

# ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES) IN IOWA

Understanding risk and resilience to promote positive outcomes

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** are early traumatic events that disrupt healthy development and increase the risk of physical, mental, and behavioral health problems across the lifespan<sup>1</sup>. Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments that support healthy development and can buffer the negative effects of ACEs to promote resilience<sup>2</sup>. This brief contains estimates of ACEs and PCEs for Iowa children compared to the rest of the U.S. using the [National Survey of Children's Health \(NSCH\)](#), a nationally representative, parent-reported survey of child and family well-being supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), U.S. Census Bureau<sup>3</sup>. These estimates were computed to inform the *Iowa Special Emphasis Report: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (2024)*, prepared by I2D2 for the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.

Figure 1. Number of ACEs in Iowa, 2022

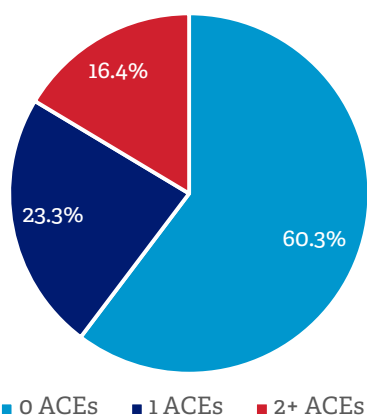
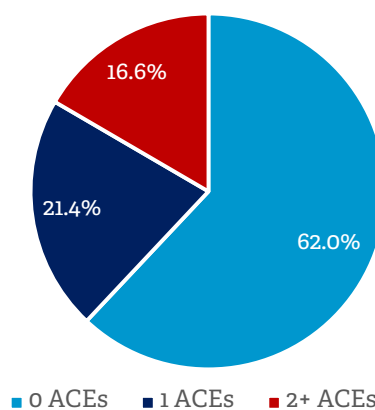
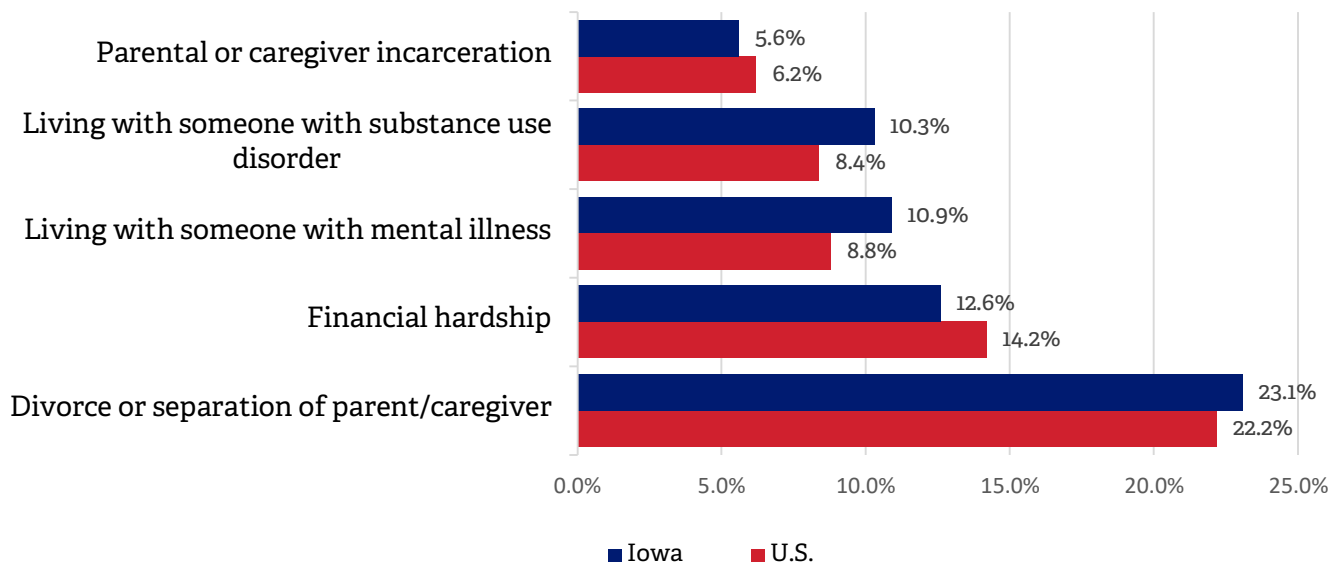


Figure 2. Number of ACEs in the U.S., 2022



Note. Estimates of ACEs for Figures 1, 2, and 3 from the NSCH include all children aged 0-17 years.

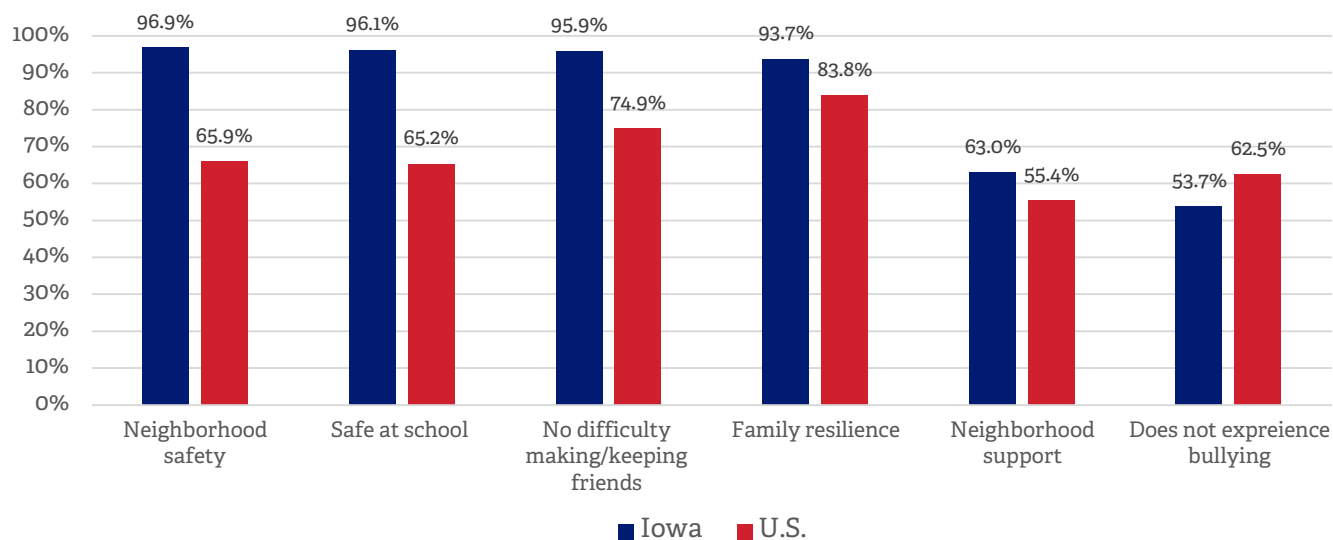
Figure 3. Top Five Types of ACEs, 2022\*



This brief is provided by I2D2, a program of Iowa State University and Early Childhood Iowa committed to putting the state's most informed, passionate, and data-driven resources to work ensuring all children are successful from birth.

**Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)** include factors with potential to promote resilience for children with ACEs. They include having a caregiver who provides safety and emotional support, participating in community traditions, feeling a sense of belonging in school, having positive peer relationships, and living in a safe neighborhood. In 2022, children in Iowa report significantly higher PCEs than national averages, particularly in areas of school and

Figure 4. Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs), 2022



Note. Estimates of PCEs for Figure 4 from the NSCH include children aged 6-17 years.

### Strategies to Support Children

Evidence from the field highlights several evidence-based strategies to address ACEs and increase access to PCEs<sup>4</sup>:

1. Economic supports for families
2. Promotion of protective social norms related to parenting and relationships
3. Access to early childhood supports and services
4. Skill-building for parents and youth
5. Opportunities for children and youth to connect with supportive adults and activities

#### References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Preventing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Leveraging the best available evidence*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *Association of positive childhood experiences with adult mental and relational health and adverse childhood experiences — United States, 2021–2022*. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 73(17), 481–487. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7317a3.html>
3. Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. (2022). *2022 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) data query: Indicator 6.13 Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)*. Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Retrieved August 1, 2024, from <https://www.childhealthdata.org/>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). *Preventing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Leveraging the best available evidence*. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/82316>

### Key Findings

Parental divorce or separation is the most common ACE, affecting about one in four children in Iowa and the U.S. as a whole.

Iowa reports slightly higher rates of parental divorce, household mental illness, and household substance use compared to national estimates.

Children in Iowa report more positive experiences than children nationally. This is especially true for school and neighborhood safety and being able to make and keep friends, with over 95% of children indicating these PCEs.

