

# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

## Definition

"ACEs" stands for Adverse Childhood Experiences. The term ACEs is used to describe 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



## 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.

### 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

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



### ENVIRONMENT

- CLIMATE CRISIS**
  - Record Heat & Droughts
  - Wildfires & Smoke
  - Record Storms, Flooding & Mudslides
  - Sea Level Rise
- NATURAL DISASTERS**
  - Tornadoes & Hurricanes
  - Volcano Eruptions & Tsunamis
  - Earthquakes



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

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

## Why It Matters



ACEs are common & interrelated.



ACEs negatively affect health and well-being.



Childhood experiences can take 20 years off life expectancy.



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

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

## Resources

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

## Take Action

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

## Learn More

Scan with your camera to learn more.



**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](https://GeorgiaEssentialsforChildhood.org)

# Early Brain Development

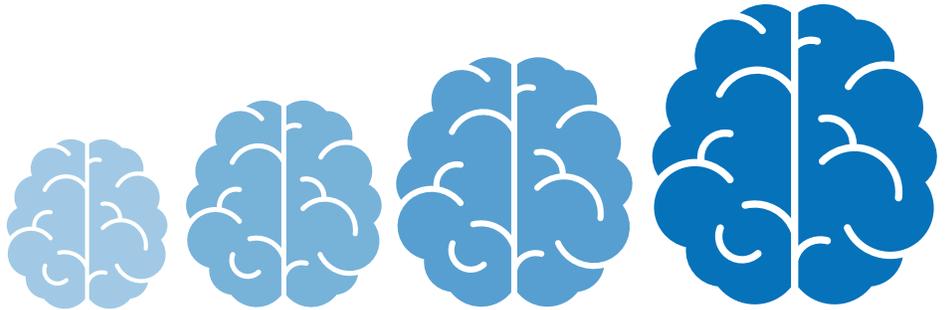
## Definition

A child's brain grows rapidly before birth and during early childhood. Many factors impact healthy brain development including nutrition, safe environments, low stress, and positive interactions throughout life.

Source: Resilient Georgia

## Trauma-Informed Approach

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.



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



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

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

## Learn More

Scan with your camera to learn more.



## 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
- Better Brains for Babies

## Take Action

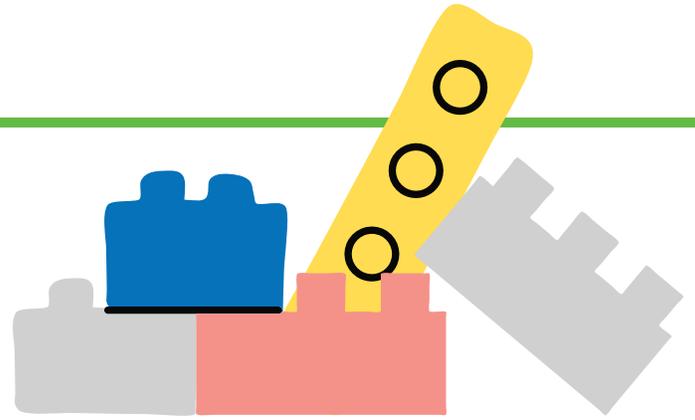
- Contribute to creating positive nurturing interactions with the young children in your lives.
- Carve out uninterrupted time for play with caregiver & child.
- Spend time reading together.
- Enjoy parks, playgrounds, and outdoor activities.
- Participate in group activities such as playdates, library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

# 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:



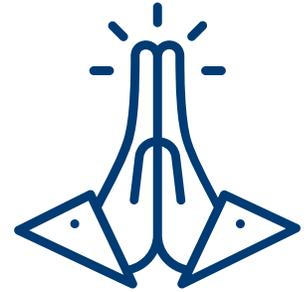
Being in nurturing, supportive adult-child relationships (i.e. parents/caregivers).



Building a sense of self-control.



Providing opportunities for social and emotional development.



Participating in faith, hope, and cultural traditions.

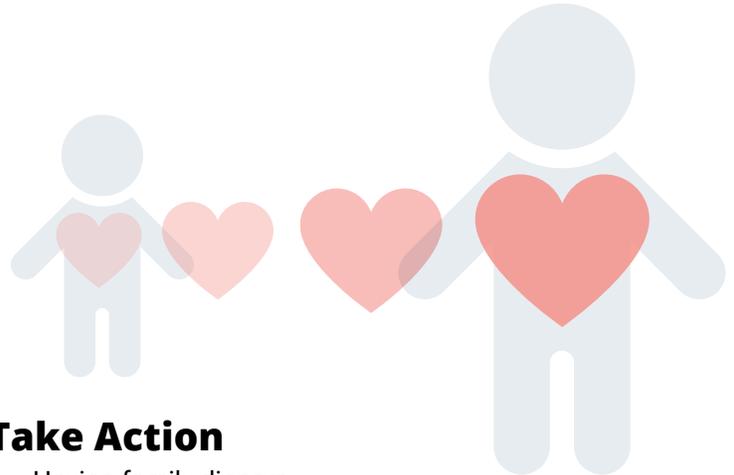
Source: Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. This language was taken from their [Concept Note on Resilience](#)

## 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.

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

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



## 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
- Raising Resilience – Teaching Kids to Be Resilient | Strong4Life

## Take Action

- Having family dinners.
- Asking questions about children's interests.
- Spending quality time together (playing games, watching movies, etc.).

## Learn More

Scan with your camera to learn more.



# Prenatal Mental Health

## A Message to Expectant People

Whether this is your first baby or your fourth, creating a new life can be exciting, chaotic, and emotional at times. We encourage you to take care of yourself and remember that outside your identity as a pregnant person you have deep value and purpose. So be patient with yourself and take up as much space as you need. You've got this!

## Prenatal Brain Development and Health

The prenatal period is a very important time for the developing brain of an infant. During this time, complex brain networks and connections are being formed.<sup>1</sup> In the first eight years of life, these connections, along with a child's early life experiences, will contribute to their social, cognitive, language, and emotional development.<sup>2,3</sup>

Stress is a common feeling we get when we feel under pressure, overwhelmed or unable to cope. In small amounts, stress can be positive and healthy. But too much of it, especially when it feels out of control, can negatively impact our mood, physical and mental well-being, and relationships.<sup>7,9</sup>

Research has identified that stress can alter the developing brain of infants. Below are different types of stressors to be mindful of during your pregnancy:

**Acute Stress:** short-term stress (a fight with your partner or family member, a traffic jam, miscommunication with your boss, etc.)

**Chronic Stress:** stress that lasts a long period of time (racism, trauma, homelessness, financial problems, depression, anxiety, etc.)

## Why It Matters

Mental health begins to form in our earliest days, even before birth. A baby's brain starts to grow during pregnancy and continues throughout life. The biggest contributor to a healthy baby brain is a responsive and dependable caregiver. There are so many ways you can help your baby's brain develop starting with your nutrition and taking good care of your physical and mental health and well-being through the pregnancy.<sup>8</sup>

Early brain development is foundational for the education, health, and behavior of a child.<sup>4</sup> Long-term stress during pregnancy can change connections in a fetus' brain that are responsible for managing emotions, memory, and decision-making.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, addressing pregnancy-related stressors early can help prevent developmental challenges and prepare children for success later in life.<sup>4</sup>

While managing stress is important, keep in mind that your baby can thrive even if your pregnancy doesn't go as you imagined. Once your child is born, they will be exposed to people and experiences that can positively shape their mental and physical development. It takes a community, and some trial and error, to raise healthy children, so don't put too much pressure on yourself to get it right from the start.

## Take Action

There are several things you can do to manage your health and well-being during pregnancy:

- Don't expect too much from yourself and set realistic goals. Rest when you need to.<sup>5</sup>
- Try not to make any major changes at this time.<sup>5</sup>
- Stay physically active.<sup>6</sup>
- Eat balanced meals, and drink plenty of water.<sup>7</sup>
- Prioritize getting a good night's sleep (8-10 hours). Create a soothing bedtime routine & supplement with day time naps as needed.<sup>10</sup>
- Spend time with loved ones, and those that make you feel relaxed.<sup>7</sup>
- Avoid using drugs and alcohol.<sup>7</sup>
- Join a support group with other expectant people and parents.<sup>5</sup>
- Seek professional assistance if needed. If you or your partner continue to feel overwhelmed during pregnancy or postpartum, consider working with a trained perinatal mental health therapist for emotional support & treatment.<sup>6</sup>

## Resources

- [Becoming a More Resilient Parent, Georgia Center for Child Advocacy](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Child Development](#)
  - [Early Brain Development and Health](#)
- [Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University](#)
- [Fussy Baby Network](#)
  - Families struggling with their infants' crying, sleeping, or feeding can call free warm line 1-888-431-2229 for help in English and Spanish
- Health and Human Services: Maternal Mental Health Hotline
  - Call or text at 1-833-9-HELP4MOMS (1-833-943-5746) in English and Spanish
- [Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia \(HMHBCGA\)](#)
  - [Pickles & Ice Cream Georgia](#)
- [Peace for Moms](#)
- [Postpartum Support International \(PSI\), Georgia Chapter](#)
  - [Perinatal Mental Health GA Provider Directory](#)

## References

1. Exposures to Poverty and Crime in Pregnancy Found to Perturb Prenatal Brain Development
2. CDC Early Brain Development and Health
3. CDC Child Development Basics
4. Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, The Science of Early Childhood
5. Australian Government Dept. of Health & Aged Care, Mental Well-being during Pregnancy
6. Pickles & Ice cream Georgia, Coping and Self-Care Skills for Mothers
7. MotherToBaby:Stress
8. Pickles & Ice Cream Georgia, How to Build A Baby Brain!
9. UNICEF, Parenting - What is Stress?
10. American Academy of Family Physicians, Sleep and Pregnancy

## Learn More

Scan with your camera to learn more and see our sourced references.



# Resilience

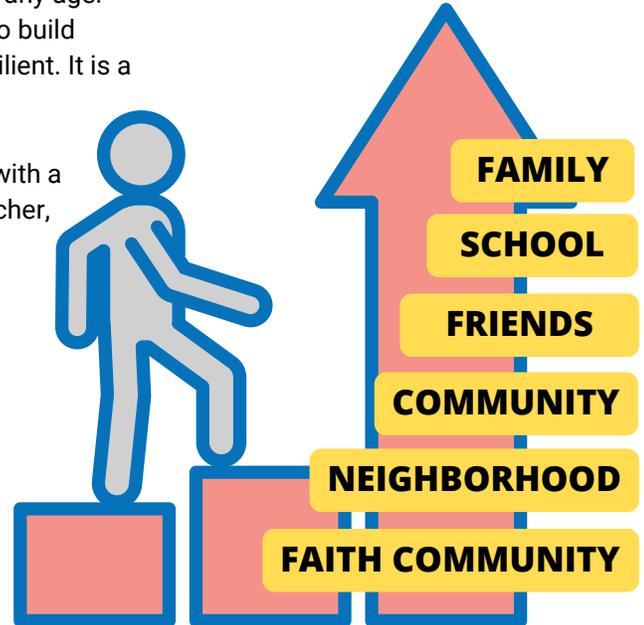
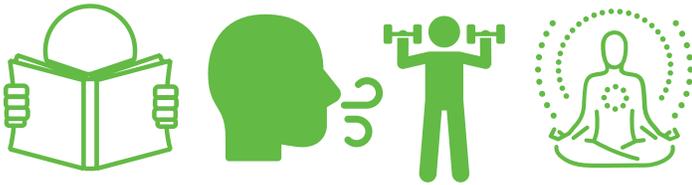
## Definition

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. We are all born with the capacity to be resilient. It is a skill that is built overtime and is like a muscle we must exercise.

Feeling safe, connected and supported by a caregiver provides a child with a foundation for building resilience. A caregiver can include a parent, teacher, coach, pastor or another safe, stable, nurturing adult in a child's life.

## 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.

## Resources

- Alberta Family Wellness Initiative
- Resilient Georgia Training Roadmap
- ResilientTeens.Org
- Community Resiliency Model
- Child Welfare Training Collaborative
- Raising Resilience – Teaching Kids to Be Resilient | Strong4Life



## 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

## Learn More

Scan with your camera to learn more.



# Toxic Stress

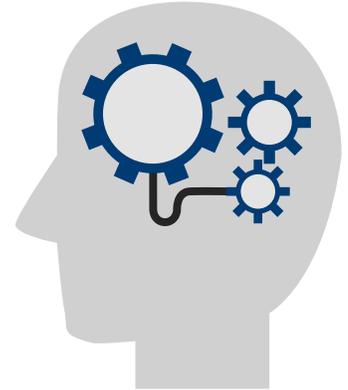
## Definition

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.

Source: Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University.



## 3 Types of 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

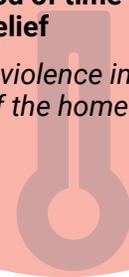
*Example: losing a family member*



### 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.



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

Scan with your camera to learn more.



# Trauma-Informed

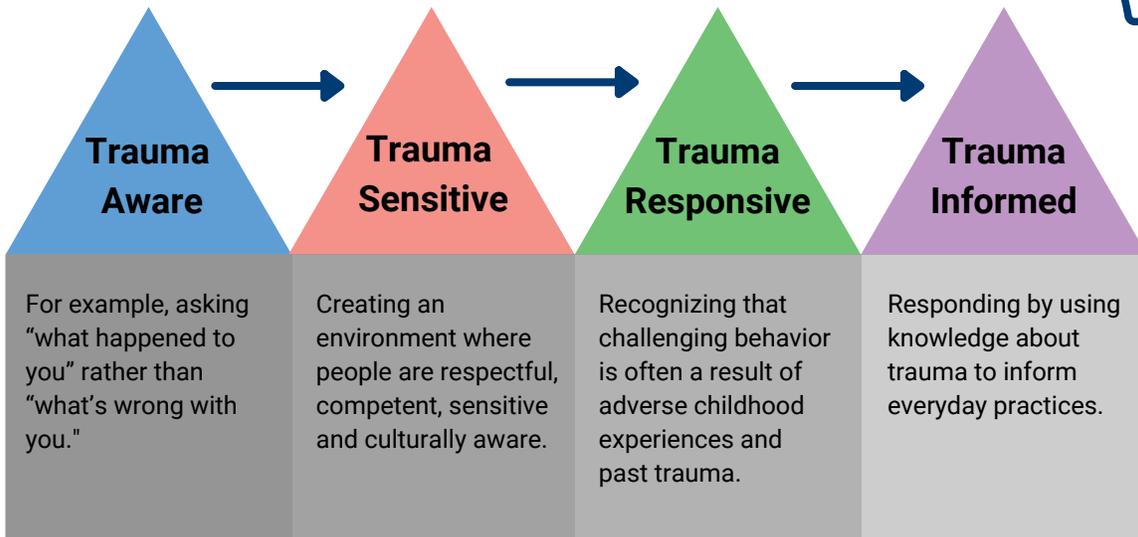
## Definition

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:



## Why It Matters

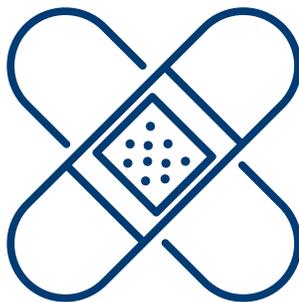
Child and family-serving organizations, programs and businesses can build trauma-informed awareness, knowledge, and skills into their everyday cultures, practices, and policies. When they work together to prevent and address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), they improve physical and mental health 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



## Learn More

Scan with your camera to learn more.

