

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)



Definition

“ACEs” stands for Adverse Childhood Experiences. The term ACEs is used to describe traumatic experiences that occur before the age of 18.

3 out of 5 Georgians have experienced at least 1 ACE. This can lead to:

- difficulties in school
- poor health outcomes
- economic instability

HOUSEHOLD

- Divorce
- Incarcerated Family Member
- Homelessness
- Physical and Emotional Neglect
- Parental Mental Illness
- Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
- Bullying
- Domestic Violence
- Maternal Depression
- Emotional and Sexual Abuse

COMMUNITY

- Community Violence
- Poor Water and Air Quality
- Poverty
- Poor Housing Quality and Affordability
- Genocide
- Mass Incarceration
- Slavery
- Under-Resourced Schools
- Systemic Racism



3 Realms of ACEs

According to the CDC, ACEs have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and even early death.

ENVIRONMENT

CLIMATE CRISIS

- Record Heat & Droughts
- Wildfires & Smoke
- Record Storms, Flooding & Mudslides
- Sea Level Rise

NATURAL DISASTERS

- Tornadoes & Hurricanes
- Volcano Eruptions & Tsunamis
- Earthquakes



Atlanta is the #1 city in the U.S. for income inequality.

9.5%

of GA children had a guardian with substance abuse

10%

of GA children had a parent serve jail time in 2017-18.

30%

of GA kids live in housing that is more than 30% the household income.

21%

of GA children live in poverty.

Source: Georgia Essentials for Childhood

Why it Matters



ACEs are common & interrelated.



About 61% of adults surveyed across 25 states reported experiencing at least one type of ACE.



ACEs negatively affect health and wellbeing.



ACEs can impact lifespan.



Toxic stress from ACEs impacts brain development and affect how the body responds to stress.



Traumatic childhood experiences can take 20 years off life expectancy.

Source: <https://numberstory.org/>

"Our ACE number does not define us. It is simply an entry point to our own personal story"

Resources

- [CDC: Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#)
- [CDC ACEs Prevention Strategy](#)
- [Georgia Essentials for Childhood: ACEs One-Pager](#)

Take Action

- Visit ResilientGeorgia.org and view our [Training Roadmap](#)
- Become ACEs aware by taking a [Connections Matter Georgia Training](#)

Learn More



Toxic Stress



Definition

Toxic Stress is long-term exposure to high levels of stress and occurs when no supportive caregivers are around to buffer a child's response to repeated negative experiences.

Toxic stress can cause long-term damage to the brain and body.

Experiencing multiple ACEs can cause toxic stress.

Sources: [Center for the Developing Child](#), [Harvard University](#)

3 Types of Stress

Positive Stress vs. Tolerable Stress vs. Toxic Stress

POSITIVE STRESS

Low to moderate levels of stress that increase learning and memory

example: starting the first day of school



TOLERABLE STRESS

Serious, temporary responses, buffered by supportive relationships

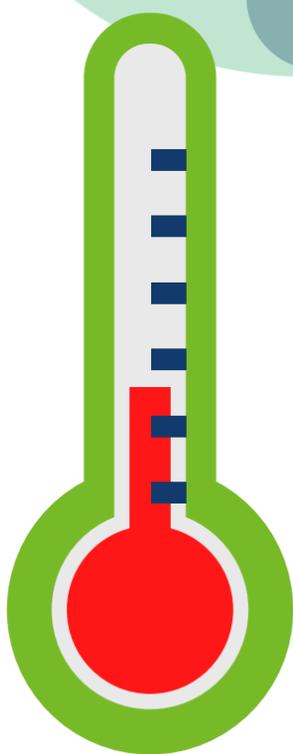
example: losing a family member



TOXIC STRESS

Exposure to stress for a long period of time without relief

example: violence inside or outside of the home



Source: [Alberta Family Wellness Initiative](#)

Why It Matters



Learning how to reduce or prevent toxic stress is an important part of healthy child development. This can happen through positive relationships between children and caregivers, helping children meet their basic needs, and nurturing their strengths and interests.



It matters to us because the small things we do as supportive caregivers prevents toxic stress in children's lives.

Source: [A Guide to Toxic Stress](#)

Take Action

- Review [Handle With Care Flow Chart](#)
- For parents & caregivers, consider changing discipline policies: ["What's Wrong vs. "What Happened"](#)

Resources

- [A Guide to Toxic Stress](#)
- [ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [StressHealth.org](#)

Learn More



Resilience



Definition

Resilience is the ability to overcome adversity.

Resilience is possible at any age. Anyone can become more resilient at any stage of life, but it's easiest to build resilience in early childhood.

Resilience is not born, it is a skill that is built overtime. It is like a muscle we must exercise.

Building Resilience

Resilience can be built by improving skills to work through challenges. The resilience of an individual depends on their relationships and community. It is the systems around us that influence the ability of both children and adults to be resilient.



Why It Matters



It is never too late to build resilience. Developing age-appropriate, healthy activities can increase the chance that an individual will better cope with stress. For example, regular physical activity, breathing techniques, and meditation can strengthen resiliency. Adults with these skills model healthy behaviors for children, thus promoting resilience for the next generation.



Take Action

- [Invest in your own resilience through these four approaches](#)
 - [Building Connections](#)
 - [Fostering Wellness](#)
 - [Finding Purpose](#)
 - [Embracing Healthy Thoughts](#)
- [Foster Resilience in Children with the 7 C's of Resilience: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Contribution, Coping, & Control](#)

Resources

- [Alberta Family Wellness Initiative](#)
- [Resilient Georgia Training Roadmap](#)
- [ResilientTeens.Org](#)
- [Community Resiliency Model](#)
- [Child Welfare Training Collaborative](#)
- [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life](#)

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Trauma-Informed

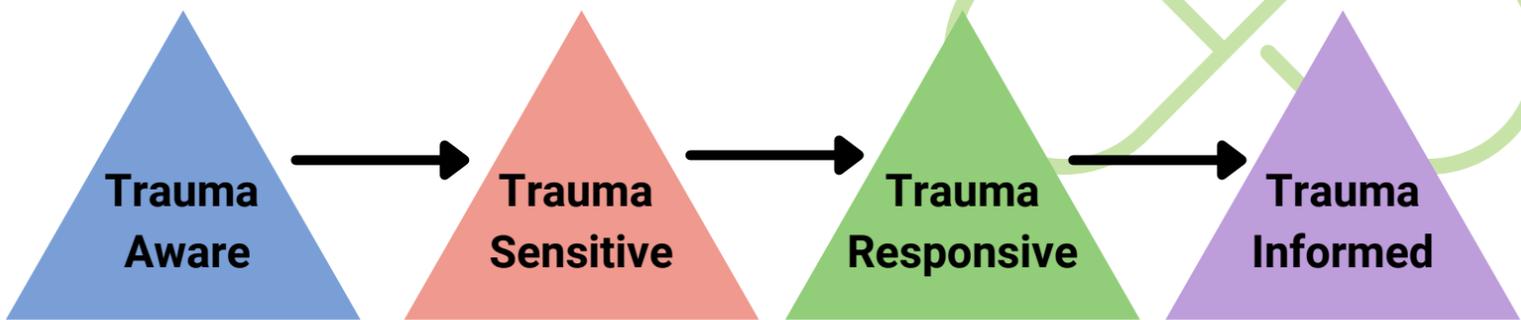


Definition

Trauma is any experience that is extremely frightening, harmful, or threatening, either emotionally, physically, or both. Trauma-informed care is an approach defined by treating the whole person, considering past trauma and resulting behaviors and health outcomes.

Trauma-Informed Approach

The trauma-informed approach is a continuum that progresses through stages. The stages of becoming trauma-informed are:



AWARE

For example, asking “what happened to you” rather than “what’s wrong with you”

SENSITIVE

Creating an environment where people are respectful, competent, sensitive and culturally aware

RESPONSIVE INFORMED

Recognizing that challenging behavior is often a result of adverse childhood experiences and past trauma

Responding by using knowledge about trauma to inform everyday practices

Why It Matters

All child-serving programs and agencies can build trauma-informed awareness, knowledge, and skills into their everyday cultures, practices, and policies. When trauma-informed organizations collaborate to prevent and address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), they improve physical and mental health for children and families, and support their ability to thrive.



Take Action

- Increase your knowledge and understanding of trauma by taking a training
- Develop an empathetic attitude that focuses on asking "What Happened To You?" versus "What's Wrong With You?" when interacting with others
- Explore how to incorporate a trauma-informed approach into your workplace

Resources

- [What is Trauma-Informed Care?](#)
- [\(SAMSHA\) Trauma-Informed Approach](#)
- [Resilient Georgia Training Roadmap](#)
- [Project GRIT](#)

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Early Brain Development



Definition

A child's brain grows rapidly before they are even born and in early childhood. Many factors impact brain development including healthy nutrition, a safe environment free of stress, and experiences throughout life.

Source: [Resilient Georgia](#)

Early Intervention is Key

The early stages of childhood are very important for later health and development. A child's brain is the foundation for an adult brain. A nurturing and responsive home, free from neglect and toxic stress is key for early brain development and growth.



Why It Matters



Children grow and learn best in a safe environment, and with many opportunities to play and explore.



Meeting basic needs like eating, resting and breathing helps the brain heal from stress.



Children need to make connections with people for their brains to grow. What builds those connections are caring, nurturing relationships.

Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



Take Action

- Contribute to creating positive nurturing interactions with the young children in your lives -
- Carve out uninterrupted time for play with caregiver & child
- Spend time reading together
- Enjoy parks, playgrounds, and outdoor activities
- Participate in group activities such as playdates, library story time, etc.

Resources

- [Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Developmental Milestones](#)
- [Brains: Journey to Resilience](#)
- [CDC: Early Brain Development](#)
- [Brain 101: Impact of Trauma on the Brain](#)
- [Talk With Me Baby](#)
- [TooSmall.org](#)

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Positive Childhood Experiences



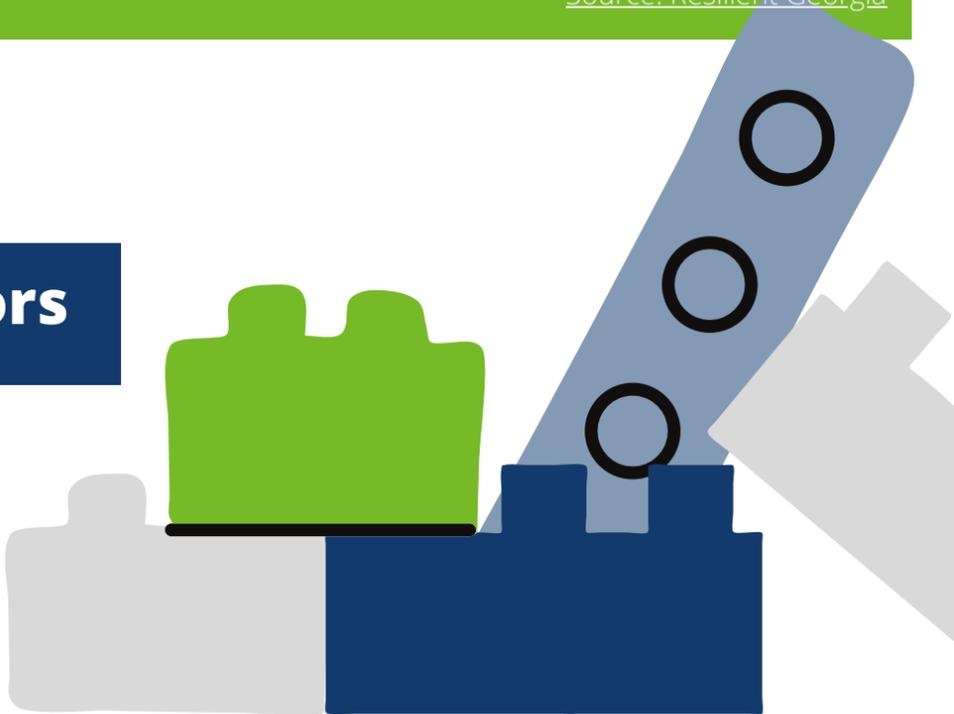
Definition

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are activities and experiences that improve a child's life, resulting in positive mental and physical health outcomes

Source: Resilient Georgia

Contributing Factors

Research has identified a common set of factors that leads children to positive outcomes in the face of significant adversity. These factors include:



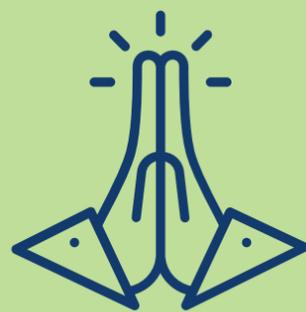
Being in nurturing, supportive adult-child relationships (i.e. parents/caregivers)



Building a sense of self-control



Providing opportunities for social and emotional development



Participating in faith, hope, and cultural traditions

Why It Matters

It is important to develop and implement programs and policies that support PCEs to make life better for everyone and promote long-term health and well-being.

Source: [Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences \(HOPE\)](#).

The more positive experiences, the stronger a child's resilience muscle becomes. Positive experiences can offset adverse childhood experiences.

Take Action

Examples of PCEs:

- Having Family Dinners
- Asking Questions about Children's Interests
- Spending Quality Time Together (playing games, watching movies, etc.)

Resources

- [HOPE – Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences](#)
- [Resilience – Center on the Developing Child](#)
- [The Four Building Blocks of HOPE](#)
- [Balancing \(ACEs\) with HOPE](#)
- [Strengthening Families Georgia](#)
- [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life](#)

Learn More

