



# From ACEs to Action

WORKING TOGETHER  
TO EDUCATE, ENGAGE,  
AND ADVOCATE FOR  
POSITIVE CHANGE





Arizona's future prosperity begins with recognizing that our youngest residents must get what they need today to become the adults who will strengthen our communities and build our economy tomorrow.

Recent advances in the science of early childhood development offer a blueprint for ensuring kids get what they need for healthy development. We now know that the early years are a time when the brain is building itself from the ground up, and that stable, responsive relationships with caring adults at home and in the community are the building blocks needed for a solid foundation.

Unfortunately, not all children enjoy the kinds of experiences that most benefit their development. Many encounter what are known as ACEs, or Adverse Childhood Experiences. These can include things like physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence that can damage the brain's developing architecture and change the way a child learns, solves problems, and relates to others—putting Arizona's future well-being at risk.

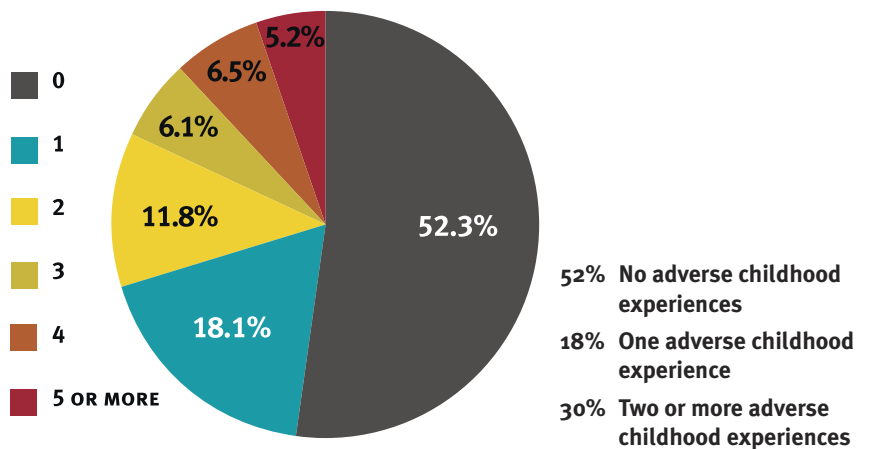
The impact of ACEs is serious and costly. The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he or she is to suffer from conditions like depression, heart disease and diabetes, poor academic achievement, and substance abuse later in life. ACEs happen to kids of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and races. They occur at all income and social levels and can affect anyone and happen anywhere.

#### ACEs in Arizona

ACEs are common in Arizona. In fact, 48%—nearly half—of Arizona's children have experienced at least one ACE. And 18%—nearly one out of five—have experienced three or more.

Children with special health care needs experience more ACEs: 64% of children with special health care needs have experienced at least one ACE by the time they turn 18 compared to 44% of children without special health care needs.

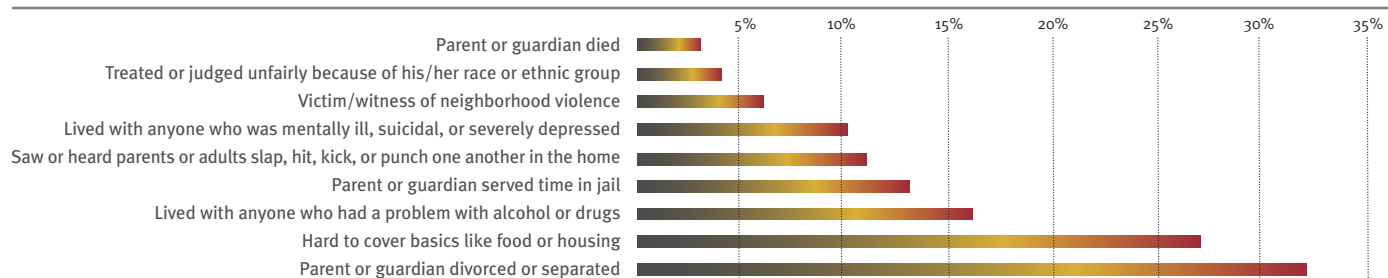
#### Co-Occurrences of ACEs Among Arizona's Children



Arizona Department of Health Services. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Arizona. September 2018.  
Data source: 2016 National Survey for Children's Health. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health.

According to recent findings, Arizona ranks *last* in the country as the state with the highest proportion of children ages 0–17 who have experienced two or more ACEs. Parental separation or divorce and economic hardship are the most common ACEs reported in Arizona.

## Prevalence of ACEs Among Arizona's Children



Arizona Department of Health Services. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Arizona. September 2018.  
Data source: 2016 National Survey for Children's Health. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health.

## Building Community Resilience

Assuring safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children is essential for Arizona's future prosperity. That is why it is key to improve the health and well-being of children, families, and communities across the state by working to address the interconnectedness of adversity within a family and within a community.

Think of a developing child like a tree and the environment in which he or she is raised like soil. When a tree is planted in poor soil, it is starved of the nutrients necessary for it to thrive. Adverse community attributes such as a lack of safe and affordable housing, community violence, systemic discrimination, and limited access to social and economic mobility compound one another, creating an adverse environment and negative cycle of worsening soil that results in withered leaves. The leaves on the tree are similar to the "symptoms" of ACEs.

When childhood adversity occurs in a context of an adverse community environment, these stressors can concentrate and become even more toxic to a child's development and long-term health. That's why community resilience is an essential factor in improving health outcomes.

## What We Can Do

We know that resilience—or the ability to move forward in the face of adversity—can protect an individual from the accumulation of stress due to adverse childhood experiences. The question is whether we will approach our challenges with a "can do," rather than a "can't do," attitude.

These strategies can make a difference in Arizona:

- Prevent ACEs by reducing sources of stress in people's lives. This can happen by helping to meet families' basic needs or providing other services.
- Foster strong and responsive relationships between children and caregivers.
- Help children and adults build core life skills to help buffer the effects of toxic stress.
- Strengthen family economic security and make high-quality health care, child care, behavioral health care, and education available to children in need.
- Provide the kinds of experiences in early care, education, and family support settings that will help parents and provide sturdy foundations for children's development.
- Invest in and support programs that provide the resources and support shown to prevent or ameliorate conditions known to produce toxic stress.
- Share information about ACEs with friends, family, teachers, physicians, and state and national leaders.







## The Arizona ACE Consortium

The Arizona ACE Consortium is working to raise awareness about the lifelong impacts of ACEs and to support initiatives aimed at preventing or mitigating their impact. Founded in 2007, the Consortium has grown into a network of more than 2,000 individuals and organizations and more than a dozen Consortium work groups. Their efforts include:

- Training tens of thousands of people across the state on ACEs, toxic stress, and ways to promote resilience.
- Growing the Arizona Trauma-Informed Faith Community Network into more than 800 passionate individuals and organizations. In February 2018, the Resilient Church conference held in Glendale, Arizona, was the first faith-based conference focused on ACEs and trauma-informed care.
- Creating trauma-sensitive Arizona schools.
- Creating a trauma-informed community through the Southern Arizona Trauma Informed Network.
- Including ACE education and trauma-informed practice requirements in state contracts with providers.

The Consortium promotes ideas, policies, and practices that reduce and prevent childhood adversity in order to create a strong and productive Arizona, where good health is available to all.

## For More Information

- ACEs Connection: [acesconnection.com](http://acesconnection.com)
- Arizona ACEs in Action: [acesconnection.com/g/arizona-aces-in-action](http://acesconnection.com/g/arizona-aces-in-action)
- A National Agenda to Address Adverse Childhood Experiences: [cahmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/aces\\_agenda.pdf](http://cahmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/aces_agenda.pdf)

*The Arizona ACE Consortium is a collaboration of these community partners, committed to making sure that all families have the opportunity to raise healthy children from the start, so that every child has the opportunity to thrive.*



## Adverse Childhood Experiences

*Can last a lifetime,  
but they don't have to.*

Injury Prevention Center, Strong Families

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