

# We Can Prevent Childhood Adversity

The Science of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Shows We Can Improve People's Lives and Help Them Thrive

## Understanding ACEs

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events in childhood (0-17 years), such as neglect and experiencing or witnessing violence.

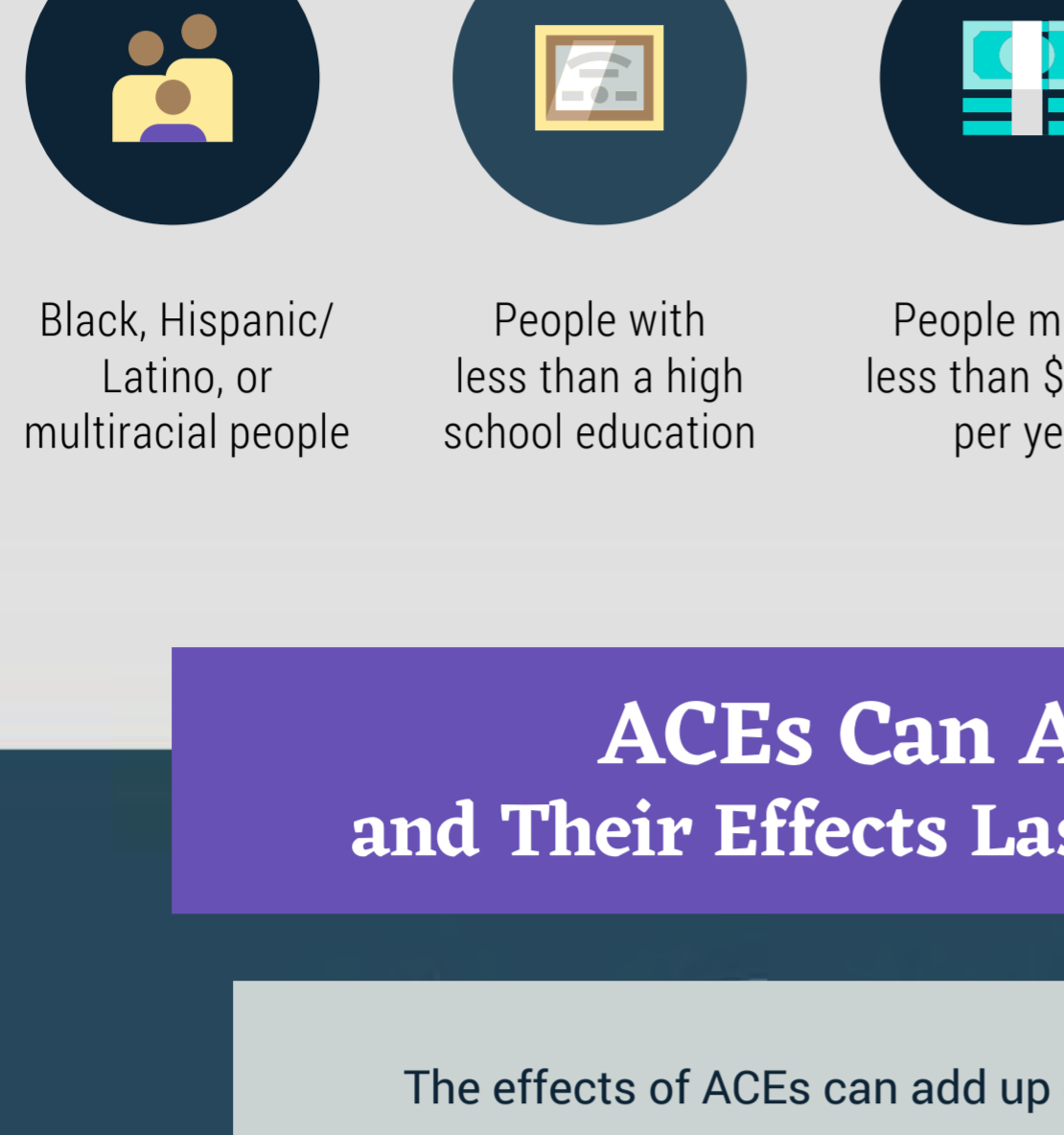
ACEs include aspects of a child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as living in a household with substance misuse or mental health problems.

ACEs can negatively impact physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral development. ACEs can also have lasting effects on health, well-being, and prosperity well into adulthood.



## Many People Report ACEs

According to data collected from more than 144,000 adults across 25 states between 2015 and 2017:



## Types of ACEs

### Abuse

- Emotional
- Physical
- Sexual

### Household Challenges\*

- Substance misuse
- Mental illness, including attempted suicide
- Divorce or separation
- Incarceration
- Intimate Partner Violence or Domestic Violence

### Neglect

- Emotional
- Physical

### Other Adversity

- Bullying
- Community violence
- Natural disasters
- Refugee or wartime experiences
- Witnessing or experiencing acts of terrorism

\* The child lives with a parent, caregiver, or other adult who experiences one or more of these challenges.

## Some Groups Are More Likely to Have Experienced ACEs

Multiple studies show that people who identified as members of these groups as adults reported experiencing significantly more ACEs:

- Black, Hispanic/Latino, or multiracial 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

## ACEs Can Accumulate and Their Effects Last Beyond Childhood

The effects of ACEs can add up over time and affect a person throughout their life. Children who repeatedly and chronically experience adversity can suffer from **TOXIC STRESS**.



Toxic stress can disrupt **ORGAN, TISSUE, AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**. Over time this can limit a person's ability to process information, make decisions, interact with others, and regulate emotions. These consequences may follow a person into adulthood.



## ACEs Can Increase Risk for Poor Social Outcomes, Disease, and Death

Research shows that experiencing a higher number of ACEs is associated with many of the leading causes of death like heart disease and cancer.

### Chronic Health Conditions    Health Risk Behaviors    Social Outcomes    Mental Health Conditions

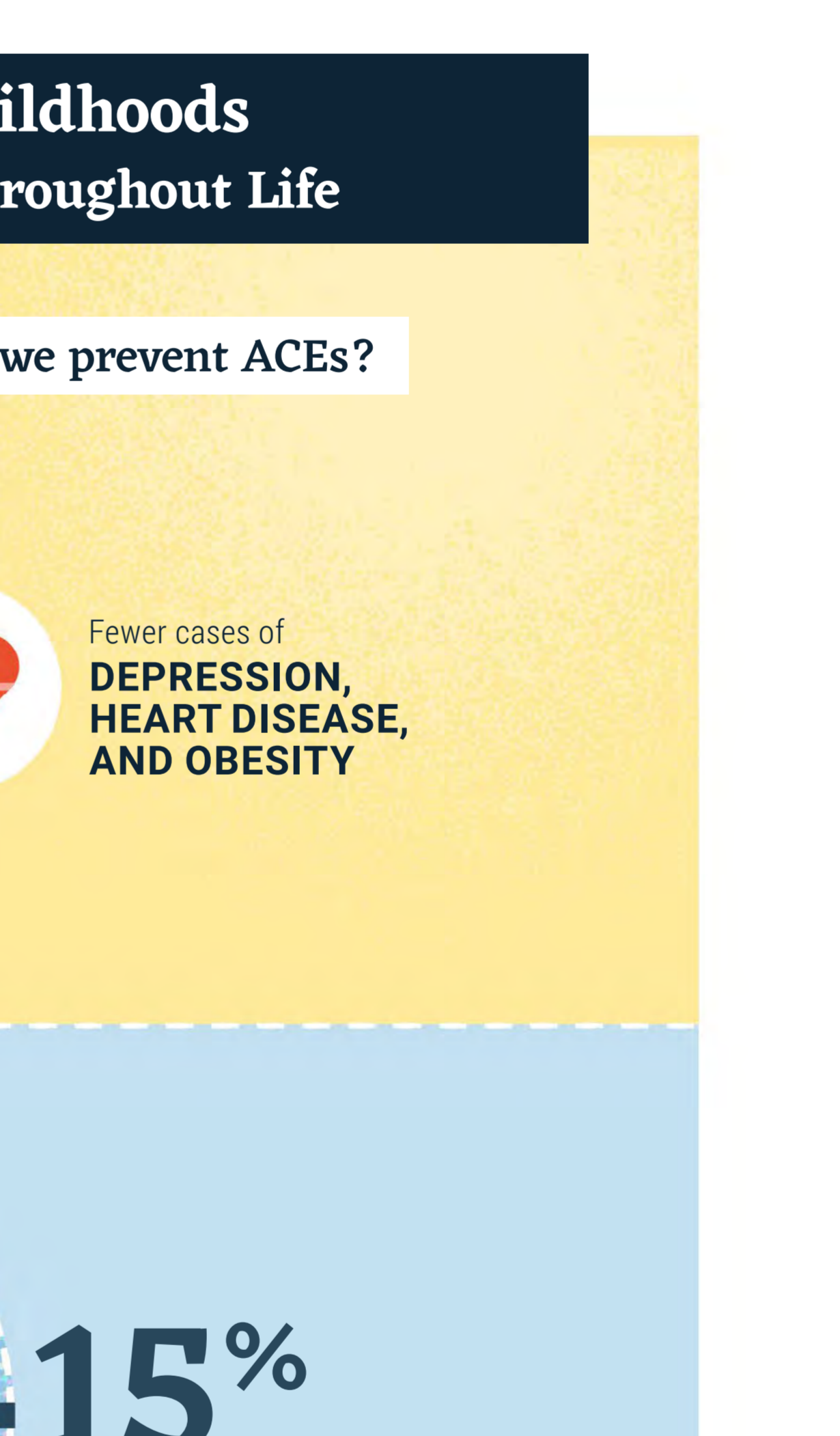
- Chronic Health Conditions:** Coronary heart disease, Stroke, Asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Cancer, Kidney disease, Diabetes, Obesity
- Health Risk Behaviors:** Smoking, Heavy drinking or alcoholism, Substance misuse, Physical inactivity, Risky sexual behavior
- Social Outcomes:** Lack of health insurance, Unemployment, Less than high school diploma or equivalent education
- Mental Health Conditions:** Depression, Suicide or attempted suicide



## ACEs Can Echo Across Generations

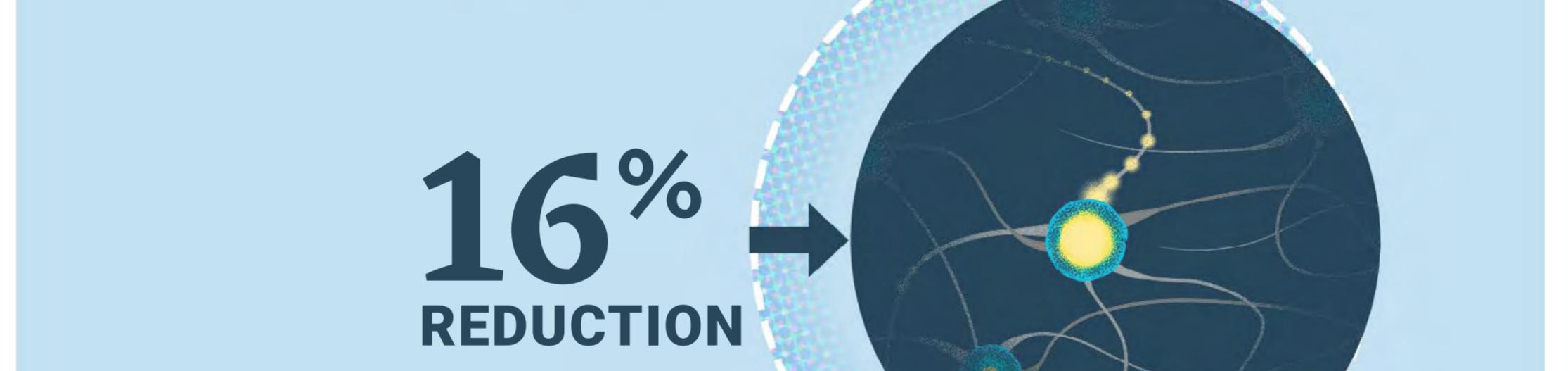
The consequences of ACEs can be passed down from one generation to the next if children don't have protective buffers like positive childhood experiences or a caring adult in their lives.

Also, when families experience historical and systemic racism or living in poverty for generations, the effects of ACEs can add up over time.



## We Can Create Positive Childhood Experiences

The science of ACEs also reveals opportunities to improve the lives of all children and adults.



- Strengthen families' financial stability:** Paid time off, Child tax credits, Flexible and consistent work schedules
- Promote social norms that protect against violence:** Positive parenting practices, Prevention efforts involving men and boys
- Help kids have a good start:** Early learning programs, Affordable preschool and childcare programs

- Teach healthy relationship skills:** How to handle conflict, Negative feeling management, Pressure from peers, Healthy non-violent dating relationships
- Connect youth with activities and caring adults:** School or community mentoring programs, After school activities
- Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms:** ACEs education, Therapy, Family-centered treatment for substance abuse

## Healthy Childhoods Have Benefits Throughout Life

What could happen if we prevent ACEs?



Fewer cases of **DEPRESSION, HEART DISEASE, AND OBESITY**

**15% REDUCTION** in the number of adults who are **UNEMPLOYED**

**16% REDUCTION** in the number of adults with **KIDNEY DISEASE**

**24-27% REDUCTION** in the number of adults with respiratory problems such as **ASTHMA AND COPD**

**33% REDUCTION** in the number of adults who **SMOKE**

**44% REDUCTION** in the number of adults with **DEPRESSION**

## Positive Childhood Experiences Can Help the Economy

The primary prevention of ACEs — stopping ACEs before they start — would benefit the economy and relieve pressures on healthcare systems.



## Healthy Childhoods Start Now

Working together, we can help create neighborhoods, communities, and a world in which every child can thrive.

Learn how you can help!

[vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/aces-infographic](http://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/aces-infographic)

