

# PREVENTING ACES - DATA FOR DECISION MAKING

DFCS Region 1: Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Dade, Fannin, Gilmer, Gordon, Murray, Pickens, Walker & Whitfield Counties

## 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. Expand trauma-informed practices and resources and increase understanding about the prevalence and impact of ACEs and adverse community environments.
2. Promote trauma-informed training for all school personnel.
3. Shape social norms about mental health and how to recognize and seek help for mental illness and substance abuse, as well as support mental health development.
4. Expand efforts to develop safe and decent affordable housing for 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: Expand trauma-informed practices and resources and increase understanding about the prevalence and impact of ACEs and adverse community environments.

Percent of children in families below 100% of the poverty level, by county

County	Percent
Cherokee	7.7
Catoosa	9.1
Dade	12.0
Fannin	16.8
Walker	19.4
Pickens	22.4
Gordon	23.1
Gilmer	23.6
Whitfield	24.6
Murray	24.8
Chattooga	31.9
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>19.6</b>

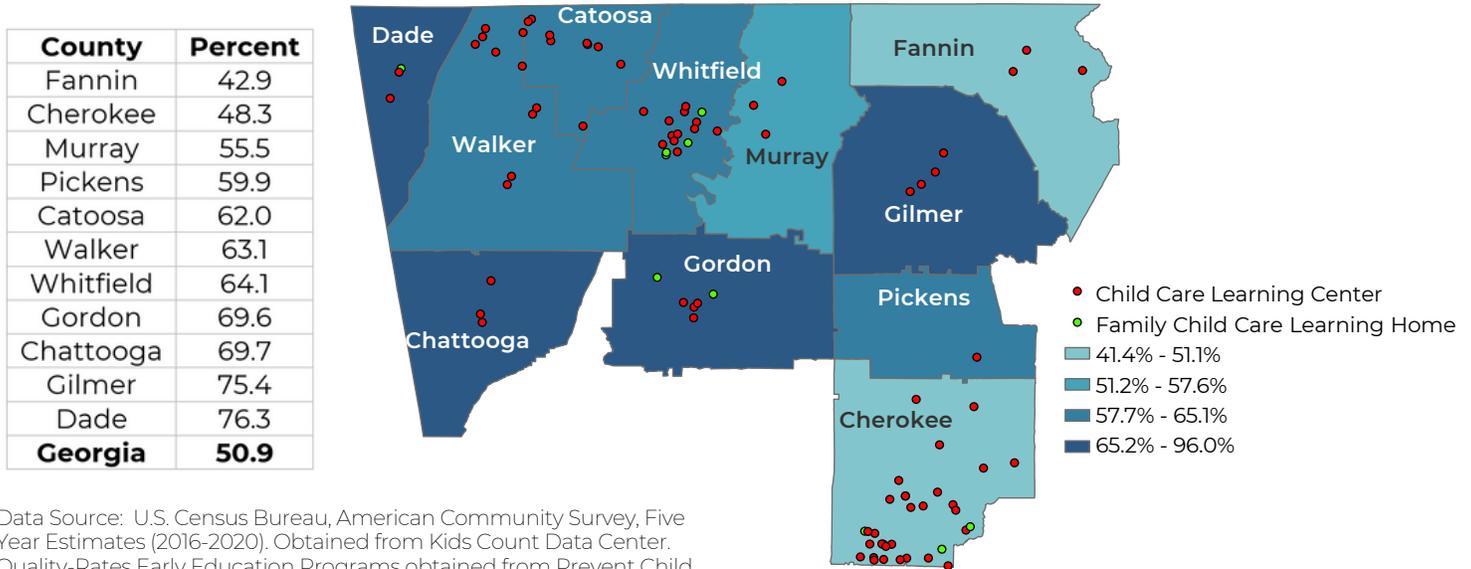
ACEs and associated social determinants of health like poverty can cause toxic stress. Some children may face further exposure to toxic stress from historical and ongoing traumas due to the impacts of multigenerational poverty resulting from limited educational and economic opportunities. This toxic stress can negatively impact cognitive processes, and harm the nervous and immune systems (CDC 2022). Trauma-informed practices and resources can help mitigate the harmful impact of toxic stress.

Children in poverty varies widely in this region and more than half the counties in this region have over 20% of children living in poverty.

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 its 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 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds not enrolled in preschool. In some counties in this region, more than 2 out of 3 children are 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 & quality-rated early education programs, by county



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 Prevent Child Abuse Georgia.

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

School District	Percent
Chattooga County	92.8
Gordon County	93.2
Pickens County	93.2
Walker County	93.8
Gilmer County	93.8
Fannin County	94.1
Dade County	94.3
Dalton City	94.4
Murray County	94.4
Cherokee County	94.6
Whitfield County	95.4
Chickamauga City	95.2
Calhoun City	95.5
Catoosa County	95.6
Trion City	95.6
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>92.7</b>

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 1, students reported feeling highly connected to others at school; in all school districts, between 92.8% (Chattooga County School District) and 95.6% (Trion City School District) of 6th-12th grade students reported they feel connected to others at school.

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

## Strategy 2: Promote trauma-informed training for all school personnel.

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 91% of students in every school district reporting they feel that adults in their school treat all students with respect.



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

School District	Percent
Pickens County	91.6
Trion City	92.7
Cherokee County	92.8
Gordon County	93.2
Dade County	93.3
Chickamauga City	93.7
Dalton City	93.8
Chattooga County	93.9
Walker County	94.0
Whitfield County	94.1
Murray County	94.2
Catoosa County	94.4
Gilmer County	94.4
Calhoun City	95.0
Fannin County	95.0
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>90.8</b>

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

## Strategy 3: Shape social norms about mental health and how to recognize and seek help for mental illness and substance abuse, as well as support mental health development.

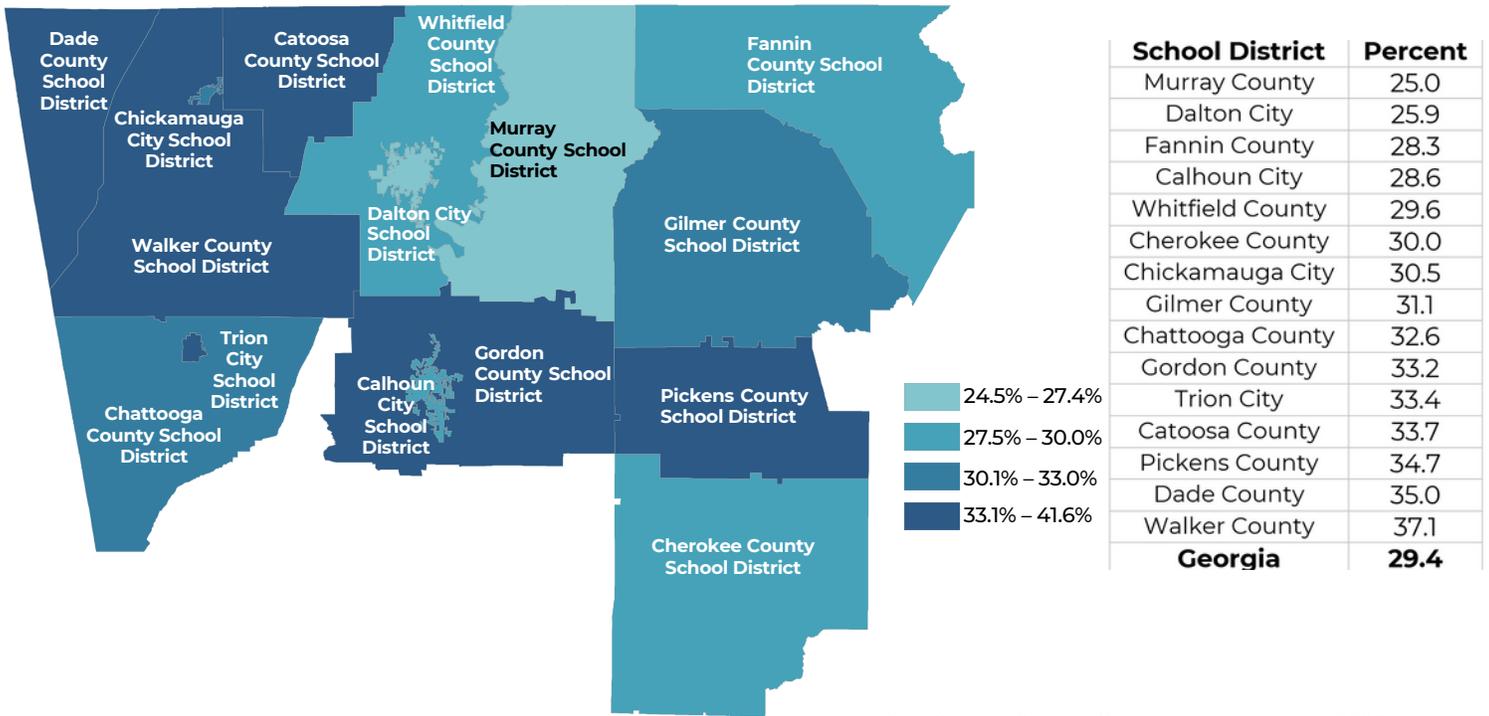
Students in this region have self-reported experiencing anxiety, depression, and traumatic events like bullying and fighting. These events can impact the ability to concentrate in school or make meaningful positive relationships. **Bullying, fighting, depression and anxiety, and substance use** are behaviors 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 (CDC 2019). 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 experiences (PCA GA).

In Region 1, at least 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, with many school systems exceeding one third of students. Bullying was also common, with nearly a quarter of students reporting having been bullied or threatened at school in some 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.

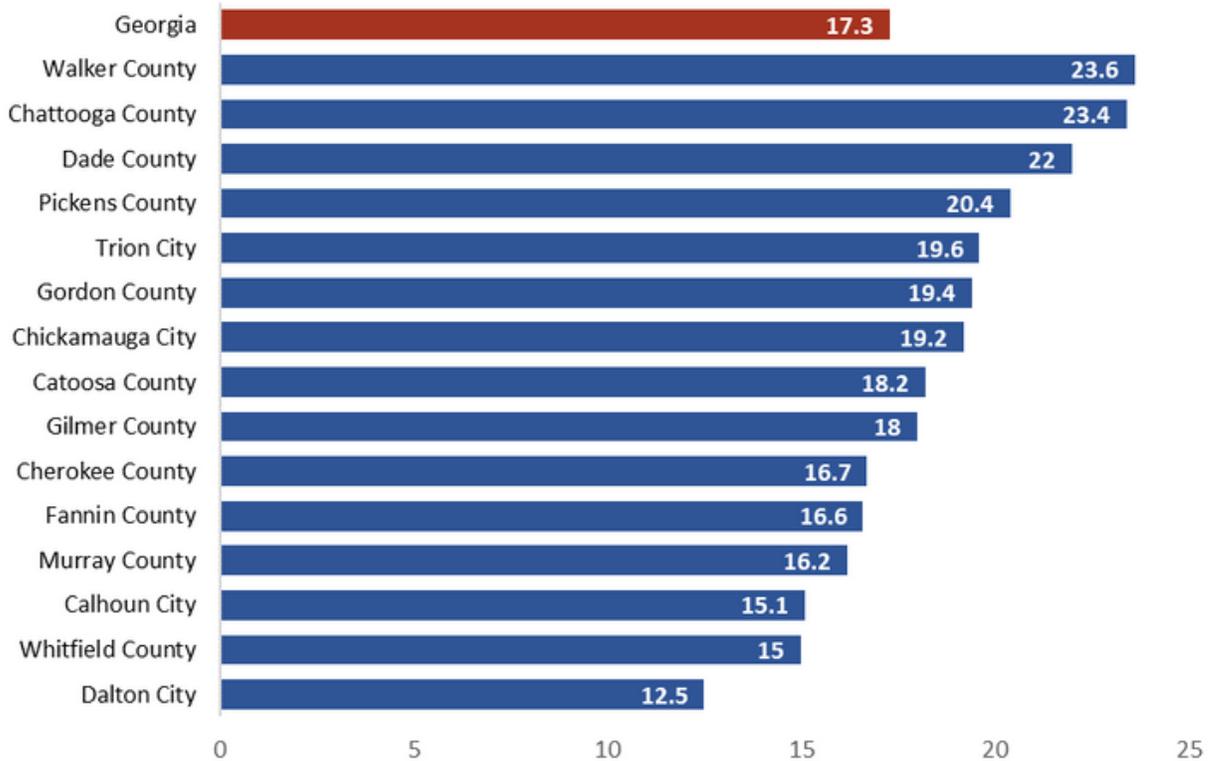


Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported having experienced intense anxiety, worries or fears that got in the way of daily activities in the past 30 days, by school district



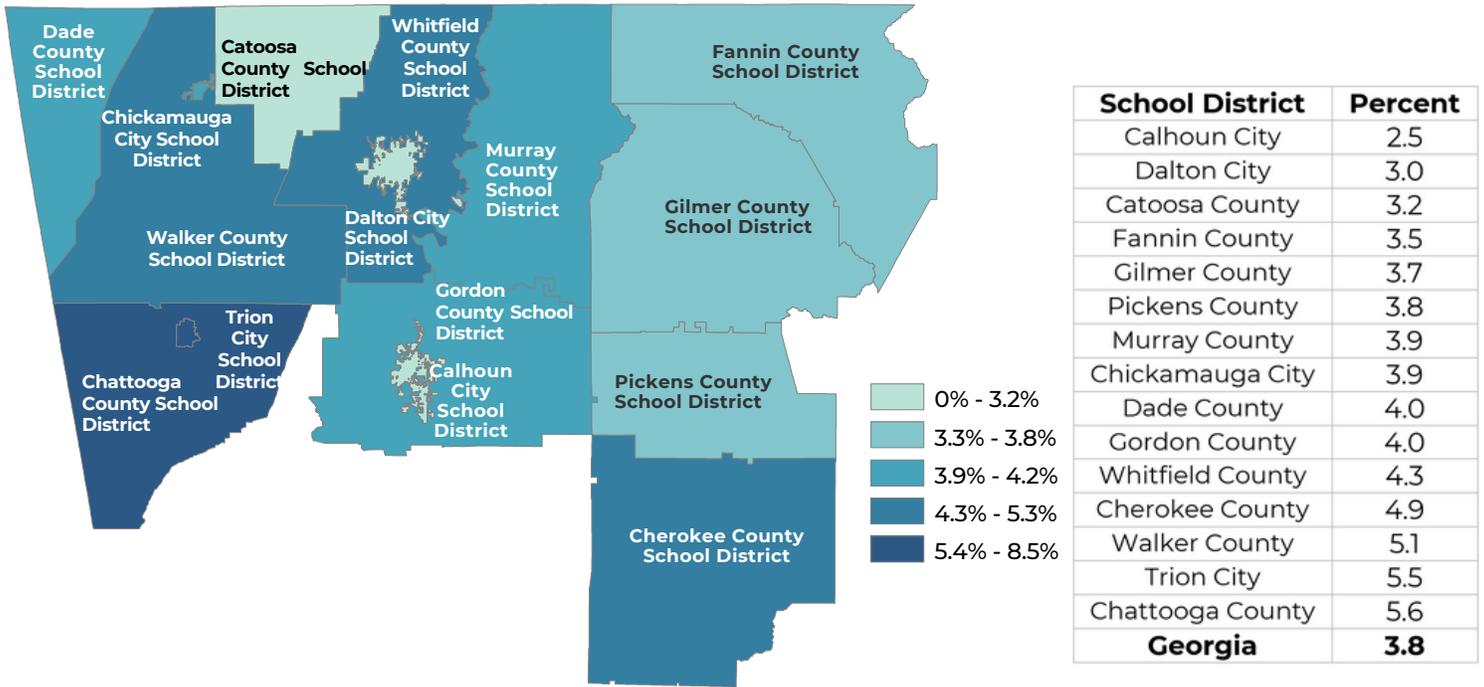
Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

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



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



Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020)

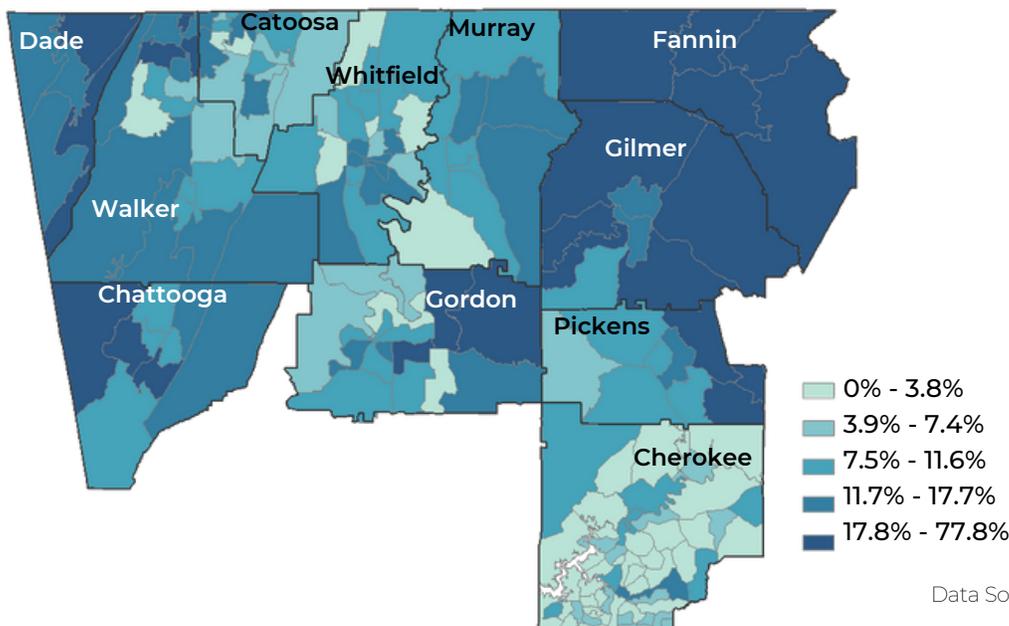
**Strategy 4: Expand efforts to develop safe and decent affordable housing for families.**

Poverty and economic instability create high stress environments and conditions that put children at risk of experiencing ACEs. High housing costs may make it difficult for families to cover costs for things like healthy food or medical care. It also leads to familial stress, mental health issues, and increased risk of disease (Healthy People 2030). Policies and programs that support economic stability by making housing, food, education, or healthcare more affordable or assisting with employment can reduce poverty and prevent ACEs.

Percent of renter households for whom gross rent (contract rent plus tenant-paid utilities) is 30% or more of household income, by county

County	Percent
Dade	28.2
Murray	34.1
Gilmer	35.2
Catoosa	35.6
Whitfield	36.6
Gordon	38.4
Pickens	40.0
Fannin	42.0
Walker	42.6
Chattooga	44.1
Cherokee	49.4
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>46.0</b>

Percent of housing units that are vacant, by census tract



Data Source: American Community Survey (2017-2021)

## 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:

- Communities in Schools of Catoosa County PAT: <https://www.catoosacis.org/>
- Family Resource Center of Gordon County/ Prevent Child Abuse Gordon: <https://www.frcgordon.org/>
- Family Support Council, Inc: <http://www.familysupportcouncil.com/>
- Preferred Family Resource: <https://preferredfamilyresource.com/>
- North Georgia Family Partners/Prevent Child Abuse Pickens: <https://northgeorgiafamilypartners.org/>



### Helpful Resources

- Find Help GA: <https://findhelpga.org/>
- Belonging for Hope: [www.belongingforhope.org](http://www.belongingforhope.org)
- Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan: [abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/canpp/](http://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/canpp/)
- Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/preventingace-datatoaction.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/preventingace-datatoaction.html)
- Prevent Child Abuse Georgia: [abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu](http://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu)
- Essentials for Childhood: [abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/essentials/](http://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/essentials/)
- Peach Parenting: <https://peachparenting.org/>
- DECAL Developmental Milestones: <https://development.dec.ga.gov/#/>
- Georgia System of Care: <https://gssystemofcare.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](http://iprce.emory.edu/PACE-D2A.html)

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