

We Can Prevent Childhood Adversity

The Science of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Shows We Can Improve People's Lives and Help Them Thrive

What Are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Adverse childhood experiences, or **ACEs**, mean **potentially traumatic events in childhood (0-17 years)** such as neglect and experiencing or witnessing violence.

ACEs can negatively impact **physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral** development.



Types of ACEs



- ABUSE**
- Emotional
 - Physical
 - Sexual



- HOUSEHOLD CHALLENGES***
- Substance misuse
 - Mental illness
 - Suicidal thoughts and behavior
 - Divorce or separation
 - Incarceration
 - Intimate partner violence or domestic violence

*The child lives with a parent, caregiver, or other adult who experiences one or more of these challenges.



- NEGLECT**
- Emotional
 - Physical



- OTHER ADVERSITY**
- Bullying
 - Community violence
 - Natural disasters
 - Refugee or wartime experiences
 - Witnessing or experiencing acts of terrorism

Many People Report ACEs

According to data collected from **adults across all 50 states and the District of Columbia** between 2011 and 2020:

64% reported experiencing **AT LEAST ONE** type of ACE.

17% reported experiencing **FOUR OR MORE** types of ACEs.

Some Groups Are More Likely to Have Experienced ACEs

Multiple studies show that people who identified as members of these groups as adults reported experiencing **significantly more ACEs**:



Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native people and multiracial people



People who are unemployed or unable to work



People making less than \$15,000 per year



People with less than a high school education



Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people

ACEs Can Accumulate and Their Effects Last Beyond Childhood

The effects of ACEs can add up over time and affect a person **throughout their life**.

- + Children who repeatedly and chronically experience adversity can suffer from **toxic stress**.
- + Toxic stress happens when the brain endures **repeated stress or danger**, then releases fight or flight hormones like cortisol.
- + This internal alarm system **increases heart rate and blood pressure** and **damages the digestive and immune systems**.
- + Toxic stress can disrupt **organ, tissue, and brain development**. Over time, this can limit a person's ability to process information, make decisions, interact with others, and regulate emotions. **These consequences may follow a person into adulthood.**

ACEs Can Echo Across Generations

The consequences of ACEs can be **passed down from one generation to the next** if children don't have protective buffers like...

... ... **positive childhood experiences**

OR

a caring adult in their lives.

Also, when families experience **historical and systemic racism** or living in **poverty for generations**, the effects of ACEs **can add up over time**.

ACEs Can Increase Risk for Disease, Early Death, and Poor Social Outcomes

Research shows that **experiencing a higher number of ACEs** is associated with **many of the leading causes of death** like heart disease and cancer.

- CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS**
Coronary heart disease • Stroke • Asthma
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
Cancer • Kidney disease • Diabetes • Obesity
- MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS**
Depression • Substance use disorder including alcohol, opioids, and tobacco
- HEALTH RISK BEHAVIORS**
Smoking • Excessive alcohol use • Substance misuse • Physical inactivity • Sexual risk behaviors • Suicidal thoughts and behavior
- SOCIAL OUTCOMES**
Lack of health insurance • Unemployment • Less than a high school diploma or equivalent education

We Can Create Positive Childhood Experiences



Strengthen families' financial stability

Paid time off, child tax credits, and flexible and consistent work schedules



Promote social norms that protect against violence

Positive parenting practices and prevention efforts involving men and boys



Help kids have a good start

Early learning programs and affordable preschool and childcare programs



Teach healthy relationship skills

Conflict resolution, negative feeling management, pressure from peers, and healthy non-violent dating relationships



Connect youth with activities and caring adults

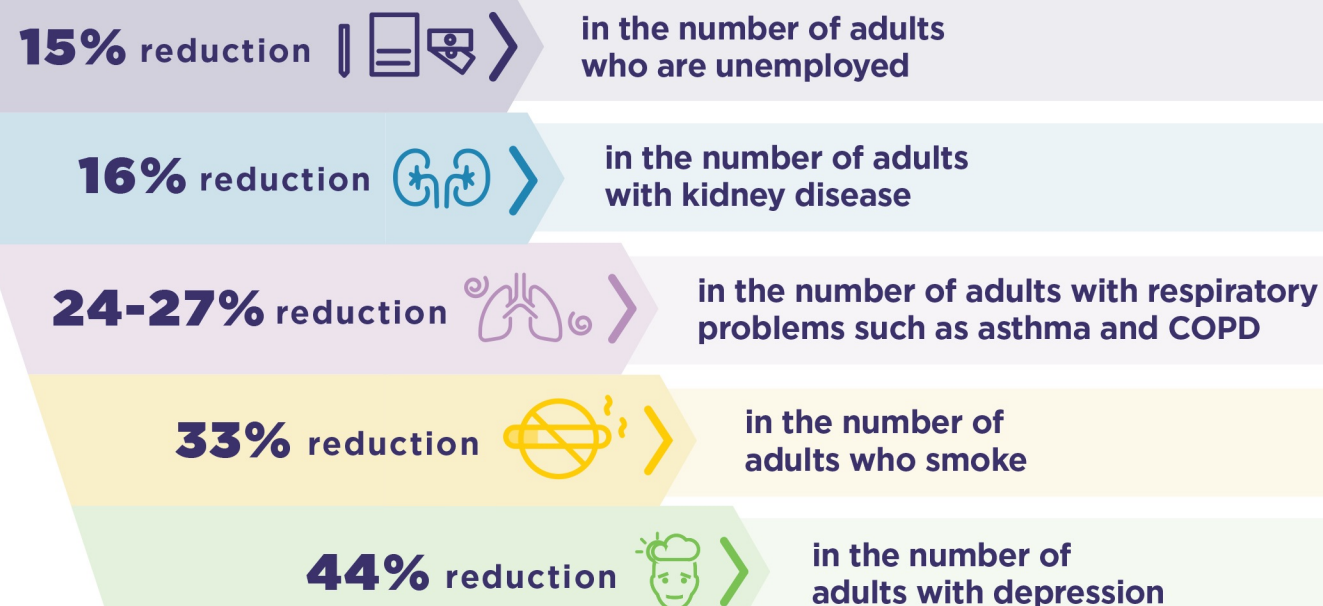
School or community mentoring programs and after-school activities



Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms

ACEs education, therapy, and family-centered treatment for substance abuse

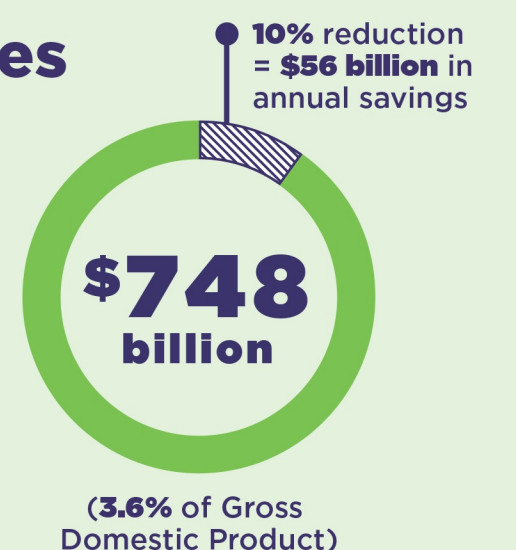
What Could Happen If We Prevent ACEs?



Positive Childhood Experiences Improve the Economy

The primary prevention of ACEs — **stopping ACEs before they start** — would benefit the economy and relieve pressures on healthcare systems.

ACEs-related illness accounts for an estimated **\$748 billion** in financial costs in North America each year. A **10% reduction in ACEs** could equate to an annual savings of **\$56 billion**.



Healthy childhoods start now.

Working together, we can help create neighborhoods, communities, and a world in which every child can thrive.

Learn how you can help! vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/aces-training



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control