

Brief 1: ACEs and COVID-19 Overview

Caring for Kids

During and After a Pandemic



A publication of West Virginia KIDS COUNT, funded with support from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation and Sisters Health Foundation.



West Virginia KIDS COUNT

West Virginia KIDS COUNT provides trusted data about the well-being of children and builds alliances to advocate for what kids need across the Mountain State. We provide state legislators, public officials and child advocates with reliable data, policy recommendations and tools needed to advance sound policies that benefit West Virginia's children and families. We are a part of a national KIDS COUNT network through the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Content produced in partnership with



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Introducing a Five-Part COVID-19 & Kids Issue Brief Series

As we approach the two-year mark of COVID-19's inception, many are beginning to ask themselves how living through a global pandemic might be affecting us long term. More importantly, how is it affecting our children?

WV KIDS COUNT hopes to answer this imperative question and provide the necessary data, resources, and strategies to overcome and prevent adverse effects the COVID-19 pandemic has on children.

In partnership with the WV ACEs Coalition and co-authored by various child well-being experts, this COVID-19 & Kids Issue Brief Series will detail the primary COVID impact areas such as health, education, and family connections.

Each brief will target the specific individuals who can actively use the information provided to make a positive difference for kids.

Educators

Caregivers

Policymakers

Child-Serving Professionals



“While children have been largely spared from the direct health effects of COVID-19 – the crisis is having a profound effect on their well-being.”

-United Nations Sustainable Development Group

Understanding the Connection Between ACEs and COVID-19 on Child Well-Being

“Do I have school today?”

“Do I need to wear a mask?”

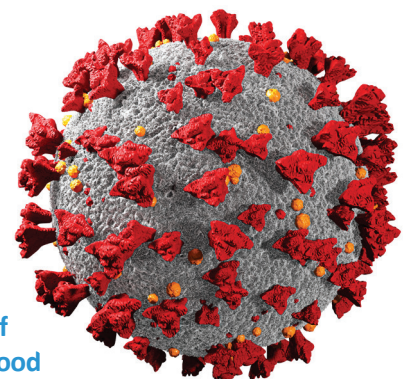
“Can I hang with my friends?”

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought much of the world to a standstill. New “rules” about daily life can make life confusing and stressful – e.g., Do I need a mask today? Is school on or off today? Can I stay home or go out today? Are my children safe with other children now? Grown-ups might not be used to having children at home continually, and may find the constant need to watch, care, and provide for children increasingly stressful. Let’s face it, kids can be challenging. Further, these adults ALSO need to deal with daily demands and their own stress loads while caring for children. They can feel so lonely and upset that they start to feel helpless or hopeless themselves. This makes it hard to stay positive and patient – which are keys to helping children thrive.

Further, COVID-related community closures mean that some children are stuck living in unsafe neighborhoods or households. Staying in these places without going to school, or visiting extended family or friends, means that there are fewer ways to get relief.

While the United States now benefits from easy access to free vaccines, it is still connected to the rest of the world where more people are getting sicker. The risk for new versions of COVID-19 coming back to the U.S. will be an ongoing challenge to families, schools, and communities. Family issues, money concerns, and health losses created by COVID-19 create a kind of stress that has yet to be named, studied, or measured. It could be a new category of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Stress created by COVID-19 could be a new category of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).



What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refer to a range of bad things that can happen to children (birth to 18) while growing up. ACEs have been studied by many scientists for over 20 years in many settings and the results are the same. There is a strong relationship. The more ACEs a child endures, the more frequently they happen, and the longer they last, the worse things can turn out for that youngster in adulthood. The ten original ACE categories include physical or emotional neglect; physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; a household member with mental illness; and household dysfunction (e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence, separation/divorce, incarcerated parent) (Felitti, Anda, et al. 1998). Recently expanded ACE categories (Karatekin & Hill, 2019) include community problems (e.g., witnessing or experiencing serious crime), peer problems (e.g., bullying, being robbed), property victimization (e.g., having one's things broken by someone else). Cronholm, Forke et al., (2015) include racial discrimination and living in foster care as new examples of ACEs. Sadly, ACEs strongly relate to poor outcomes in adulthood, including mental illness; serious drug use; addiction; heart, lung, brain, and liver disease; and early death (Felitti, Anda et al., 1998).

While traumatic childhoods can lead to serious adult problems and even an unnaturally shorter life, that is not the end of the story. There is hope. Protective factors such as a caring stable adult, areas of personal mastery, a sense of cultural history, strong thinking skills, and self-regulation go a long way in offsetting the negative effects of ACEs (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). Adults can change a youngster's life by investing hope and encouragement into their interactions with children, by being reliable and stable themselves, and by teaching social and emotional skills such as perspective-building, waiting one's turn, altruism, managing one's emotions, being aware of others' needs, and making responsible decisions. Further, if a child builds an area of mastery (art, music, sports, academics, etc.), the child experiences control and influence, which builds confidence in overcoming hardships.

10 Original ACEs Categories

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Incarcerated Relative



Mother treated violently



Substance Abuse



Divorce

Upcoming:

What to Expect in the Five-Part COVID-19 & Kids Issue Brief Series

Brief 1

ACEs and COVID-19 Overview

Caring for Kids During and After a Pandemic

Brief 2

COVID-19's Impact on Educating West Virginia's Kids

Challenges, Opportunities and Coping Strategies for Teachers and Mentors

Brief 3

Policies that Put Kids First

Recommendations for Policymakers

Brief 4

Caregivers, Kids and COVID-19

What Parents, Grandparents, Foster Parents and Residential Parents Can do to Help

Brief 5

A Family-Centered Approach to Service and Resource Delivery Amid a Pandemic

Recommendations for Child Serving Professionals



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