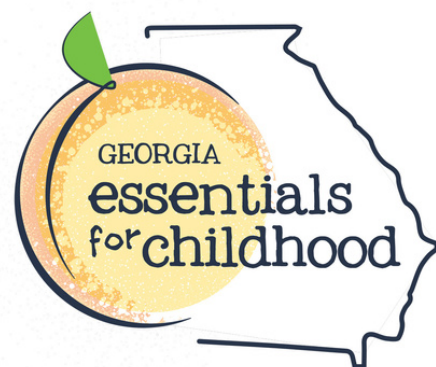




Family Resilience

Georgia Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan

2020-2029



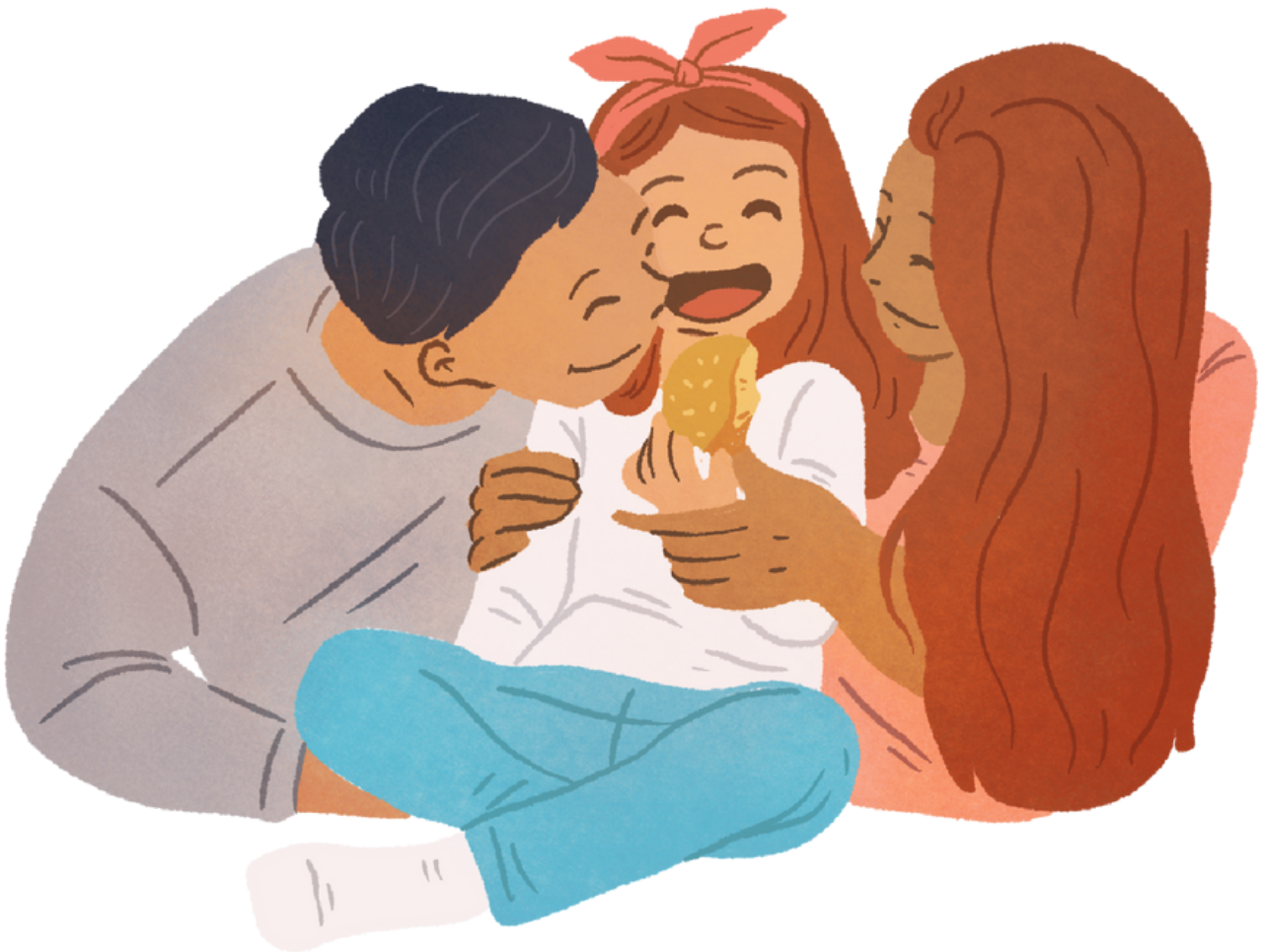
Highlights

Issues

- 3 out of 5 Georgians adults reported experiencing at least 1 adverse childhood experience
- Studies have shown that children and adults who can be resilient through adversity may mitigate or avoid the consequences of adversity

Solutions

- Preventing adversity
- Increase positive experiences
- Strengthen individual and/or family skills



Background

One of the six objectives of the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan is Increasing Family Resilience. Parental resilience is defined in the plan as managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma. “The concept of family resilience refers to the family as a functional system, impacted by highly stressful events and social contexts, and in turn, facilitating the positive adaptation of all members and strengthening the family unit.” (1). According to the CDC’s website (2): Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). For example:

- 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:

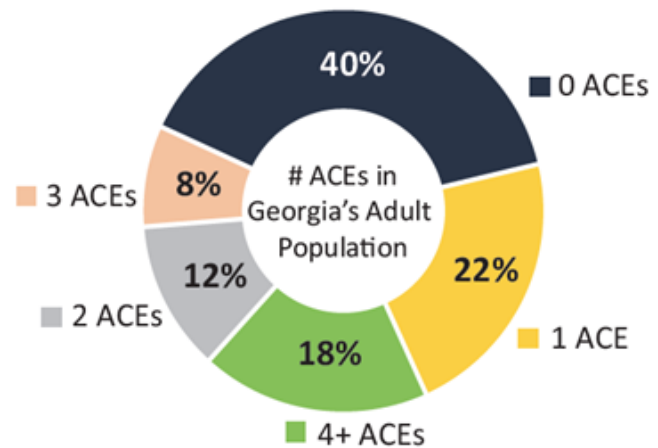
- substance use problems
- mental health problems
- instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential. However, ACEs can be prevented. Georgia’s Department of Public Health, in collaboration with the Prevention and Community Support Section at the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, has collected data on the reported Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in 2016, 2018, and 2020. The 11 questions surveyed can be found [here](#). (3)



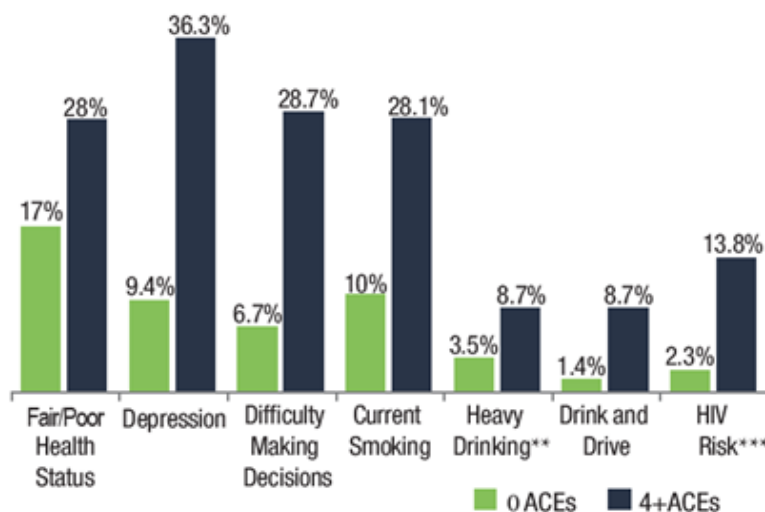
Currently, the 2016 and 2018 data indicate that Georgia is consistent with other states in the number and complexity of reported ACEs. Three out of five Georgians surveyed reported experiencing at least one of the 11 captured ACEs. 18% of adults surveyed reported experiencing four or more ACEs. Research over the decades shows that those experiencing four or more ACEs are more likely to engage in risky health behaviors, are more likely to suffer from depression or substance abuse disorders, and also are more likely to have reduced physical wellness (see charts below). Studies also show, however, that children and adults who have the ability to be resilient through adversity are able to mitigate some or all of the consequences of adversity through buffering with Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs). “Although some families are more vulnerable or face more hardships than others, a family resilience perspective is grounded in a deep conviction in the potential of families to strengthen their resilience in overcoming their challenges. Even those who have experienced severe trauma or very troubled relationships have the potential for healing and growth over the life course and across the generations” (Walsh, 2012b, 2016a, 2016b). In the work of Dr. Robert Sege and Charlynn Harper Brown and others, we learn how focusing on Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences can increase resilience and overcome adversity and trauma. (4)

3 in 5 Georgians Reported at Least One ACE



(5)

Health Behaviors and Outcomes for GA Adults Reporting 4+ ACEs Compared to 0 ACEs*



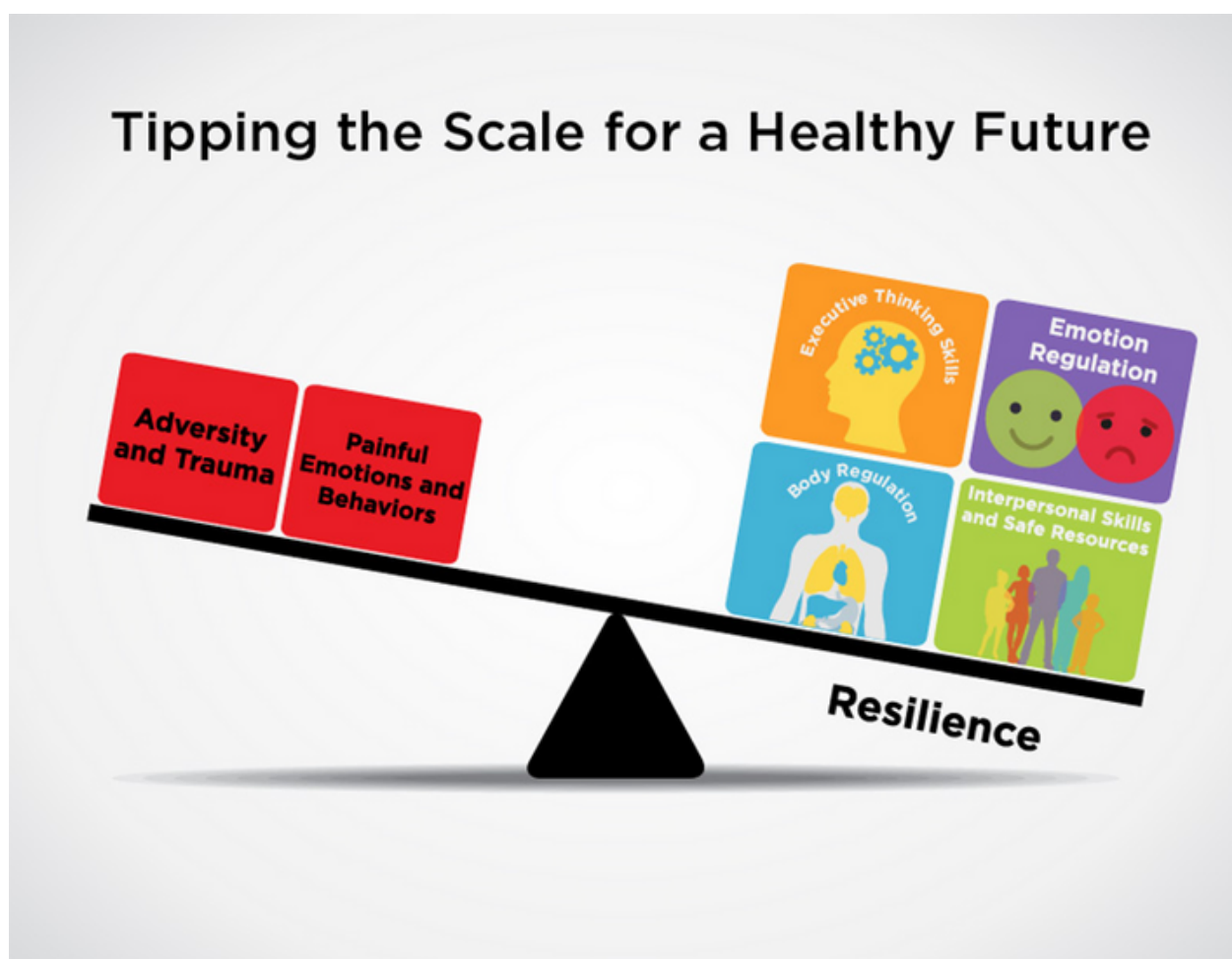
Adults with 4+ ACEs were more likely to:

- Have poor mental health for 14 days or more in the previous month
- Have been diagnosed with depression
- Have difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions due to a physical, emotional, or mental condition

(5)

According to the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (6), “Resilience comes from a combination of positive supports that surround us, the skills and abilities we’ve learned, and the life experiences we’ve had up until now. Imagine that each of us has a scale where these things add up to our capacity for resilience. This “resilience scale” applies at the individual level, the family level, and the community level. The supports we put in place to improve resilience for everyone help determine the collective health and economic wellbeing of our communities.” Three of the ways that we can work to “tip the scales” throughout communities in Georgia are to prevent adversity, increase positive experiences, and strengthen individual or family skills.

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(7)

Preventing Adversity

Adversity, such as those items reflected on the ACE questionnaire including physical or emotional abuse, parental substance abuse or mental illness, or neglect, as well as Adverse Community Environments, such as lack of affordable and safe housing, community violence, or systemic discrimination, can pile on the scale and lead to the lifelong negative health and wellbeing consequences discussed earlier. Through preventing or lessening adversity in individuals, families, and communities, we can tip the scales toward overall child and family wellbeing by lowering the “weight” placed on the left side of the scale.

Increase Positive Experiences

Connections Matter Georgia is an in-person training designed to engage community members in building caring connections to:

- Improve resiliency,
- Prevent childhood trauma, and
- Understand how our interactions with others can support those who have experienced trauma.

Science tells us that relationships have the power to shape our brains. Relationships help us learn better, work better, and parent better. When we experience tough times, they help us heal. With each connection, we develop a healthier stronger community.

According to Harvard’s Center for the Developing Child, “Science shows that children who do well despite serious hardship have had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult. These relationships buffer children from developmental disruption and help them develop “resilience,” or the set of skills needed to respond to adversity and thrive”. (8) Just as is promoted through Connections Matter Georgia, it’s those interpersonal **connections** and supports which commonly proves to be the difference in bouncing back from adversity.



Additionally, the Harvard Center for the Developing Child asserts, “ programs that actively build skills for planning, organization, impulse control, cognitive flexibility, and other executive functions can also improve the abilities of adults with limited education and low income to cope with, adapt to, and even prevent adversity in their lives and in the lives of their children. (8)

As discussed earlier, the work of Dr. Bob Sege and Charlynn Harper-Browne promote the provision of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) to mitigate against the harm of adversity or trauma and help build resilience. The four building blocks of Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences, or HOPE are:

1. Relationships - with other children, other adults, and through interactive activities
2. Environment - safe, equitable, and stable environments where children and families live, learn and play, to include school and home environments
3. Engagement - developing a sense of connectedness through social or civic activities
4. Opportunities for Social-Emotional Development - playing with peers, learning self-reflection skills, and collaborating in art, sports, drama or music

Through the promotion of these four building blocks and offering opportunities for positive experiences, Georgia can help mitigate against unavoidable adversity or trauma and prevent avoidable adversity or trauma.

Improve Skills and Abilities

Long-term improvements in resilience happen when we help children or adults build skills and abilities. This is like shifting the fulcrum of the resilience scale so that the burdens of past adversity have less negative leverage. One of the goals is to support executive function or “air traffic control” in the brain. Visit this [link](#) for accompanying graphics, videos to explain these concepts, and ‘read more’ links. (9)

The Harvard Center for the Developing Child reports that the science of resilience can help us understand why some children do well despite serious adversity. “Resilience is a combination of protective factors that enable people to adapt in the face of serious hardship, and is essential to ensuring that children who experience adversity can still become healthy, productive citizens”.

What we have learned through the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families framework is that these skills can be learned. While there is some research that supports an inherent predisposition to being resilient, we know that the development of the five Strengthening Families Protective Factors can increase an individual or family’s ability to bounce back from adversity and prevent abuse or neglect.



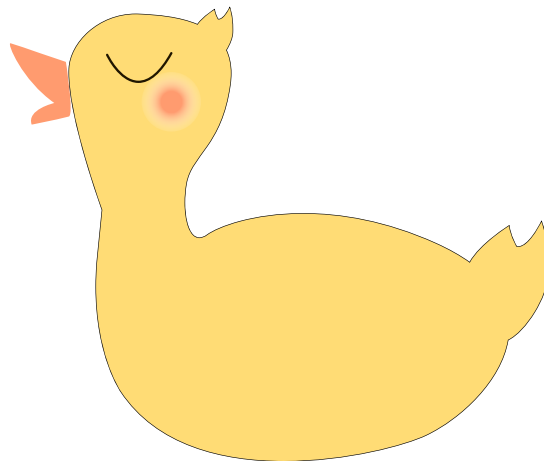
The Five Protective Factors can be found on the Strengthening Families Georgia [website](#).
(10)

1. Parental Resilience - parents can bounce back from life's challenges or difficulties
2. Social Connections - parents have positive, supportive relationships
3. Knowledge of Child Development - parents know how children or youth grow and learn
4. Concrete Supports in Times of Need - parents have access and know where to go for help when needed
5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children - children know how to communicate their emotions and needs in a healthy way

Providing opportunities through programs or services such as evidence-based home visiting or Parent Cafes can help promote the development of these protective factors in children and adults, ultimately leading to the strengthening of families and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

As discussed earlier, the HOPE initiative is a way of focusing on those positive experiences that support children's growth and development into healthy, resilient adults. "We now know that even in the face of adversity, key positive experiences help us heal. Although the effects of trauma can be serious, many adults have overcome their own trauma and now lead healthy, productive lives as a result of those positive experiences." (11)

We have learned through a growing body of research of the impact of trauma and adversity on the developing brain that not only does prolonged or severe trauma lead to structural and chemical changes in the brain but it also can trigger a flight or fight response in adults long into their parenting years. A traumatized child can grow into a parent with an overstimulated, poorly regulated adrenaline response to perceived stress and can react in harmful ways to the daily challenges all parents face in child-rearing. Without intervention or help in building protective factors and resilience skills, these parents may be more likely to maltreat their children, intentionally or otherwise. Read more [here](#) on the impact of trauma on the developing brain. (12)



As we have already discussed, however, the existence of trauma in one's childhood is not a condition from which there is no "cure". With the building of resilience skills, parents can learn how to respond to environmental stressors in a more healthy, "upstairs brain" mode and reduce the likelihood of passing on this trauma to their own children. Connections Matter Georgia training, Strengthening Families Georgia training, or other programs and services available in Georgia, all help us in learning new skills for controlling the "fight or flight" response and increasing our ability to manage stress. For example, "regular physical exercise, stress-reduction practices, and programs that actively build executive function and self-regulation skills can improve the abilities of children and adults to cope with, adapt to, and even prevent adversity in their lives. Adults who strengthen these skills in themselves can better model healthy behaviors for their children, thereby improving the resilience of the next generation." (8)

You can learn more about these programs or initiatives discussed here at the links below in the resources section.

Relation to Equity

Family resilience can be best described as a family's ability to bounce back from a challenging situation or circumstance stronger and more resourceful. Resilience is a skill that is cultivated through practice. Some families build resilience unknowingly through supporting each other through hard times and tackling small tasks together consistently over time. Some families may face more hard times and challenging small tasks than others. This variation in family experience can be attributed to inequity. (13)

Contrasting with equality, equity is more than a lack of access to resources. Equity addresses the process of the provision of resources based on the unique needs and circumstances of a family. Equity involves meeting people where they are. Health equity allows for everyone, every family to reach their full potential without being disadvantaged due to social status. Some of the most common social determinants of health are related to food, education, housing, transportation, and socio-economic status. (14) Also included in this broad range of social determinants of health are psychosocial factors such as freedom from bias and discrimination.

Black, Hispanic/Latino, or multi-racial people; People with less than a high school education; People making less than \$15,000 per year; People who are unemployed or unable to work; Lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people.

Research continues to show racial bias, direct and indirect, can negatively impact the well-being of children and families. Exposure to everyday bias and discrimination along with the burden of structural racism can lead to chronic, toxic stress. This can lead to poor health outcomes for overburdened families and communities that become unable to provide consistent, supportive relationships and relief from chronic stress. (14)

Children in families lacking in resilience and experiencing disproportionate stress and crises are at a greater risk for experiencing adverse childhood experiences including child abuse and neglect. However, most adverse early experiences and exposures are preventable. (14) There are a variety of approaches to address social inequities. Some of the most studied and implemented include increasing economic supports, place based interventions and reductions in racism. It is vital to start the investment into families early in children's lives to ensure a strong start and long-lasting positive benefits to resiliency, health, education, and overall quality of life. The burden of tackling many of these equity issues is that inequity exists in the very systems that were built to support children and families (CANPP).

However, if we take an equitable approach to preventing child abuse and neglect by strengthening family resiliency, we can uncover the unique needs of families and allocate resources and support in a way that is most beneficial to build families that are resilient to overcome the challenges they may face. Most importantly, keeping in mind the confounding stressors experienced by vulnerable and at risk populations, we will have more effective interventions, a greater impact and ultimately stronger, more resilient families and communities across the state of Georgia.

Programs and Recommendations

The CDC recommends [5 strategies for preventing child abuse and neglect](#), aimed at promoting policies and social norms that encourage positive parenting and enhancing resources and supports to provide families with the greatest chance for success. These strategies are: Strengthening economic supports to families, Changing social norms to support parents and positive parenting, Providing quality care and education early in life, Enhancing parenting skills to promote healthy child development, and Intervening to lessen harms and prevent future risk. It is important to implement a broad array of strategies within Georgia, from those focusing on preventing child abuse and neglect, to those intended to mitigate the impact of abuse. Strategies that act on the individual, family, and community levels should be utilized to address the connection between community context and individual outcomes and have the greatest possible impact on the lives of Georgia's children.



Further, Georgia Essentials for Childhood promotes the following Georgia-specific strategies to increase family resilience as part of the state's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan (CANPP):

- Expand evidence-based afterschool, out-of-school, and summer programs.
- Decrease family violence through the adoption and promotion of evidence-based practices and approaches.
- Increase access to evidence-based or research-informed programs for parenting skills and support that help parents/caregivers understand all stages of their child's development.
- Increase access to family-support services in emergency rooms and urgent-care facilities.
- Promote access to broadband internet technology for parents and caregivers to secure appropriate child-development tools and resources.
- Promote and expand comprehensive and specialized supports for families of children with disabilities.
- Promote policies that ensure at-risk families receive evidence-based parenting education.
- Promote strategies to ensure families can quickly recover from natural disasters and public-health crises.
- Promote the development of transition plans for state-placed children and youth (e.g., Department of Juvenile Justice, Division of Family and Children Services), and engage families in the planning process.
- Promote, link, and support information and referral systems.
- Shape social norms around positive parenting and family help-seeking in times of need (e.g., public-awareness campaigns).

Many of these strategies align with the CDC's child abuse prevention strategies and are currently being addressed by programs within Georgia. Below, each of the CDC's 5 strategies is explored with an example of how the strategy is being implemented in Georgia. Its link to the Georgia CANPP family resilience strategies is highlighted as well.

The first strategy for the prevention of child abuse and neglect is strengthening economic supports to families. Approaches to achieve this strategy include strengthening household financial security through policies such as tax credits and subsidized childcare, and family friendly work policies such as paid leave and livable wages (Forston et al 2016). Until recently, Georgia had no paid family and medical leave program and provided no paid extra support for workers beyond the federal mandates. Further, under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act only about 41% of Georgians have access to even unpaid leave (Working adults). On May 5th 2021, Governor Kemp signed a bill which provides three weeks of paid parental leave for state employees and public school employees (Georgia general assembly). While this policy is an important step, it leaves out many private sector and other non-qualifying workers and does not provide leave for illness or the care of sick loved ones. Many other states offer more support to families via paid family leave laws. For example, California offers up to 8 weeks of benefits for people who must take time off work to care for an ill family member or care for and bond with a new child (California EDD). Georgia families could similarly benefit from policies to expand paid leave, which support the CANPP strategy of promoting strategies to ensure families can quickly recover from natural disasters and public-health crises.

The next strategy is changing social norms to support parents and positive parenting. These approaches seek to change norms around issues such as discipline and acceptability of seeking help. They may be accomplished through public engagement and education campaigns or legislative approaches to reduce corporal punishment. (15) In Georgia, for example, The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Prevention and Community Support Section's Help for Georgia Parents campaign aims to engage parents and encourage use of the 1-800-CHILDREN Helpline. The goals of the campaign are to normalize and encourage help-seeking among parents and prompt others to offer support (Help for Georgia Parents). The 1-800-CHILDREN Helpline is a resource available to all Georgians which connects families with over 3,000 resources and support services throughout the state. The resource is free and is offered in English and Spanish (1-800-Children). The campaign and helpline align with the CANPP strategies of increasing access to evidence-based or research-informed programs for parenting skills and support that help parents/caregivers understand all stages of their child's development; shaping social norms around positive parenting and family help-seeking in times of need; and Promoting, linking, and supporting information and referral systems.

The third strategy, providing quality care and education early in life includes preschool enrichment with family engagement and improved quality of child care through licensing and accreditation. (15) Head Start and Early Head Start sites are located in 93% (148) of counties in Georgia. Head Start is a federally funded early childhood development program for low-income families. Head Start provides early education both in and out of the home; parenting education; health and mental health services for mothers and children; nutrition education; and family support services. (16) The Georgia Head Start State Collaboration Office builds partnerships between federally-funded Head Start programs and state-funded early childhood programs. They work to align early education and care programs in Georgia with the state's K-12 education standards. (17) This program supports the CANPP strategies of *increasing access to evidence-based or research-informed programs for parenting skills and support that help parents/caregivers understand all stages of their child's development and promoting policies that ensure at-risk families receive evidence-based parenting education.*

The next strategy is enhancing parenting skills to promote healthy child development. Approaches to this strategy include early childhood home visitation and parenting skill and family relationship approaches. (15) The Georgia Department of Public Health's Home Visiting Program is designed to assist Georgia parents who need sustained support during pregnancy and the first year of their child's life. Its goals are to increase healthy pregnancies; improve parenting confidence and competence; improve child health, development and readiness; and increase family connectedness to community and social support. The program uses the following evidence-based models: Early Head Start - Home Visiting, Healthy Families Georgia, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers. (18) The home visiting model aligns with the CANPP strategies of *decreasing family violence through the adoption and promotion of evidence-based practices and approaches; increasing access to evidence-based or research-informed programs for parenting skills and support that help parents/caregivers understand all stages of their child's development; and promoting policies that ensure at-risk families receive evidence-based parenting education.*

The final strategy, intervening to lessen harms and prevent future risk, encompass approaches aimed to mitigate the negative physical and mental consequences of abuse as well as diminish the risk that impacted children are revictimized later in life or go on to perpetuate violence themselves. These aims can be achieved through enhanced primary care, behavioral parent training programs, treatment for children and families to lessen the harms of abuse and neglect exposure, and treatment for children and families to prevent problem behavior and later involvement in violence. (15) SafeCare is an in-home parent training program for the prevention of child maltreatment that targets risk factors for child neglect and physical abuse in which parents are taught skills in the areas of positive parent-child interactions, home safety, and recognizing and responding to symptoms of illness and injury. SafeCare is currently being implemented in 29 counties in Georgia, which is 18% of Georgia counties. (19) This promotes the CANPP strategy *of decreasing family violence through the adoption and promotion of evidence-based practices and approaches*.

Additionally, several training opportunities available to parents and caregivers, as well as other community members, help to increase family resilience. Many of these training opportunities are referenced in the Resilience Training Resources list below and are also included in [Resilient Georgia's Training Roadmap](#).

Resilience Training Resources

- [Connections Matter Georgia](#)
- [Strengthening Families Georgia](#)
- [Georgia State University Professional Excellence Child Welfare Training Collaborative](#)
- [Trust Based Relational Intervention training for Caregivers](#)
- [Community Resilience Model](#)
- [Better Brains for Babies](#)

Calls to Action

What can you do to help increase family resilience in your communities? Here are some actions you can take to help create nurturing communities.

- Get involved in the implementation of the Regional or state Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plans (CANPP).
- Host or attend a Civic Dinner to build awareness.
- Fund, host or attend a Resilience Training - as seen in the list below or on the Resilient Georgia Training Roadmap.
- Help identify and connect parents/caregivers to existing available resources.
- Advocate on behalf of policies and/or funding to support increasing availability of family support resources.
- Join or create coalitions or collaboratives in your community which support families and promote family resilience (e.g. Resilient Georgia, Family Connection Collaboratives, Georgia Family Support Network, Prevent Child Abuse Councils, State of Hope, Kiwanis Clubs, etc).
- Find your role and actions in supporting families at <https://www.belongingforhope.org/prevention-roles-actions>.

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