



Early Childhood Trauma Prevention

- Factors contributing to childhood trauma and prevention strategies





FAMILY PROFILE

Jessi & Sabrina Holman Franklin County



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Sabrina and Jessi haven't seen any concerning behavior by Austin at school or at home. "He is a happy kid despite everything," says Sabrina. But, as he gets older, the couple knows he may need counseling. For now, "I tell him, 'Your mommy is in heaven, and you can always talk to her,' " Sabrina says. "We keep her spirit very much alive."

In Austin's short four years, he's experienced more trauma than most young children. He was there when his mother overdosed on fentanyl at 28. She didn't realize the marijuana she was smoking was laced with the deadly opioid.

Prior to that day in March 2022, Austin didn't always have a home. Mom, who was in a physically abusive relationship, was in and out of homeless shelters.

After his mother's death, Austin was placed with his maternal grandmother. But she, too, was struggling with issues, financial and otherwise. After a year-long court battle that pitted Austin's grandmother, his biological father, and his maternal aunt against each other, Sabrina Holman, the aunt, and her wife, Jessi, were given full custody of their nephew.

With time, Austin's grandmother has come around to believing her grandson is in the right home. His father is mostly absent.

The lengthy nature of the court fight and the uncertainty of who would prevail was stressful. But now the Columbus couple say they and Austin, who's in his second year of preschool, are doing well. He wants everyone to call him "Aus the Boss," says Jessi, a nickname Austin was given by her siblings.

Sabrina, who has an administrative position at a child care program, and Jessi, who is an early educator, make sure Austin knows his mother loved him, and they talk often about her with him.

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Early Childhood Trauma

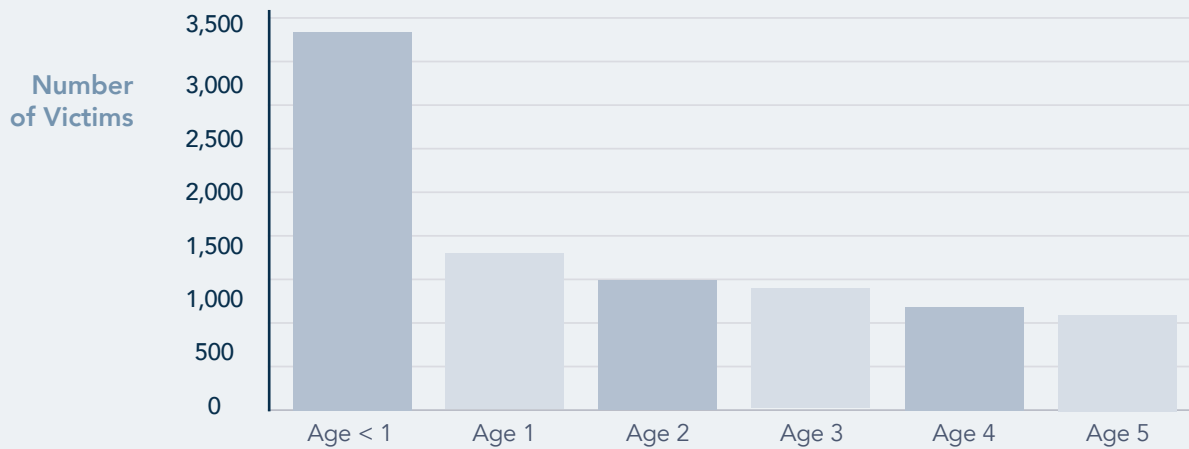
What does the data tell us?

Ohio's youngest children are heavily influenced by caregiving and environmental factors, where negative experiences can have just as much impact as positive ones.

Too many of Ohio's youngest children are growing up in unsafe or unstable conditions, increasing their exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which can lead to a wide range of negative outcomes. In contrast, children exposed to safe, nurturing environments are more likely to be shielded from the long-term harm caused by early adversity and trauma.



1 Maltreatment Victims by Age in Ohio



Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau (2022).

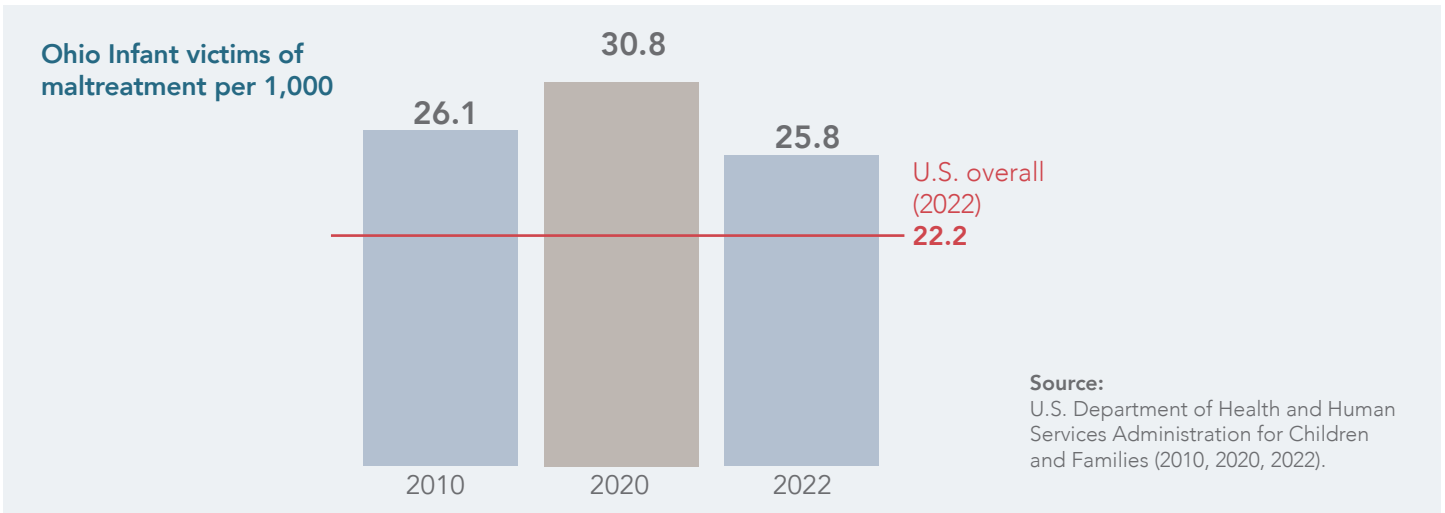


Compared to older children (ages 1-17), Ohio's infants under one are three times more likely to be victims of maltreatment.¹



2 Too Many Children are Victims of Maltreatment

Though infant maltreatment rates have declined since 2019, the overall rate has remained stagnant since 2010.



Though recent data shows improvement in maltreatment rates since 2020, the number of childhood fatalities related to maltreatment has increased.² Two-thirds of all child deaths related to abuse and neglect nationally were among children younger than 3, and almost half were infants under age 1.³



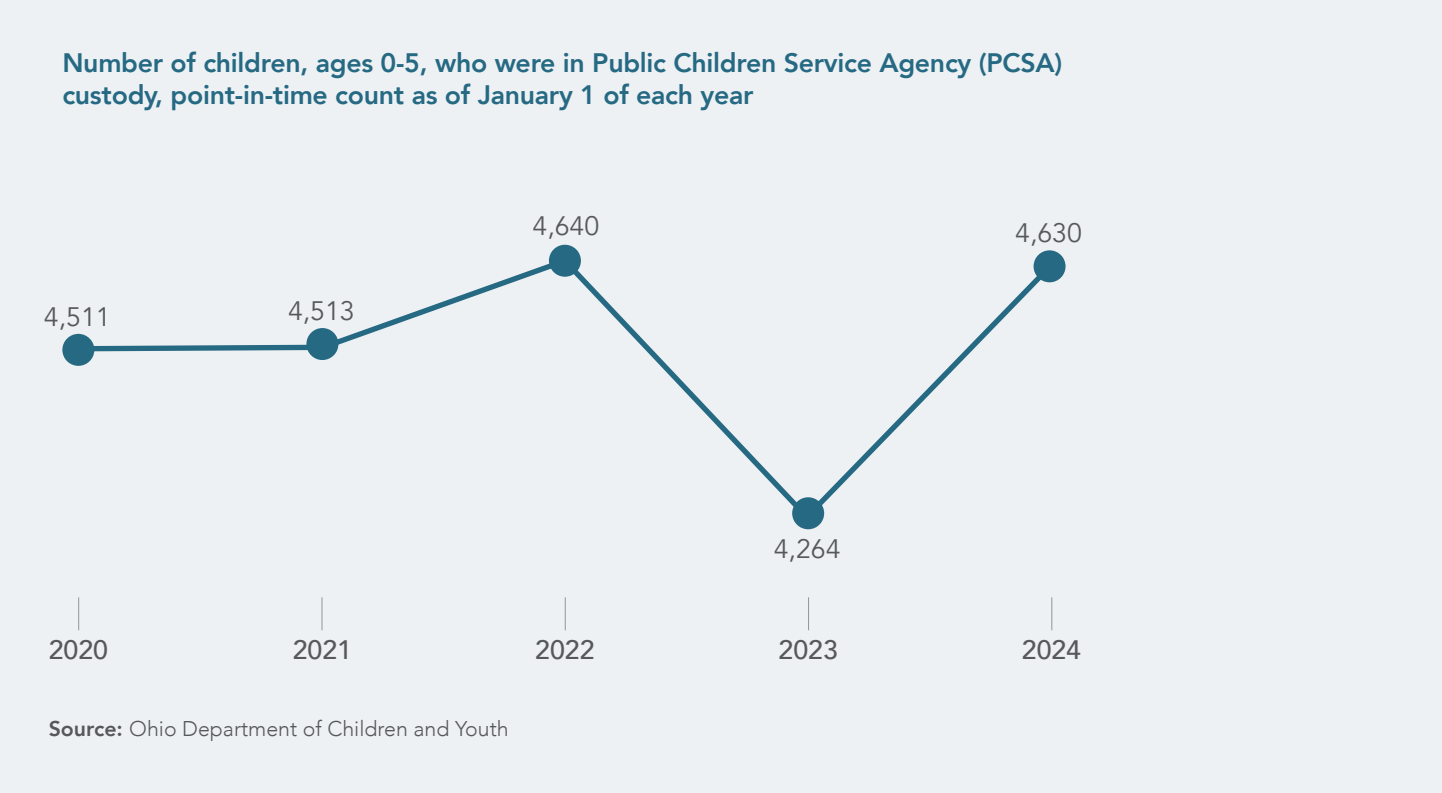
Ohio is ranked 30th of 50 states and D.C. for infant maltreatment, with over 3,000 children under the age of one being victims of maltreatment in 2022.¹





Protective Custody

3 Despite evidence from other states that child abuse and neglect cases were underreported during the pandemic,⁴ the number of young children in protective custody in Ohio increased from 2020 to 2024.




3 The average stay in state custody is 2 years.⁵ The sharp decrease in 2022 suggests this anomaly may result from temporary policy or practice changes during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Ohio's performance

Child Welfare

	Baseline	Most Recent	Trend
Maltreatment, infants. Number of children who experienced maltreatment (child abuse and/or neglect), per 1,000 infants under age 1	30.8 (2020)	25.8 (2022)	Improved
Removal from home for maltreatment. Number of children removed from the home due to abuse and neglect, per 1,000 population, ages 0-5	3.1 (ODCY: 2021 ACS: 2021)	3.1 (ODCY: 2023 ACS: 2022)	No Change
 Removal from home for maltreatment. Number of children removed from the home due to abuse and neglect, per 1,000 population, ages 0-5	Black, non-Hispanic		6.4
	White, non-Hispanic		2.4
	Hispanic		3.3
	Multirace, non-Hispanic		4.7
Protective custody. Number of children, ages 0-5, who were in Public Children Service Agency (PCSA) custody.	4,640 (2022)	4,630 (2024)	No Change
Protective custody, placement type. Percent of children, ages 0-5, who were in Public Children Service Agency (PCSA) custody, by placement type	Pre-adoptive home and family foster home (non-relative) placements		64.3%
	Family foster home (relative) placements		34.3%



4 Black families are disproportionately reported to Child Protective Services, and their cases are more likely to be screened for further investigation compared to other racial groups. This leads to persistent overrepresentation of Black families and children in the child welfare system.⁶



Trauma, Toxic Stress & Household Challenges

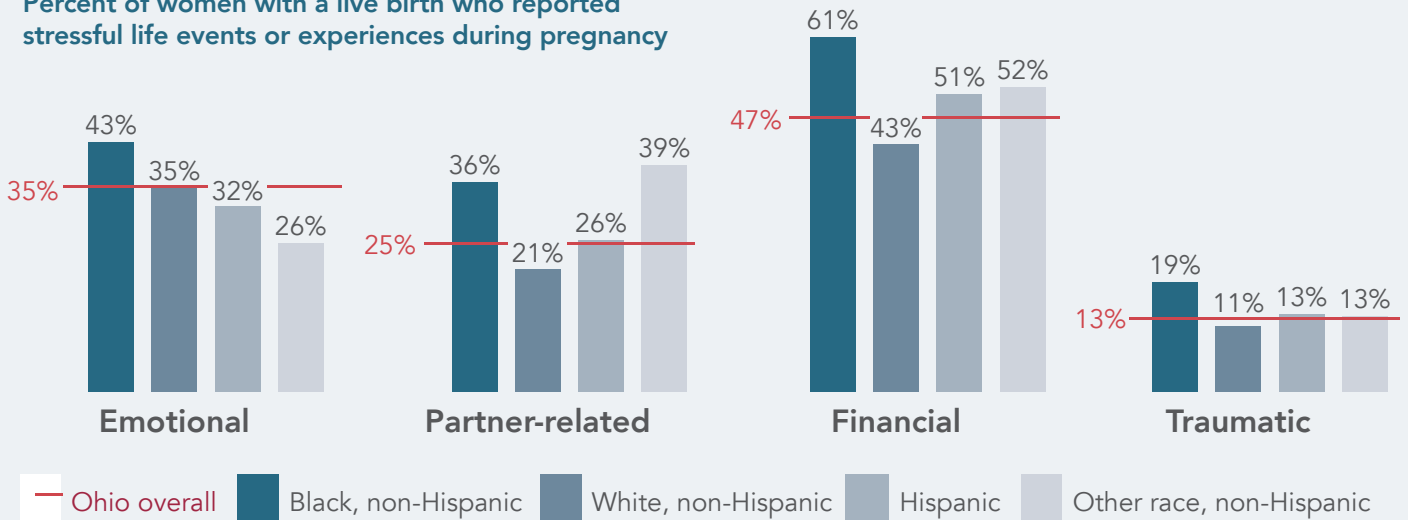
What does the data tell us?

Preventing childhood adversity and trauma is necessary to build a strong foundation for young children in Ohio. Exposure to adversity and trauma in early childhood has both immediate and long-term negative impacts on health and well-being.

Stressful life events or experiences during pregnancy

Black women are more likely than women of other races to report experiencing emotional, financial, and traumatic events during pregnancy. These stressors—such as intimate partner violence and housing or income insecurity—are especially dangerous during pregnancy, elevating the risk of preterm birth, infant mortality, and pre-eclampsia—a leading cause of maternal mortality.

Percent of women with a live birth who reported stressful life events or experiences during pregnancy



Source: Ohio Pregnancy Assessment Survey (2022)

Stressful life events are organized into four primary categories:

- 1. Emotional:** close family member was sick and/or someone close to the mother died.
- 2. Partner-Related:** argued with partner more than usual, partner said pregnancy was unwanted, separated from partner due to military deployment or work travel, or divorce.
- 3. Financial:** difficulty paying bills, partner experienced job loss, reduction of hours or pay.
- 4. Traumatic:** a close friend or family member experiences substance use challenges, partner or self was incarcerated or was homeless.

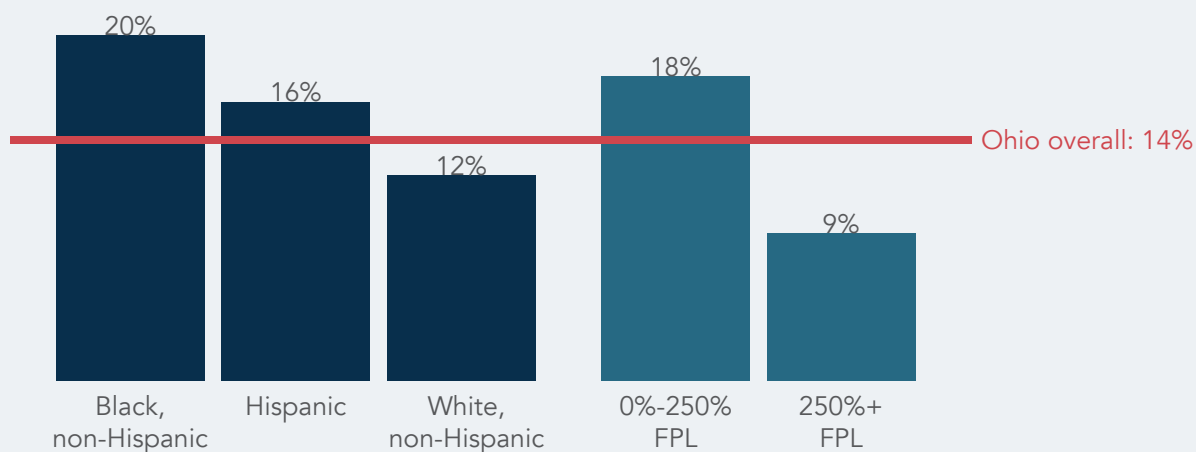


Almost 1 in 3 respondents reported high levels of stress and 65% could benefit from additional resources and support for parenting.⁷

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Using a scale of 0-10 where exposure to an adverse event equates to 1-point, a child with a score of 2 or more is more likely to qualify for special health care needs and repeat a grade at school. Children of color and children living in lower income families are more likely to have experienced two or more ACEs than their peers.⁸

Percent of children, ages 0-5, who experienced two or more ACEs



Source: Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey (2021)

ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood. ACEs are generally grouped into four primary categories:⁹

- 1. Abuse:** including emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.
- 2. Household challenges:** such as substance use, mental illness, or incarceration of a household member.
- 3. Neglect:** including emotional and physical neglect.
- 4. Other:** such as exposure to racism and discrimination, food insecurity, neighborhood safety concerns, or bullying.



Why is it important to prevent early childhood adversity and trauma?

Young Ohioans deserve to grow up in supportive environments that nurture their mental and physical well-being. Sadly, systemic racism, unequal distribution of resources, and generational poverty often lead to adverse childhood experiences.

Children exposed to adversities such as abuse, neglect, or caregiver substance use disorder increase the risk for poor health outcomes later in life. Long-term exposure to stressors related to these and other ACEs can lead to:¹⁰

1. **Disrupted neurological development and emotional, social, and cognitive impairment.**
2. **Adoption of behaviors that increase risk of poor health outcomes.**
3. **Social problems, such as lower educational attainment, reduced earning potential, and unemployment.**
4. **Disease, disability, and early death.**

There are ways we can better support young child development and protect against the harms of ACEs during this important time when children are experiencing rapid physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth. Access to resources like neighborhoods with safe and affordable housing, high-quality early learning experiences, and positive relationships can build resilience and protect against the harms of trauma and adversity.¹¹ It is never too early in a child's life to invest in preventing adversity and trauma, but it can be too late.



Almost 50% of respondents expressed concerns with their child's behavior. More than 70% of respondents reported concerns that their child was showing signs of emotional distress.¹²



Ohio's performance

Trauma, Toxic Stress, & Household Problems

	Baseline	Most Recent	Trend
Stressful life events or experiences during pregnancy.* Percent of women with a live birth who reported stressful life events or experiences during pregnancy	Emotional		35.4%
	Partner-related		25.0%
	Financial		46.8%
	Traumatic		12.8%
Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Percent of children, ages 0-5, who experienced two or more ACEs	17.00% (2019)	14.30% (2021)	Improved
	Black (non-Hispanic)		20.2%
	White (non-Hispanic)		12.0%
	Hispanic		16.3%
	0 – 250% FPL		17.8%
	250% + FPL		8.6%
Supportive neighborhood. Percent of children, ages 0-5, who lived in a supportive neighborhood	N/A	58.6% (2022)	N/A
5 Domestic violence. Percent of children, ages 0-5, who witnessed domestic violence	6.6% (2019)	4.8% (2021)	Greatly Improved
6 Parental incarceration. Percent of children, ages 0-5, with a parent or guardian who served time in jail	10.7% (2019)	7.7% (2021)	Greatly Improved
Mental illness or substance use in the household. Percent of children, ages 0-5, who lived with someone with a mental illness or substance use disorder	18.4% (2019)	15.7% (2021)	Improved

*Disaggregated data is available. All stressful life events are disaggregated by race, income, and rural/urban typology and can be found in the Data Appendix.



5 This data, taken from a Medicaid Assessment Survey, relies on individuals to self-report. Those experiencing domestic violence may not identify their situation as domestic violence.¹³



6 Incarceration is a significant predictor of negative health outcomes for parents and young children alike. Early exposure to the criminal justice system can lead to numerous negative outcomes, including poorer peer relationships, diminished cognitive skills, and a range of mental health challenges.¹⁴



Citations & Sources

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