



Help Youth At Risk for ACEs

Youth-serving and faith-based organizations, coaches, and caregivers can help prevent and reduce the negative impacts of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by creating positive childhood experiences and connecting youth with activities and caring adults that build their sense of safety, confidence, and community. Raising awareness of ACEs in communities about how to prevent these experiences can help children and youth grow up and thrive in a safe, stable environment.



What are ACEs?

Traumatic experiences in childhood and teenage years may put children at risk for violence, chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance abuse in adulthood. These traumatic experiences are known as [adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\)](#). These experiences can affect children for years and impact their potential in life.

ACEs may take many forms, including:

- experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
- witnessing violence in the home or community
- having a family member attempt or die by suicide

Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with:

- substance use problems
- mental health problems
- instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison

Raising Awareness of ACEs

The first step to helping young people at risk for ACEs is for everyone in our communities to better understand these experiences. ACEs are far more common than many people realize. About 6 in 10 adults surveyed reported experiencing at least one ACE before age 18, and nearly 1 in 6 of them reported experiencing four or more different types of ACEs.

ACEs have many immediate and long-term consequences. ACEs can have immediate impacts on child and adolescent health, as well as put individuals at risk for chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems well into adulthood. For example, there is evidence that ACEs are related to poor mental health and suicidal behaviors in adolescence, as well as putting people at risk for heart disease and depression later in life. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities.

Fortunately, educating youth-serving and faith-based organizations, coaches, and caregivers and raising community awareness about ACE prevention and helping children and youth who have experienced ACEs, can help children and youth grow up and thrive in a safe, stable environment.

How to Help Prevent ACEs

The good news is that ACEs are preventable. The harmful effects of ACEs can affect everyone in our communities, and everyone can help prevent them. By implementing ACE prevention strategies and acting quickly when an ACE happens, communities can help all children and youth reach their full potential.

Here are some strategies to help prevent ACEs:

Strengthen families' financial stability

Community organizations such as faith-based and youth-serving organizations can promote policies that support families facing financial problems or help parents balance work and family responsibilities, which reduce stress and allow parents to meet children's basic needs. Examples include:

- Policies that support employers offering paid time off to care for a newborn or family member
- Policies that provide families assistance with childcare costs and healthy nutrition
- Providing income or child tax credits for working families
- Offering flexible and consistent work schedules

Promote social norms that protect against violence

Encourage community organizations such as youth-serving and faith-based organizations, coaches, and caregivers to promote non-violent attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Examples include:

- Supporting parents and positive parenting practices
- Encouraging people to speak up when they see violence
- Involving men and boys in prevention efforts
- Educating parents and caregivers that it's okay to ask for help

Help kids have a good start

Involved parents, strong preschool programs, and good quality childcare get children started on the right foot and help them succeed later. Youth-serving and faith-based organizations can contribute to this as well. Examples include:

- Getting caregivers involved in early learning programs
- Ensuring childcare facilities at faith-based or youth-serving organizations are licensed and accredited
- Helping improve access to affordable, high-quality childcare and preschool programs
- Offering in-home support and training in child health and development

Teach healthy relationship skills

Children and caregivers can both learn how to create healthy relationships and manage their emotions. Teens, while participating in faith-based or youth organizations, can learn about safe dating. Examples include:

- Teaching children and youth how to handle conflict(s), negative feelings, and peer pressures
- Offering programs that teach skills for developing healthy, non-violent dating and peer relationships
- Teaching healthy parenting skills to parents and caregivers
- Helping parents or caregivers learn ways to support their children and set a good example with their behaviors

Connect youth with caring adults and activities

Community organizations connect young people with positive role models and provide activities for young people to learn leadership and other new skills. Communities can help young people grow and succeed at school and in life. Examples of ways organizations can connect youth to caring adults and activities include:

- Enrolling them in school or community mentoring programs

- Getting them involved in after-school activities
- Giving them opportunities to build confidence and practice leadership skills
- Offering a training opportunity in the arts, media, sports, science, or technology

Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms

When ACEs occur, community organizations, can offer services and support to reduce harms and help break the cycle of adversity. Examples include:

- Learning more about ACEs and what support is available for kids, teens, and adults
- Offering medical, legal, housing, and other crisis intervention services as needed
- Providing therapy to reduce symptoms of depression, fear or anxiety, and behavior problems.
- Using family-centered treatment for substance misuse


Benefits of preventing ACEs

Creating safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments while youth participate in faith-based or youth organizations can prevent ACEs and help all children and youth reach their full health and life potential. Some of the many benefits of preventing ACEs include:

- Healthier relationships
- Better performance in school
- Higher graduation rates
- Fewer mental health problems
- Less substance use
- Fewer behavior problems and less violence
- Fewer arrests for violent crimes
- Less burden and cost from violence for everyone

Everyone can play an important role in supporting a better future for kids, teens, and their families.

See [Adverse Childhood Experiences Resources](#) for more prevention resources.

 Check out CDC's [free online training](#) to help faith, spiritual, and religious leaders, staff members, volunteers, and community members understand their role in preventing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

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Not helpful

Very helpful