

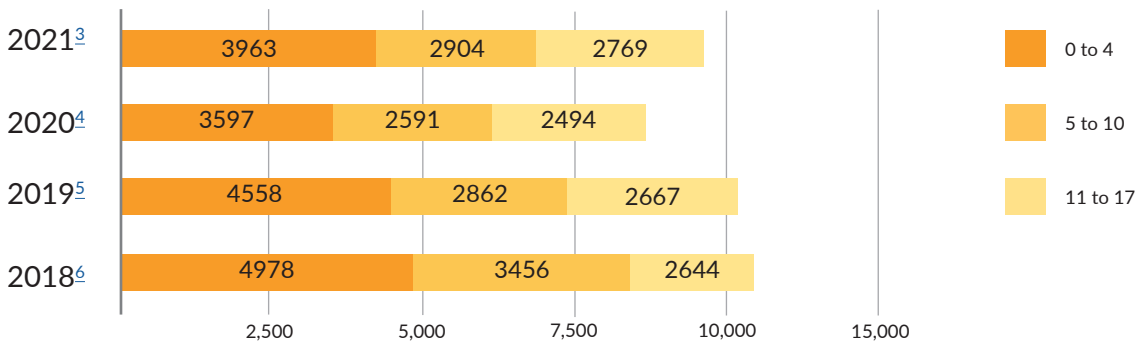


Brain development is impacted by both genetics and experiences. As children grow, their brains develop basic functions first (e.g., breathing), before progressing to more sophisticated function (e.g., complex thought).¹

What is child maltreatment?

Child maltreatment includes all types of abuse and neglect of a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caregiver, or other person in a child-serving role. There are four common types of abuse: **physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect.**²

Substantiated Child Victims of Maltreatment in Georgia, by Age



Maltreatment can:⁷

- Cause permanent fear response to certain triggers, even when there is no actual threat
- Destabilize emotion and stress regulation
- Delay developmental milestones
- Diminish executive functions like memory, attention, impulse control, etc.
- Decrease response to positive feedback or rewards
- Make social interactions more difficult

Other Factors Impacting Development



Responding to Stress

The timing and type of stress determines the impact on the brain.

Positive stress: moderate, brief, and generally a normal part of life⁸

Tolerable stress: more severe and long-lasting difficulties; can be damaging unless the stress is time-limited and buffered by relationships with adults that help the child adapt⁹

Toxic Stress: strong, frequent, and prolonged activation of the body's stress response system that disrupts healthy development¹⁰



Sensitive Periods

Windows of time in development when certain parts of the brain may be more susceptible to certain experiences (e.g., strong attachments to caregivers formed during infancy)¹¹

Positive Childhood Experiences

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) can help to mitigate the harm of abuse and help build resilience. The four building blocks of Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences, or HOPE, are:¹²



Relationships

Relationships with other children, other adults, and through interactive activities



Engagement

Developing a sense of connectedness through social or civic activities



Environment

Safe, equitable, and stable environments where children and families live, learn, and play, including school and home environments



Opportunities for Social-Emotional Development

Playing with peers, learning self-reflection skills, and collaborating in art, sports, drama, or music

Policy and Practice Recommendations

- 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).

Trauma-induced changes to the brain can result in varying degrees of **cognitive impairment** and **emotional dysregulation** that can lead to a host of problems, including difficulty with attention and focus, learning disabilities, low self-esteem, impaired social skills, and sleep disturbances.

-Child Welfare Information Gateway, Supporting Brain Development in Traumatized Children and Youth



References for Child Maltreatment: Effects on the Brain

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