

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

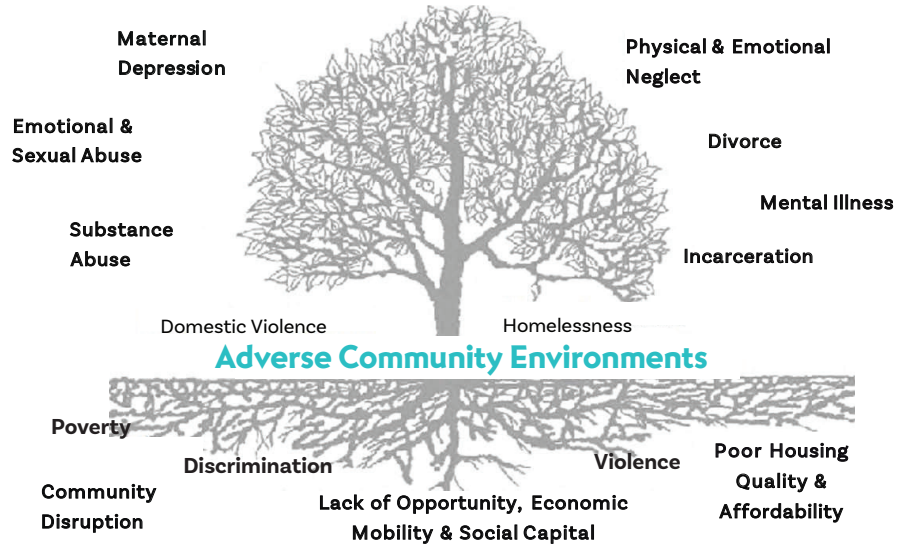


ACEs are **common**. 1 in 5 Kentucky children have already experienced at least two ACEs.¹

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. I. National Survey of Children's Health, 2019-2020.