

Special Emphasis Report:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

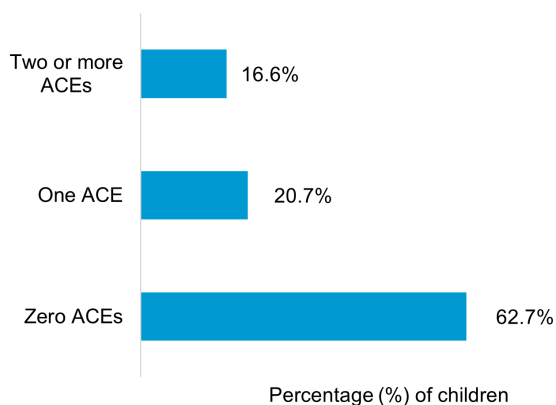
Understanding ACEs

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events or circumstances in childhood (0–17 years), including aspects of a child’s environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding. ACEs can negatively impact physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral development and can also have lasting effects on health, well-being, and prosperity well into adulthood.

Impact and magnitude of ACEs

The effects of ACEs can be passed down from one generation to the next, especially when positive childhood experiences (PCEs) are not in place in a child’s life. PCEs can include being in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment and having community and family support. In Wisconsin, 37.3% of children have experienced one or more ACEs, and 16.6% have experienced two or more ACEs, as reported by a parent or caregiver (2024) [Figure 1]. This is compared to the 39.1% of children who have experienced at least one ACE nationally.

Figure 1: Percentage of ACEs in Wisconsin, 2024



Types of ACEs*

The most prevalent type of ACE experienced in Wisconsin is divorce, impacting 20.2% of children [Figure 2].

Figure 2: Top five types of ACEs experienced by children, 2024

Type of ACE*	Percentage
1.Divorce	20.2%
2.Financial troubles	13.5%
3.Mental illness	10.2%
4.Substance use	8.9%
5.Parent or guardian served jail time	7.1%

* All of the ACEs above are experienced by someone in the child’s household. Experiences are reported by parents, and abuse and neglect data are not collected in the survey.

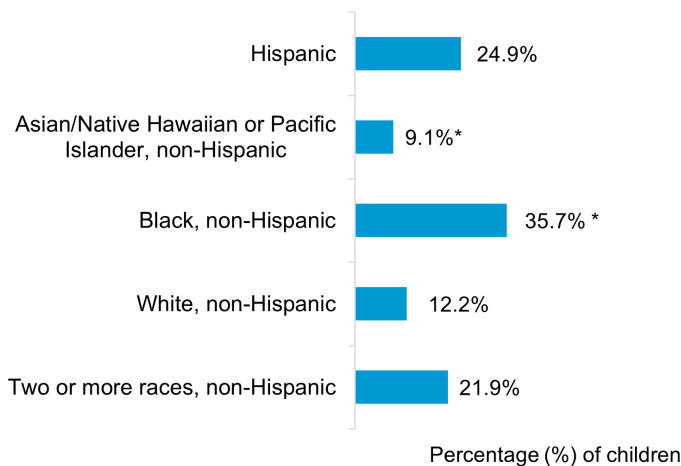
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ACEs by demographic group

ACEs vary by individual and population level characteristics. Black and Hispanic children have greater levels of experiencing two or more ACEs in Wisconsin than other racial/ethnic groups [Figure 3].

Figure 3: Percentage of children with 2+ ACEs by race and ethnicity, 2022–2024



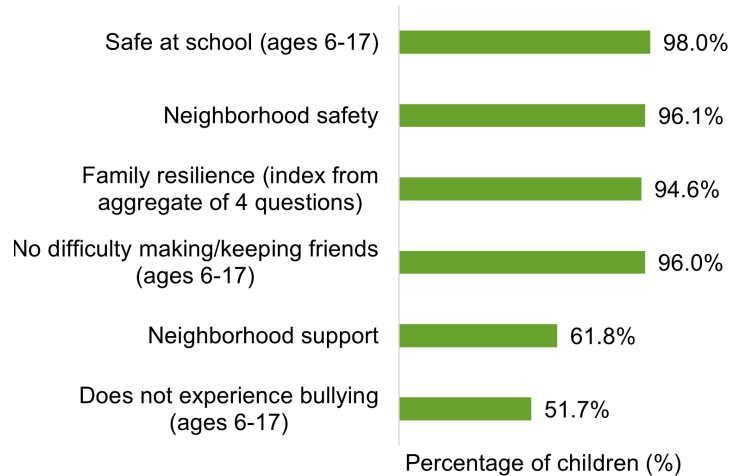
American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic not displayed due to low count. 31.9%* of AI/AN children ((including those who are Hispanic or another race) have experienced 2+ ACEs. *Interpret with caution. Estimate may be unreliable based on confidence interval 20 percentage points wide or 1.2 times greater than the estimate. Learn more in the [NSCH weighting methodology](#) guide.

Positive childhood experiences (PCEs)

Addressing ACEs starts with healthy childhoods, which can provide lasting benefits throughout life. In Wisconsin, 96.1% of children live in a safe neighborhood and 61.8% have neighborhood support [Figure 4].



Figure 4: Percentage of children with positive childhood experiences, 2024



ACEs prevention strategies

Supporting families, children, and communities can help prevent ACEs and promote PCEs. Effective ACEs prevention strategies include:

1. Strengthening economic supports for families
2. Promoting social norms that protect against violence and adversity
3. Ensuring a strong start for children
4. Enhancing skills to help parents and youths handle stress, manage emotions, and tackle everyday challenges.
5. Connecting children to caring adults and activities
6. Intervening to lessen immediate and long-term harms. While not a primary prevention strategy, timely access to assessment, intervention, support, and treatment for children who have experienced ACEs can help mitigate the consequences of ACEs.

Learn more about these strategies in CDC's [ACEs Prevention Resource for Action](#). Additional information about violence prevention can be found in resources from CDC's [Veto Violence](#) program.

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ACEs and PCEs activities in Wisconsin

ACEs Community of Practice

In 2025, members of [Injury and Violence Prevention Program](#) at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) joined staff from the [DHS Child and Adolescent Health Unit](#) and Wisconsin's [Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board](#) (the Prevention Board), to participate in the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials ACEs Learning Community. This learning opportunity connected the Wisconsin team with other states working to address ACEs, strengthened partnerships between Wisconsin organizations engaged in ACEs prevention, and helped initiate a project surrounding family-friendly workplace policies (see below). The partnership continues to work on identifying and supporting innovative ACEs prevention activities. Examples of previous and on-going work include:

- Providing ACEs-related technical assistance and data to local jurisdictions and organizations.
- Developing language for a data dashboard of ACEs experienced by Wisconsin mothers.
- Identifying and engaging with additional partners who are implementing evidence-based approaches to ACEs prevention.

Child abuse and neglect prevention

The Prevention Board, created in 1983, uses programming, policy, and education to prevent child abuse and neglect. By focusing on the factors that protect children from maltreatment, the Prevention Board works with communities to strengthen families and prevent abuse and neglect before it occurs. The Prevention Board supports the [Five for Families website](#) with resources for parents. The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families has also been transforming the child welfare system since 2018 to be more family-focused and collaborative in supporting more children and families in-home.

Family-friendly workplace policies

Family-friendly workplace policies—such as paid parental leave, support for child care, and supportive breastfeeding policies—prevent ACEs (including sexual abuse) and promote PCEs by supporting economic stability in families and helping parents balance work with family-life. Using funds from the Rape Prevention and Education grant, DHS supported two local organizations ([Family Friendly Workplaces](#) and the [Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#)) in educating employers about the importance of family-friendly policies through in-person employer round-tables and [new resources](#).

Wisconsin Violence and Injury Prevention Partnership (WIVIPP)

Many organizations are working to prevent and address ACEs across Wisconsin. WIVIPP, a group organized through DHS, is made up of public health, academic, and non-profit partners who aim to reduce injury and violence. The partnership helps members address ACEs and promote PCEs by providing opportunities to learn about specific types of ACEs and PCEs, data sources that can help identify populations at greater risk for ACEs, and programs, projects, and resources from other Wisconsin organizations focused on ACEs and PCEs.

Note: Data in this report are from the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), which does not include all potential ACEs like child abuse and neglect. See the [NSCH website](#) for more details.

