

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in South Carolina



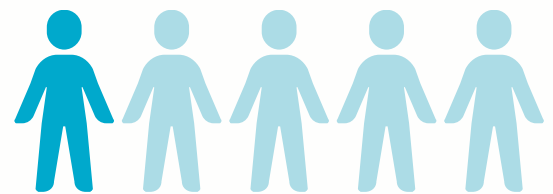
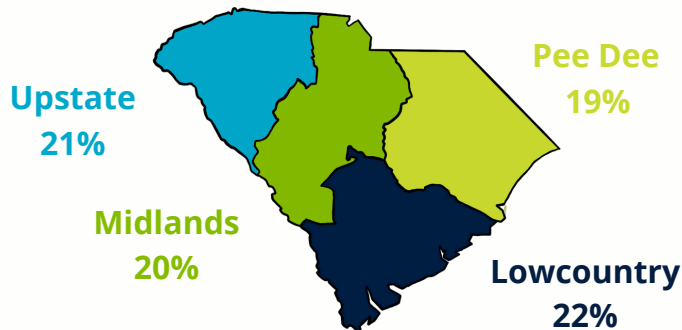
What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years) and may increase the risk of physical and mental health problems later in life.¹

In 2021...

Adults Who Experienced 4 or More ACEs, by DPH Region

Percent

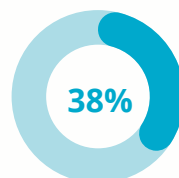


21% of adults in South Carolina have experienced **4 or more ACEs**.

The Lowcountry Region had the highest percentage of adults who reported experiencing 4 or more ACEs.

Prevalence of ACEs Types

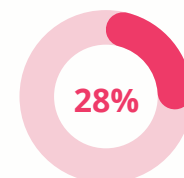
The most common ACEs reported during childhood were Emotional Abuse (**38%**), Divorce (**30%**), and Alcohol or Drug Misuse (**28%**).



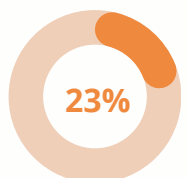
Emotional Abuse



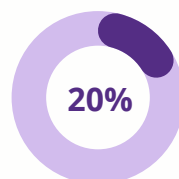
Divorce



Alcohol or Drug Misuse *



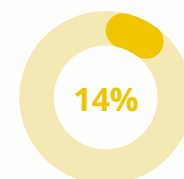
Physical Abuse



Mental Illness



Domestic Violence



Sexual Abuse



Incarceration

*The alcohol or drug misuse ACE type is based on reporting that during childhood, a household member was a problem drinker or alcoholic and/or a household member used illegal street drugs or abused prescription medications. Individually, 24.5% of adults reported a household member being a problem drinker or alcoholic, and 11.1% of adults reported a household member used illegal street drugs or abused prescription medications; 7.5% reported both alcohol and drug misuse.

Groups More Likely to Experience ACEs

Experiencing 4 or more ACEs was most prevalent among these groups:



People who are unable to work
(32%)



People with less than a high school education (26%)



People making <\$50k in household income per year (25%)



Non-Hispanic Other (including multi-racial) people (25%)

The Impact of ACEs on Health and Wellbeing

Compared to those with no ACEs, those with 4 or more ACEs have:



4.3 times higher prevalence of not being able to afford a doctor



4.0 times higher prevalence of depression



2.8 times higher prevalence of current cigarette smoking



2.0 times higher prevalence of binge drinking

Positive Childhood Experiences Buffer the Effects of ACEs²

What are Positive Childhood Experiences?

Positive childhood experiences (PCEs) are children's experiences of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments that promote healthy child development and adult mental and relational health and buffer against negative impacts of adverse childhood experiences.²

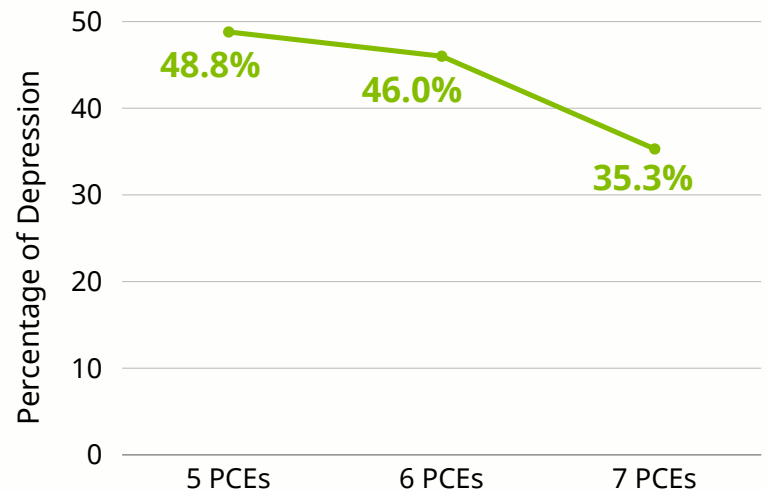


7 PCEs include:

- Feeling safe and protected by an adult at home
- Feeling a sense of belonging in high school
- Feeling supported by friends
- Being able to talk about their feelings
- Enjoying participating in community traditions
- Feeling supported by family during difficult times
- Feeling two or more non-parent adults caring about them

Impact of PCEs on Depression Among Adults Who Experienced 4+ ACEs

Percent



Among adults who had 4 or more ACEs, those reporting more PCEs had a lower prevalence of depression than those with less PCEs.

ACEs Activities in South Carolina

The SC Department of Public Health (DPH) Core State Injury Prevention Program (Core SIPP) is developing educational materials that focus on ACEs prevention and PCE promotion. To obtain more information about SC parenting classes, early intervention services, firearm safety, and access to ACEs prevention training, please email the DPH Injury Prevention Program at injury@dph.sc.gov.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2024, October 24). About Adverse Childhood Experiences. Retrieved on April 22, 2025 from <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>.

2. Sege, R., Swedo, E.A., Burstein, D. (2024, May 2). Prevalence of Positive Childhood Experiences Among Adults — Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Four States, 2015–2021. MMWR Morbidity Mortality Weekly Report 2024;73:399–404. DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7317a3>