

Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences

What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events occurring before age 18, significantly impacting well-being. Examples include abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), neglect, and household dysfunction (e.g., domestic violence, substance abuse). These experiences shape long-term mental and physical health, emphasizing the need for early recognition and preventive measures to break the cycle of trauma and foster healthier childhoods.

Statistics¹

37% of American children are reported to Child Protective Services by their 18th birthday (African American children are reported at **54%**), for a total of 4 million child maltreatment referral reports received.

- Abused children are **25%** more likely to experience teen pregnancy.
- Abused teens are more likely to engage in sexual risk-taking, putting them at greater risk for STIs.
- About **30%** of abused and neglected children will later abuse their own children, continuing the horrible cycle of abuse.
- In at least one study, about **80%** of 21 year old's that were abused as children met criteria for at least one psychological disorder.
- Children who experience child abuse & neglect are about **9 times** more likely to become involved in criminal activity.

Health Consequences from ACEs¹

ACEs have a profound impact on both mental and physical health. Here are some ways in which ACEs can affect health:

- **Mental & Behavioral Health Issues:** Elevated risks of mental health disorders like depression, anxiety, and PTSD, along with the potential for behavioral issues such as aggression, impulsivity, and challenges in forming healthy relationships.
- **Chronic Diseases:** The stress response triggered by ACEs can contribute to the development of chronic health conditions.
- **Substance Abuse:** There is a correlation between ACEs and an increased likelihood of engaging in substance abuse, including alcohol and drug dependence.
- **Cognitive Impairment:** ACEs may affect cognitive functions, leading to difficulties in learning, memory, and overall cognitive development.
- **Early Mortality:** Premature death can be attributed to the cumulative impact of ACEs on physical and mental health over the lifespan.

Prevention & Intervention

Prevention strategies involve community-wide efforts, such as parenting programs, educational initiatives, and access to mental health resources. Early intervention is crucial, as identifying and addressing ACEs promptly can mitigate their long-term impact. Support systems, including counseling services and community outreach, play a vital role in helping individuals and families navigate and overcome the challenges associated with ACEs.

Resources

1. Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH): The Georgia DPH may provide information and resources related to childhood health and well-being.
2. Local Health Departments: Contact your local health department, as they often offer programs and resources related to child health and family support.
3. Georgia Family Connection: This organization works to improve child and family outcomes in Georgia. They may have resources or information related to ACEs.
4. Kids at Risk Action (KARA): Vital resource on child abuse, offering prevention measures and support. Their comprehensive approach contributes to creating a safer environment for children.

