

Kentucky Kids and Adverse Childhood Experiences: Quick Facts About ACEs

Fight. Flight. Freeze. These are your body's natural responses to stressful situations and your body's way of telling you that you may be unsafe. Continuous activation of those responses can cause emotional and physical health problems that can last a lifetime.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adverse Community Environments

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are serious traumatic or stressful events that occur prior to age 18 that can result in toxic stress, causing harm to a child's brain, such as*:

- Experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
- Witnessing violence in the home or community
- Having a family member attempt or die by suicide
- Substance use or mental health problems in the household
- Instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison

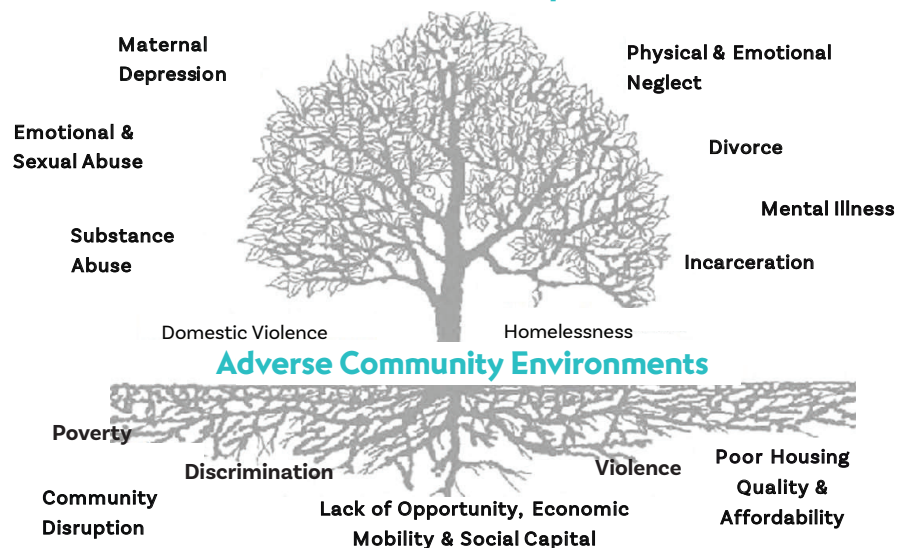


ACEs are **common**. 22% of Kentucky kids have experienced at least two ACEs—ranking 14th highest in the nation.¹

The Pair of ACEs

To address ACEs, we must also understand and address the community conditions that kids grow up in, such as poverty, discrimination, and community violence, that can create a negative cycle of ever worsening "soil" for a child's "tree" of experiences.

Adverse Childhood Experiences



Ellis, W., Oletcr, W. (2017) A New framework for Addressing Adverse Childhood and Community Experiences: The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Model. Academic Pediatrics. 17 (2017) pp. S86-S93. DOI Information: 10.1016/j.acap.2016.12.011

Impact of ACEs

When children experience these negative events or traumas, their bodies can be flooded with stress hormones. This toxic stress can reduce a child's ability to manage their emotions and may make it difficult to learn, to play in a healthy way, or respond to challenging situations. If not addressed, as children exposed to trauma become adults, toxic stress can increase the risk of*:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Heart or liver disease
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Intimate partner violence
- Smoking
- Suicide

Resilience Brings Back Health and Hope

Resilience is the ability to be healthy and hopeful despite experiencing stressful or traumatic events. Research shows that when caregivers provide physically and emotionally safe environments for children and teach them how to be resilient—to solve problems, build nurturing relationships, and manage their emotions—the negative effects of ACEs can be reduced.

We can all help build a child's resilience!

- Support resilient caregivers
- Ensure basic needs are met
- Promote caring relationships and social connections
- Create supportive communities
- Enact policies and practices that help every child thrive

Bloom Kentucky

The Bloom Kentucky initiative is focused on statewide policy changes and budget investments that aim to prevent and mitigate the multi-generational impacts of childhood adversity so that every child can grow up happy, healthy, and hopeful.



As part of the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children, Bloom Kentucky is advocating for the following recommendations to prevent and mitigate ACEs:

- Improve access to behavioral health services in schools and communities
- Boost investments to quality early childhood care and education to strengthen access for working families
- Further improve access to high quality home visiting services like the HANDS program
- Ensure access to concrete supports when families need a hand up, including survivors of domestic violence
- Hold parents accountable in ways that minimize the impact of incarceration on children

Get Involved

- Learn more about Bloom Kentucky at bloomkentucky.org
- Get engaged in advocacy by checking out Kentucky Youth Advocates' Advocacy Toolkit at kyyouth.org/advocacy-toolkit
- Participate in the Bloom Policy Team to inform recommendations by emailing us at info@kyyouth.org

*Please note the examples above are not meant to be a complete list of adverse experiences or risks.
1. National Survey of Children's Health, 2018-2019.



Kentucky can...

Promote the Wellbeing and Financial Stability of Survivors of Domestic Violence and Their Children

Domestic violence takes many forms, including chronic yelling, controlling behaviors, isolation, threats of suicide or murder, threats involving weapons, threats to take the children, and serious injuries. Many children exposed to violence in the home are also victims of physical abuse. Children who witness domestic violence, or are victims of abuse themselves, are at serious risk for physical and mental health issues that can last a lifetime.

Employment and financial independence are critical for survivors of domestic violence to be able to support themselves and their children. Financial independence can mean the difference between having to remain in or return to an abusive relationship and leaving for their children's and their own safety.

Quick Facts on Domestic Violence and Child Safety

➡ The homicide rate in 2019 for women in the workplace was almost 3X higher than it was for men.

➡ It's likely that a third of those women were killed by someone they knew, and in most cases, an intimate partner.

➡ In 2020, Kentucky had nearly 17,000 child victims of abuse or neglect and over 50% had family violence as a risk factor, both of which are Adverse Childhood Experiences with immediate and long-term impacts on well-being.

➡ The pandemic has likely exacerbated the issue with prolonged isolation and added economic uncertainty.

Kentucky can take steps to remove barriers to permanently leaving an abusive relationship

- Ensure victims of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking are not ineligible or disqualified from unemployment insurance benefits if their reason for not working is directly related to their experience of abuse, assault, or stalking.
- Through confidential documentation by police or court records, a sworn statement, or other documentation, survivors of domestic violence should be able to access these short-term benefits as they find safety and stability for themselves and their children.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Ensure unemployment insurance is available to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.



Kentucky can...

Hold Parents Accountable in Ways That Minimize the Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children

Children need their parents to care for them and work to meet their basic needs. Unfortunately, **in Kentucky more than one in 10 children have had a parent separated from them due to incarceration**—the 6th highest rate in the nation. Having a parent incarcerated can negatively impact a child's behavioral, educational, and health outcomes. Even short stays in jail for a parent can create negative consequences for children and for the parent's ability to financially support the family.

To minimize the impact on children, Kentucky needs a system of justice that promotes accountability and reserves incarceration for those who pose a flight risk or risk to public safety.

For parents who have committed a nonviolent offense and do not pose a risk to public safety, there are community-based alternatives to incarceration, like required substance use treatment, parenting classes, vocational training, or mental health services. With a statute similar to Tennessee's, Kentucky can allow judges more options for imposing these community-based alternative sentences if the person who committed the nonviolent offense is a primary caregiver of a dependent child.

Holding parents accountable in these ways allows them to continue caring for their children and helps them be more successful in contributing to society. Higher rates of incarceration overall impact people's ability to keep jobs and find employment after release, impacting a community's workforce.

Utilizing alternative sentencing that allows parents to stay connected to children would minimize the trauma for children of having a parent incarcerated and the disproportionate impacts on Black youth.

Parental incarceration is an Adverse Childhood Experience that has been referred to as a “shared sentence” due to the short and long-term effects it has on children.

What does the data tell us?

- Due to systemic inequities within the criminal justice system, Black children are disproportionately impacted by having a loved one incarcerated across all community types.
- More than half of adults in state custody are parents, including 64% of women and 55% of men.
- Black men are overrepresented in the incarcerated population, and therefore, in the population of incarcerated fathers.
- Women (at 27%) are more likely than men (at 15%) to be incarcerated for a drug offense as their most serious offense, and 53% of women are in state custody for a Class D non-violent, non-sexual offense.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Utilize community-based sentencing alternatives that promote both rehabilitation and accountability while factoring in whether a person is a primary caregiver so parents can continue providing for their children.



Kentucky can...

Boost Investment in Child Care for Children, Families, and Communities

Access to high-quality, reliable child care allows parents to get and keep a job, sets children up for success in school, and strengthens Kentucky's economy. Yet, many Kentucky families struggle to afford any kind of child care, much less safe, high-quality care. Unstable child care translates into direct costs for employers through employee absenteeism, tardiness, and reduced productivity.

As Kentucky recovers from the pandemic, access to child care is essential to help parents enter and stay in the workforce:

- ✓ Adequate child care provider payment rates and increased eligibility for low-income, working families
- ✓ Safe, reliable child care centers that can adequately compensate teachers
- ✓ Parents can go to work knowing their children are safe and learning
- ✓ Thriving families and local economies across the commonwealth

While recent federal relief measures have helped child care centers keep their doors open, continued state investment is needed to maintain and build the supply of child care, particularly for parents who struggle to afford it.

**Nearly 100,000
Kentucky women**
have left the workforce during the pandemic due to
child care issues and school closures.

40%
of working-age Kentuckians cited caregiving
responsibilities as reasons for not working this year.

HALF
of Kentucky communities
are child care deserts, where families have limited or
no access to child care.

**The lack of available child care
in Kentucky accounts for**

\$573 million

**in lost earnings, business
productivity, and tax revenue.**

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Build an infrastructure for child care that improves access to affordable, high-quality care to allow parents to work, children to thrive, and local economies to grow.



Kentucky can...

Invest in the Education and Wellbeing of Every Student

Kentucky will have the strongest economy and financial stability for families when all children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential through education. Every student can succeed academically when provided trauma-informed and supportive school environments and access to sufficient resources. Yet there are multiple factors, like lack of cultural understanding and differing teacher expectations, contributing to large numbers of Black and Brown children being left behind. In Kentucky, 84 percent of Black and 83 percent of Latinx students are graduating on time, compared to 91 percent of White students.

During the pandemic, public schools have been critical in connecting families to the resources needed to continue learning, access meals, and receive school-based health services and other supports. Schools will continue to be a critical pillar for students, families, and communities as the Commonwealth recovers from the impacts of COVID-19.

**Only about
HALF
of all students**
in Kentucky reach the critical milestones of 4th grade reading and 8th grade math proficiency; systemic factors contribute to even lower rates for many youth of color.

Many policy and practice changes are needed to set kids up for success and on a path towards a brighter, healthier future. Among the many budget investments that Kentucky can make, the Blueprint for Kentucky's Children hopes to see the following included:

Full-day kindergarten can:

- ✓ Significantly increase basic skills test scores in the 3rd, 5th, and 7th grades, compared to half-day or no kindergarten
- ✓ Help to narrow achievement gaps
- ✓ Promote literacy development
- ✓ Ensure access to a nutritional breakfast and lunch

- **Continue funding for full-day kindergarten.** In 2021, the General Assembly invested in the early education outcomes by allocating funds to support full-day kindergarten for the next school year. Full-day kindergarten boosts students' academic achievement and strengthens their social and emotional skills. It allows teachers more quality time to engage in constructive learning activities with students. It gives parents access to better learning and care for their children, and fewer disruptions than half-day programs. Kentucky can allocate funds to ensure earlier learners have access to full-day kindergarten and are set up for success.
- **Increase per-pupil funding to ensure public schools can help all kids learn.** As Kentucky looks for what our students need, the primary school funding formula – or SEEK funding – needs to be protected from any budget cuts and investment dollars should be adjusted to keep up with inflation.

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Kentucky can...

Invest in the Education and Wellbeing of Every Student

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- **Increase funding for school-based health providers and access to school-based behavioral health services.** The Expanded Care Services policy, enacted in Kentucky through the 2019 School Safety and Resiliency Act, allows school districts to now bill Medicaid for health services provided to eligible students within the school building or virtual school setting. During this time of heightened social and emotional needs, schools, healthcare providers, and other entities interacting with children and families must elevate efforts to identify signs of stress, anxiety, and depression. School districts can use this funding stream to connect students with necessary physical and behavioral health screenings, counseling, immunizations, and preventive dental care. Kentucky can ensure school districts, especially in rural areas and for communities of color that often lack access to behavioral health providers, have the information and resources needed to leverage this opportunity to improve student health and well-being.

In 2020, the Kentucky General Assembly funded school-based mental health service providers in all 171 school districts. According to updates to the School Safety and Resiliency Act, a school-based mental health provider is defined as an EPSB certified school psychologist, school counselor, or school social worker, among other licensed professionals. While this funding was an important catalyst, school districts have experienced difficulty finding qualified mental health practitioners to fill these positions. Kentucky can increase funding to attract qualified professionals, and to be more equitable and sustainable for districts.

In the 2020-21 school year, FRYSCs:



Coordinated more than
85,000 home visits



Supported more than
20,000 parents and
nearly 7,000 grandparents
through support groups



Made referrals for mental
health support for more
than 4,000 students

- **Increase investment in Family Resource and Youth Service Centers.** Family Resource and Youth Service Centers (FRYSCs) enhance student success by making referrals to health and social services, connecting families to afterschool care, supporting kinship caregivers, and more. As demonstrated in school districts across the Commonwealth during the pandemic, they are integral in providing tools for families to remove barriers to student learning. For a school to be eligible for a FRYSC, 20% or more of enrolled students must be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. While the number of students receiving free lunch has risen, the FRYSC-per-student allocation has not kept up.

Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:

Continue funding for full-day kindergarten, increase SEEK funding, increase investment for school-based mental health providers, ensure dedicated resources to implement the Expanded Care Services policy in schools, and increase investments in Family Resource and Youth Service Centers.