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. 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. Promote resilience strategies for children and youth (e.g., stress management, coping, skills development, problem-solving, skills development).

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.

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 is highly variable in this region. Below is a map that shows the percentage of children in families below 100% of the poverty level.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2017-2021) Community Resources Obtained from Prevent Child Abuse Georgia
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 percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds not enrolled in preschool. In this region, more than 2 out of 5 children are not enrolled in preschool. The dots on the map represent the locations of Quality Rated Early Learning Programs in the Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cobb</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwinnett</td>
<td>54.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>55.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>50.9</td>
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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 most school districts reporting they feel that adults in their school treat all students with respect.
Parenting skills are important to end generational cycles of violence. These skills support the development of healthy family relationships and reduce known risk factors for child abuse and neglect. PEACH Parenting is a site where parents can use access information and resources designed to help them become stronger parents. Here, they will learn ways to adapt to stress by responding in healthy ways so that they can provide better care to their children.

Providing family support and parenting programs can prevent the occurrence of child maltreatment and ACEs. Region 13 has a low number of maltreatment investigations, ranging from less than 1 to 3 investigations. 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 training. Find supportive family resources at Find Help Georgia.

### Maltreatment investigations per 10,000 children, by county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwinnett</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Data Source: Division of Family and Child Services (June 2021 through May 2022). Obtained from Fostering Court Improvement.
Strategy 3: Promote resilience strategies for children and youth (e.g., stress management, coping skills development, problem-solving skills 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 and promote resilience. 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 experience (PCA GA).

The charts below show Region 13 responses to several Georgia Student Health Survey questions pertaining to mental health: Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported having been bullied or threatened by other students (Bullying); 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 (Anxiety); Percent of 6th-12th grade students who reported having had 5 or more drinks of alcohol in a row in the past 30 days (5+ drinks); and During the past 12 months, have you seriously considered attempting suicide? (Considered Suicide).

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020).
Having meaningful and supportive relationships with peers and adults is an important protective factor that 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.

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

Data Source: Georgia Student Health Survey (2020).
PREVENTING AVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES - DATA FOR DECISION MAKING

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:

- Connections Matter Georgia: https://cmgeorgia.org/
- Resilient Gwinnett: https://resilientgwinnett.org/
- Preferred Family Resource: https://preferredfamilyresource.com/

Helpful Resources

- Find Help GA: https://findhelpga.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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Learning card: Trauma Informed. Resilient Georgia. https://www.resilientga.org/trauma-informed


Prevent Child Abuse Georgia. Training. https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/training/