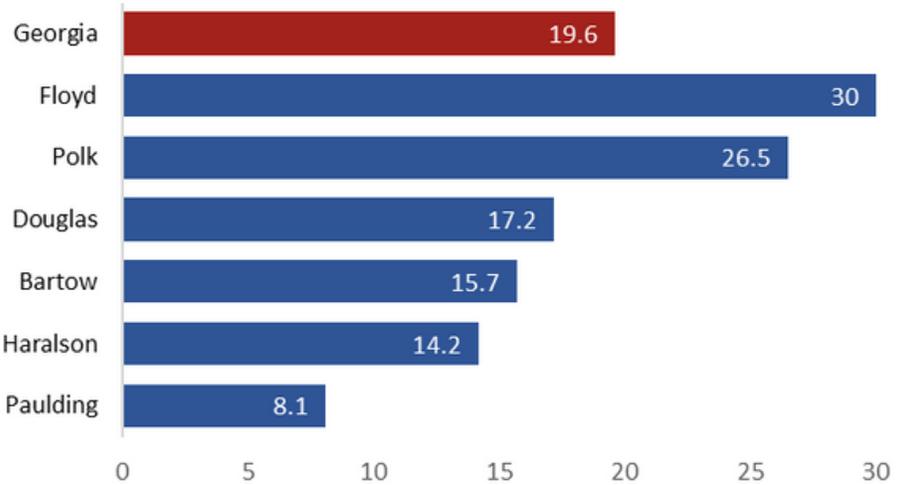
Communities with high rates of poverty and limited educational and economic opportunities is a risk factor for child maltreatment (CDC 2022).

Poverty and economic instability create high stress environments and conditions that put children at risk of experiencing ACEs and can lead to toxic stress that may negatively impact cognitive processes and harm the nervous and immune systems (CDC 2022).

Families who create safe, stable, and nurturing relationships are less likely to experience ACEs. Skill-based parenting and family relationship approaches reduce risk factors for child abuse and neglect and protect children and youth from multiple forms of violence and other health compromising behaviors (CDC 2019).
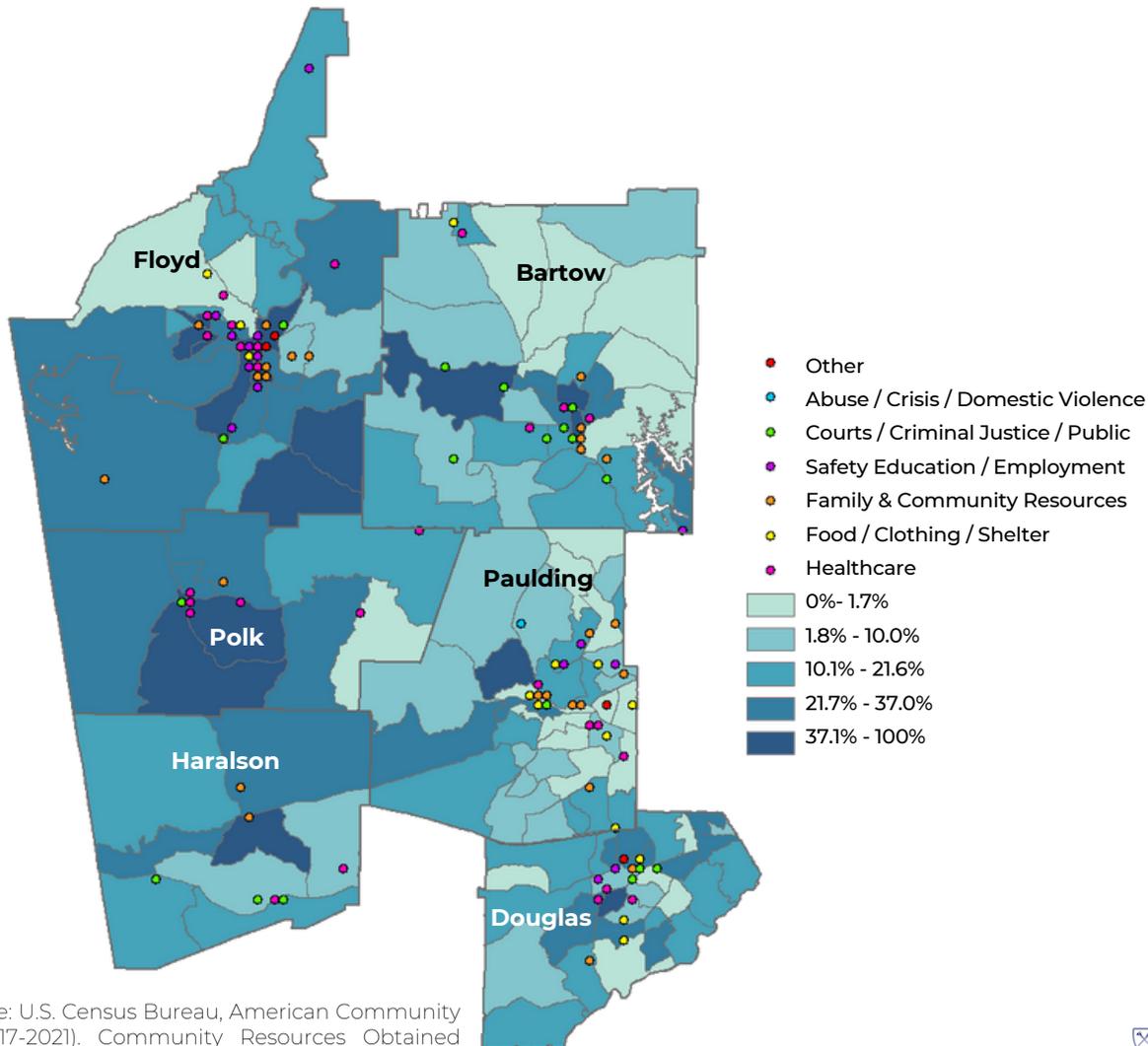
Providing **family supports,** including parenting education, can prevent the occurrence of ACEs. The dots on the map below show the locations of community resources in the region.

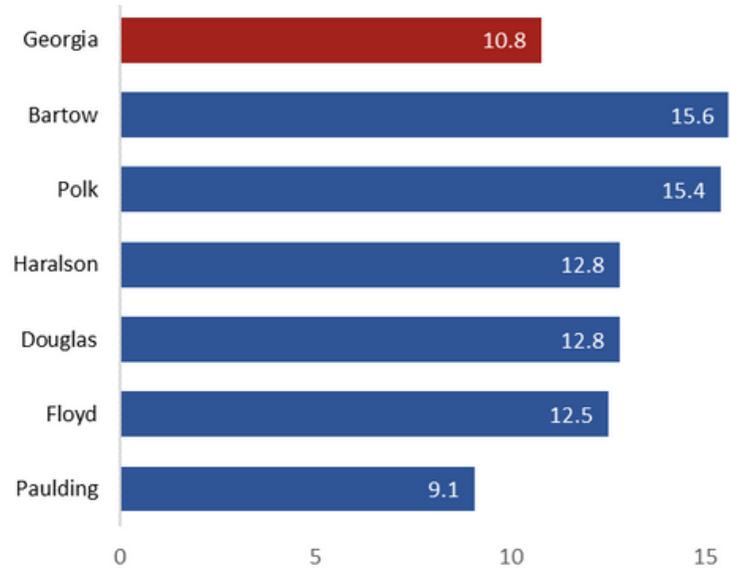### Percent of Children in Families Below 100% of the Poverty Level, by county

County	Percent
Georgia	19.6
Floyd	30
Polk	26.5
Douglas	17.2
Bartow	15.7
Haralson	14.2
Paulding	8.1

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2017-2021)

Percent of children in families below 100% of the poverty level, by census tract & community resources

Legend:
- Other
- Abuse / Crisis / Domestic Violence
- Courts / Criminal Justice / Public
- Safety Education / Employment
- Family & Community Resources
- Food / Clothing / Shelter
- Healthcare
- 0%- 1.7%
- 1.8% - 10.0%
- 10.1% - 21.6%
- 21.7% - 37.0%
- 37.1% - 100%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2017-2021). Community Resources Obtained from Prevent Child Abuse Georgia.

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Maltreatment investigatons per 10,000 children, by county

The chart to the right shows the number of children subject of maltreatment investigations at the county level in from June 2021 to May 2022. While the numbers vary from 9.1 to 15.6 per 10,000 children, any level of maltreatment is worrisome. These data help bring attention to the incidence of child abuse and neglect in this region.

Prevent Child Abuse Georgia is an organization that works to increase public awareness of child abuse prevention and recognition of suspected child abuse and neglect cases. Click here to learn more about their public trainings. Find supportive family resources at Find Help Georgia.

County	Value
Georgia	10.8
Bartow	15.6
Polk	15.4
Haralson	12.8
Douglas	12.8
Floyd	12.5
Paulding	9.1

Data Source: Division of Family and Child Services (June 2021 through May 2022). Obtained from Fostering Court Improvement

Strategy 3: 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.

Percent of population 16 years and older who are unemployed, by county

Adverse Community Environments, such as widespread **unemployment**, community violence, systemic racism and discrimination, and limited access to social and economic mobility create high stress environments and conditions in which ACEs are more likely to occur. Since the community conditions in which a person grows up also impact adversity and trauma, Adverse Community Environments and Adverse Childhood Experiences are closely linked. ACEs tend to thrive in communities affected by these Adverse Community Environments, so addressing these social factors is an important step in ACE prevention (PCA GA).

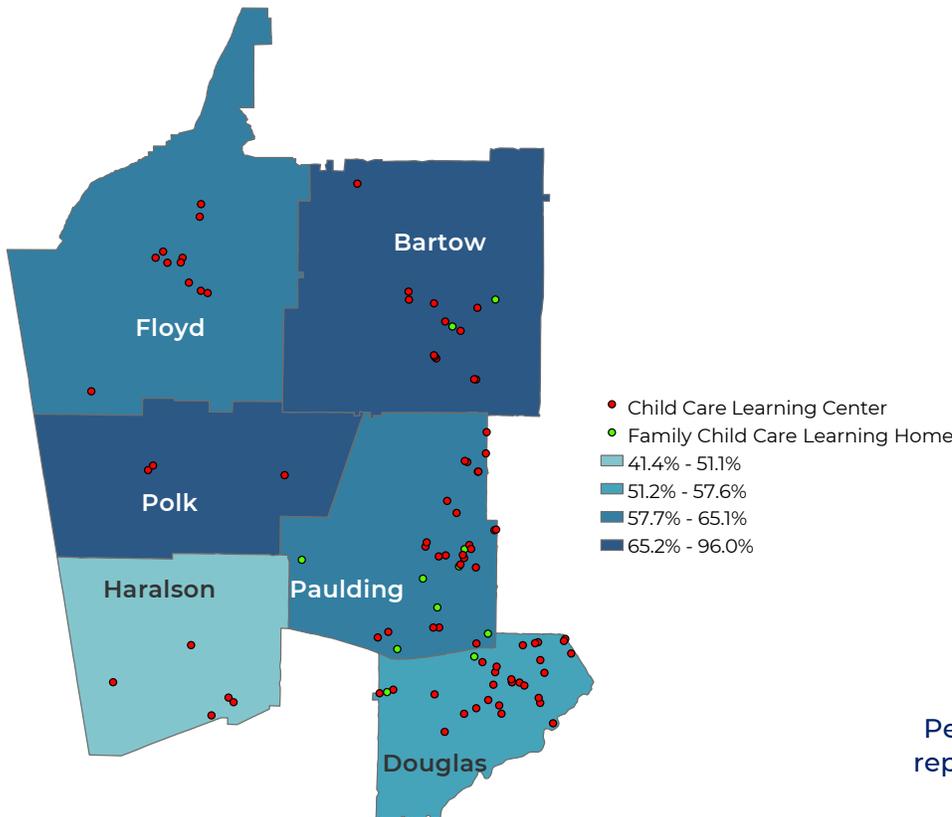| County	Percent
Paulding	4.2
Floyd	4.6
Haralson	4.9
Bartow	5.6
Polk	6.5
Douglas	6.7
Georgia	**5.5**

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2017-2021)

Early education plays an important role in the healthy brain development of children. Early education programs ensure a strong start for children by helping them develop physical, emotional, social, behavioral, and intellectual capacities. Access to high-quality childcare and preschool programs can help children build a strong foundation for future learning and opportunities while acting as a buffer against rough home environments, child behavioral problems, parental stress and depression, and child abuse and neglect. Early education programs can help prevent ACEs by providing information about ACEs and their impacts, caregiver support, and training about child health and development. Providing these resources can help families build a safe and supportive home environment.

The map below shows the the percent of 3- and 4-year-olds not enrolled in preschool. The dots on the map represent the locations of Quality Rated Early Learning Programs in the region.

Percent of 3- and 4-year-olds not in preschool, by county & quality-rated early education programs

Legend:
- Child Care Learning Center
- Family Child Care Learning Home
- 41.4% - 51.1%
- 51.2% - 57.6%
- 57.7% - 65.1%
- 65.2% - 96.0%

County	Percent
Haralson	50.1
Douglas	57.3
Floyd	59.1
Paulding	62.5
Polk	66.4
Bartow	72.1
Georgia	**50.9**

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five Year Estimates (2016-2020). Obtained from Kids Count Data Center.
Quality-Rates Early Education Programs obtained from PCA Georgia.

Having **meaningful and supportive relationships** with peers and adults can mitigate the effects of ACEs and promote resilience in children: the CDC lists 'children who have positive friendships and peer networks' and 'children who have caring adults outside the family who serve as mentors/role models' as two of their ACEs protective factors (CDC 2021). Schools are an important place for children to access positive peer networks and caring adults, particularly when ACEs create instability in the home.

In Region 3, students reported feeling highly connected to others at school; in all school districts, between 91.8% (Douglas County School District) and 95.9% (Bremen City School District) of 6th-12th grade students reported they feel connected to others at school.

Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported they feel connected to others at school, by school district

School District	Percent
Douglas County	91.8
Paulding County	92.6
Polk County	92.8
Bartow County	92.9
Haralson County	93.9
Rome City	94.0
Cartersville City	94.3
Floyd County	94.4
Bremen City	95.9
Georgia	**92.7**

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

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Strategy 4: Expand specialty/accountability courts (drug, mental health, family treatment) with an emphasis toward ensuring access to behavioral health treatment for all families.

Students in this region have self-reported experiencing anxiety, depression, and traumatic events like bullying and fighting, etc. These events can impact the ability to concentrate in school or make meaningful positive relationships. **Bullying, fighting, depression and anxiety, and substance use** are behaviors that are strongly associated with ACEs.

Improving mental health access for children and providing them with strong support systems are powerful ways to prevent these outcomes. For instance, connecting students to supportive adults through mentorship programs, involvement in religious activities, or after school programs or activities can promote feelings of belonging and engagement in school and decrease the occurrence of these mental health challenges. Promoting trauma-informed training can help school personnel identify and respond to the trauma students are experiencing (CDC 2019). Trauma-informed practices can create a more inclusive school environment that fosters resilience and supports positive childhood experience (PCA GA).

Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported having been bullied or threatened by other students, by school district
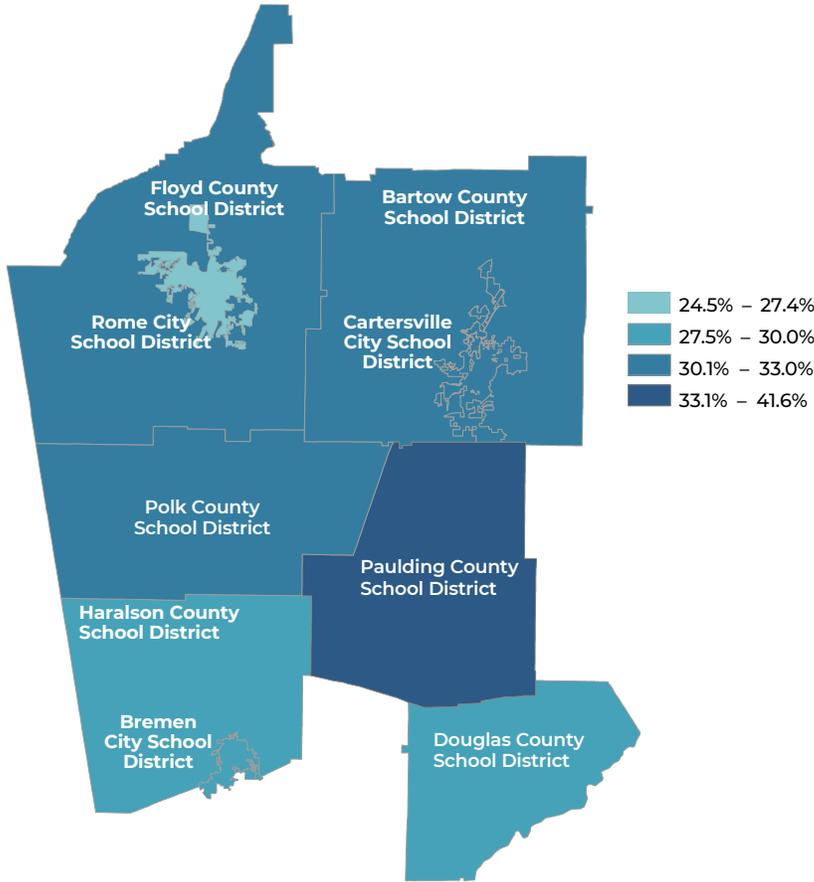

School District	Percent
Douglas County	14.4
Paulding County	16.4
Polk County	16.8
Bartow County	17.0
Haralson County	17.2
Rome City	18.1
Cartersville City	18.6
Floyd County	21.1
Bremen City	21.3
Georgia	**17.3**

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020).

In Region 3, more than one quarter of 6th-12th grade students in every school district reported having experienced intense anxiety, worries or fears that got in the way of daily activities in the past 30 days. Bullying was also common, with more than 1 in 5 students reporting having been bullied or threatened at school in several districts. Having had 5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row (within a couple of hours) in the past 30 days was strongly associated with other behaviors involving the use of drugs and alcohol.

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Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported having experienced intense anxiety, worries or fears that got in the way of daily activities in the past 30 days, by school district

Legend:
- 24.5% – 27.4%
- 27.5% – 30.0%
- 30.1% – 33.0%
- 33.1% – 41.6%

School District	Percent
Rome City	26.5
Haralson County	27.9
Douglas County	28.3
Bremen City	28.5
Bartow County	30.1
Floyd County	30.2
Polk County	31.7
Cartersville City	32.7
Paulding County	33.4
Georgia	**29.4**

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported having had 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row in the past 30 days, by school district

Legend:
- 0% - 3.2%
- 3.3% - 3.8%
- 3.9% - 4.2%
- 4.3% - 5.3%
- 5.4% - 8.5%
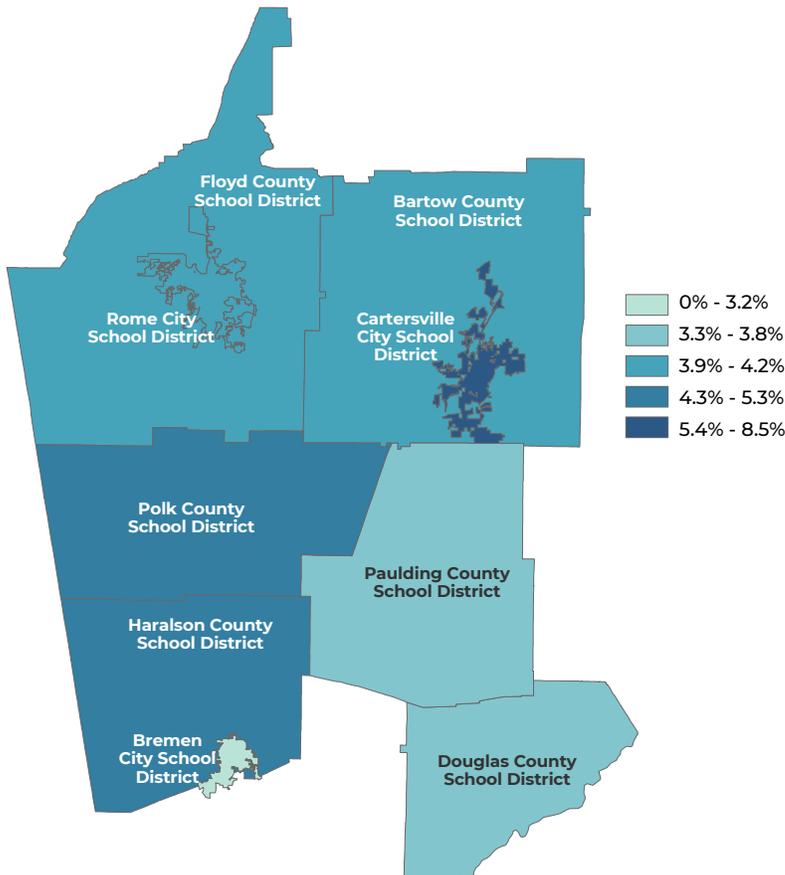
School District	Percent
Bremen City	2.7
Douglas County	3.3
Paulding County	3.8
Polk County	3.9
Bartow County	4.3
Floyd County	4.3
Rome City	4.7
Haralson County	5.0
Cartersville City	6.0
Georgia	**3.8**

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

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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.
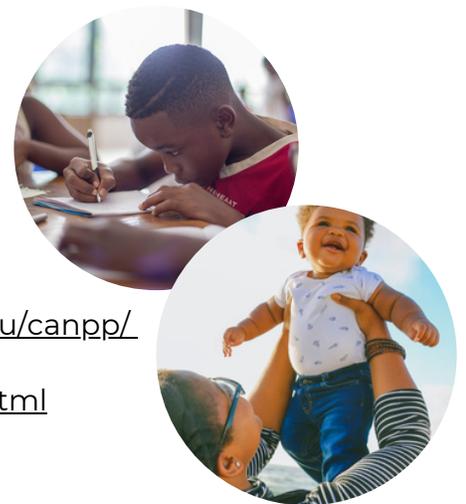
Evidence-based Prevention Programs

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:

- Advocates for Children: https://advochild.org/hope-in-your-home/
- Exchange Club Family Resource Center: https://www.exchangeclubfrc.org/
- Polk Family Connection: http://polk.gafcp.org/

Helpful Resources

- Find Help GA: https://findhelppga.org/
- 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/
- Peach Parenting: https://peachparenting.org/
- DECAL Developmental Milestones: https://development.decal.ga.gov/#/
- Georgia System of Care: https://gasystemofcare.org/
- Resilient Georgia: https://www.resilientga.org/

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 iprce.emory.edu/PACE-D2A.html

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