

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

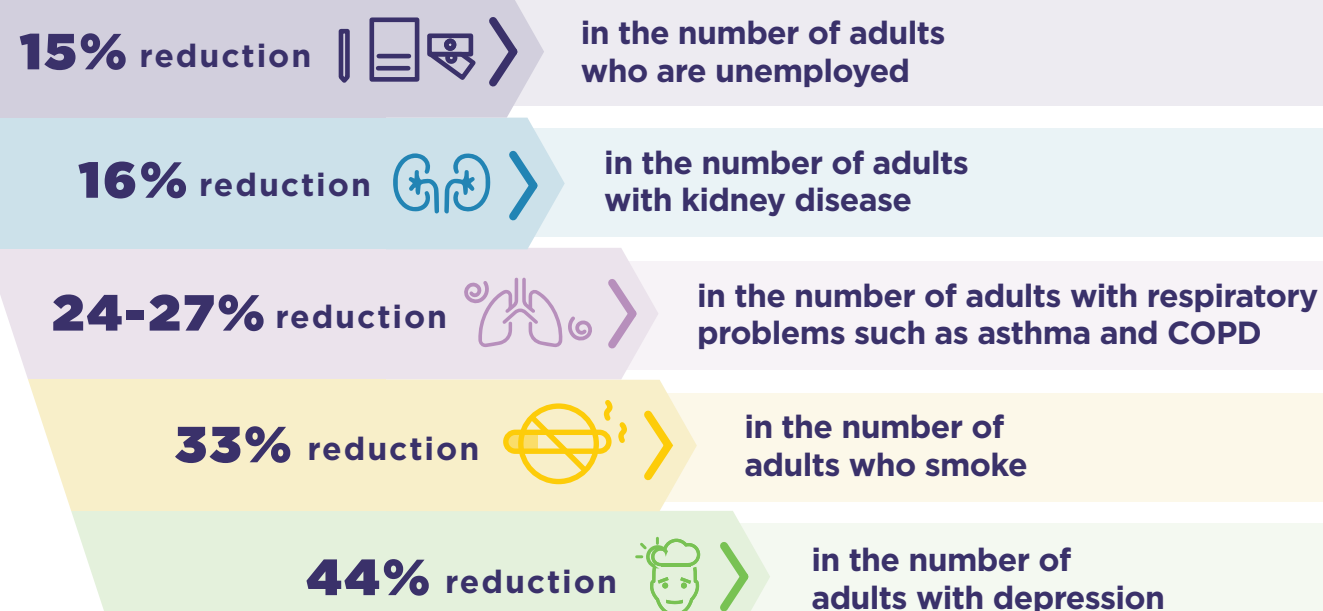
Research shows that **experiencing a higher number of ACEs** is associated with **many of the leading causes of death** like heart disease and cancer.

- 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

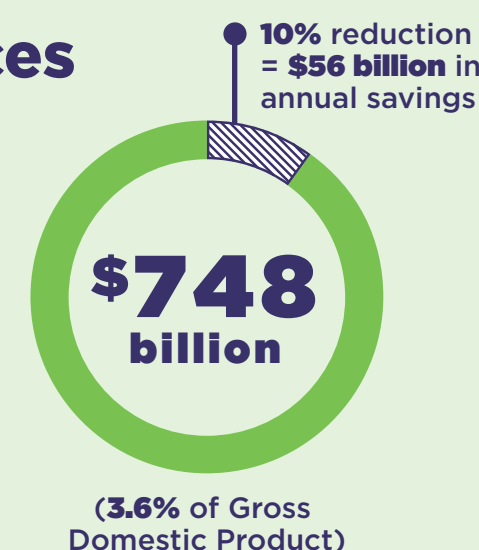
What Could Happen If We Prevent ACEs?



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