

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Understanding ACEs

ACEs (**Adverse Childhood Experiences**) are serious childhood traumas that can result in toxic stress. Prolonged exposure to ACEs can create toxic stress, which can damage the developing brain and body of children and affect overall health. Toxic stress may prevent a child from learning or playing in a healthy way with other children, and can cause long-term health problems.

Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.

Increases stress hormones which affect the body's ability to fight infection.

May cause lasting health problems.



Increases problems with learning and memory.

*I can't hear you!
I can't respond to you!
I am just trying to be safe!*

Reduces the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.

Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Asthma
- Depression
- Heart disease
- Intimate partner violence
- Liver disease
- Sexually-transmitted disease
- Smoking
- Suicide

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) can include:

- Abuse: Emotional/physical/sexual
- Bullying/violence of/by another child, sibling, or adult
- Homelessness
- Household: Substance abuse/mental illness/domestic violence/incarceration/parental abandonment, divorce, loss
- Involvement in child welfare system
- Medical trauma
- Natural disasters and war
- Neglect: Emotional/physical
- Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
- Violence in community

! SURVIVAL MODE RESPONSE

Toxic stress increases a child's heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension. Their thinking brain is knocked off-line. Self-protection is their priority.



Help children identify, express and manage emotions.



Create safe physical and emotional environments (home, school, community, systems).



Understand, prevent and respond to ACEs.



“Children with ACEs find ‘resilience’ because an adult provides a safe environment – in which they feel known, validated.”

Donna Jackson Nakazawa

Author of *Childhood Disrupted: How Your Biography Becomes Your Biology & How You Can Heal*

What is resilience?

Research shows that if caregivers provide a safe environment for children and teach them how to be resilient, that helps reduce the effects of ACEs.

What does resilience look like?

Having resilient parents and caregivers who know how to solve problems, have healthy relationships with other adults, and build healthy relationships with children.

Building attachment and nurturing relationships:

Adults who listen and respond patiently to a child in a supportive way, and pay attention to a child's physical and emotional needs.

Building social connections.

Having family, friends, neighbors, community members who support, help and listen to children.



Meeting basic needs:

Provide children with safe housing, nutritious food, appropriate clothing, and access to health care and good education, when possible. Make sure children get enough sleep, rest, and play.

Learning about parenting, caregiving and how children grow:

Understand how caregivers can help children grow in a healthy way, and what to expect from children as they grow.

Building social and emotional skills:

Help children interact in a healthy way with others, manage emotions, communicate their feelings and needs, and rebound after loss and pain.

Resources:

-  [ACEs Too High](#)
-  [ACEs Connection](#)
-  [Resource Center](#)
-  [Parenting with ACEs](#)