

# STRESS & EARLY BRAIN GROWTH

## Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

### What are ACEs?

ACEs are serious childhood traumas -- a list is shown below -- that result in toxic stress that can harm a child's brain. This toxic stress may prevent child from learning, from playing in a healthy way with other children, and can result in long-term health problems.

#### Adverse Childhood Experiences can include:

1. Emotional abuse
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Emotional neglect
5. Physical neglect
6. Mother treated violently
7. Household substance abuse
8. Household mental illness
9. Parental separation or divorce
10. Incarcerated household member
11. Bullying (by another child or adult)
12. Witnessing violence outside the home
13. Witness a brother or sister being abused
14. Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
15. Being homeless
16. Natural disasters and war

#### Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Depression
- Illicit drug use
- Heart disease
- Liver disease
- Multiple sexual partners
- Intimate partner violence
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts
- Unintended pregnancies

### How do ACEs affect health?

**Through stress.** Frequent or prolonged exposure to ACEs can create toxic stress which can damage the developing brain of a child and affect overall health.

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

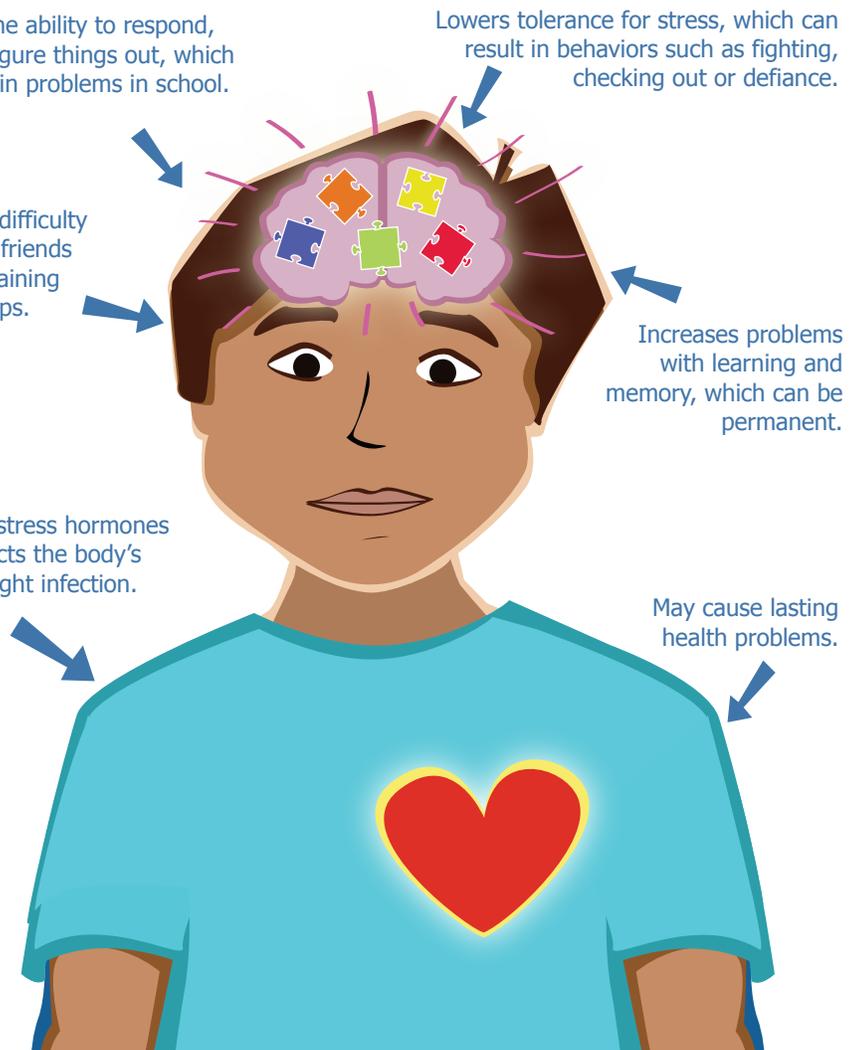
Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.

Increases problems with learning and memory, which can be permanent.

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

May cause lasting health problems.



**A Survival Mode Response** to 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. In other words:  
**"I can't hear you! I can't respond to you! I am just trying to be safe!"**

# The good news is resilience can bring back health and hope!

## What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to return to being healthy and hopeful after bad things happen. Research shows that if parents provide a safe environment for their children and teach them how to be resilient, that helps reduce the effects of ACEs.

## Resilience trumps ACEs!

### Parents, teachers and caregivers can help children by:

- Gaining an understanding of ACEs
- Helping children identify feelings and manage emotions
- Creating safe physical and emotional environments at home, in school, and in neighborhoods

### What does resilience look like?

#### 1. Having resilient parents

Parents who know how to solve problems, who have healthy relationships with other adults, and who build healthy relationships with their children.

#### 2. 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.

#### 3. Building social connections

Having family, friends and/or neighbors who support, help and listen to children.

#### 4. Meeting basic needs

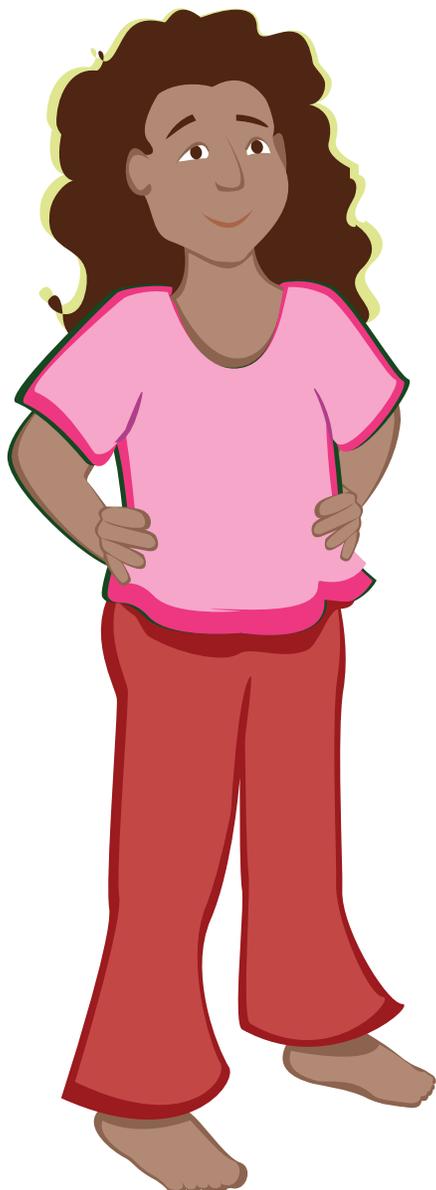
Providing children with safe housing, nutritious food, appropriate clothing, and access to health care and good education.

#### 5. Learning about parenting and how children grow

Understanding how parents can help their children grow in a healthy way, and what to expect from children as they grow.

#### 6. Building social and emotional skills

Helping children interact in a healthy way with others, manage their emotions and communicate their feelings and needs.



### Resources:

#### ACES 101

<http://acestoohigh.com/aces-101/>

#### Triple-P Parenting

[www.triplep-parenting.net/glo-en/home/](http://www.triplep-parenting.net/glo-en/home/)

#### Resilience Trumps ACEs

[www.resiliencetrumpsACEs.com](http://www.resiliencetrumpsACEs.com)

#### CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

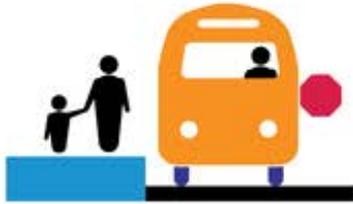
[www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/)

#### Zero to Three Guides for Parents

<http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/areas-of-expertise/free-parent-brochures-and-guides/>



# DOs AND DON'Ts OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED COMPASSIONATE CLASSROOM



## 1 CREATE A SAFE SPACE

Consider not only physical safety but the children's emotional safety as well.

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## 2 ESTABLISH PREDICTABILITY

Write out a schedule and prepare children for transitions. It helps create a sense of security and safety.



## 3 BUILD A SENSE OF TRUST

Follow through with your promises and in situations where changes are unavoidable be transparent with your explanations.

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## 4 OFFER CHOICES

Empower students and offer "power with" rather than "power over" strategies.



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## 5 STAY REGULATED

Help your students (and yourself!) stay in the "Resiliency Zone" to promote optimum learning. Have regulation tools ready to help students bumped out of the zone into either hyperarousal (angry, nervous, panicky) or hypoarousal (numb, depressed, fatigued).



There's really only one **DON'T**  
Let's not punish kids for behaviors that are trauma symptoms.



### **ACEs: Getting Free / Low Cost Help Now**

- Call 211 <https://fcmha.org/how-we-help/24-hour-mha-call-center>  
2-1-1 operates 24 hours a day, and services are available in more than 150 languages. 2-1-1 is answered by trained specialists who assess callers' needs and link them to the right solutions using a comprehensive database of federal, state, and local services.
- Heartly House: 301-662-8800 <https://www.heartlyhouse.org/>  
Provides comprehensive services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.
- Mental Health Association Walk In Clinic: 301-663-0011 <https://fcmha.org/>  
Through education, advocacy, empowerment, and treatment, MHA helps everyone face their challenges and make lasting positive changes.

### **Learn About ACEs**

- Incorporating Trauma-Sensitive Practices into Schools: A collection of resources for schools. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/trauma/school-resources>
- TED TALK: How Childhood Trauma Affects People Across a Lifetime [https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime)
- Centers for Disease Control: A collection of resources on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including the original study and relevant data. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>
- The Childhood Adversity Narratives: Opportunities To Change The Outcomes Of Traumatized Children <http://www.canarratives.org/>

### **Taking Action to Address ACEs in Schools**

- Resources for Schools, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction <http://www.traumainformedcareproject.org/resources/bibliography%20of%20resources%20for%20schools%20to%20be%20trauma%20informed.PDF>.
- Six ways to become a trauma informed school <https://nationalresilienceminstitute.org/2017/05/6-ways-become-trauma-informed-school/>.
- A school project in Massachusetts <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>.
- Information on being trauma informed from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [https://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume\\_22\\_Number\\_2/trauma\\_tip/guiding\\_principles.html](https://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume_22_Number_2/trauma_tip/guiding_principles.html) and a division in SAMHSA to assist organizations in becoming trauma informed <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/about>.
- Survey about how ready an organization is to be trauma informed [http://www.traumainformedcareproject.org/resources/Traumam%20Informed%20Organizational%20Survey\\_9\\_13.pdf](http://www.traumainformedcareproject.org/resources/Traumam%20Informed%20Organizational%20Survey_9_13.pdf).