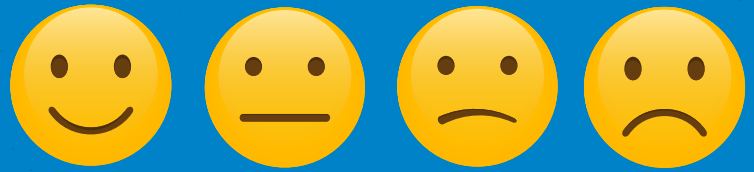


ACEs



ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Toxic Stress

Positive stress, like the first day of school or a sports challenge, is part of growing up. But when events or a child's environment are repeatedly threatening or harmful, putting kids on "red alert" over time, that's toxic stress. Stress is more harmful when kids don't have caring adults to help them recover and develop coping strategies.

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) are specific instances of toxic stress, and can include:

- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Loss of parent through divorce, incarceration or death
- Physical or emotional neglect
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Inadequate housing or lack of food
- Serious or repeated medical needs
- Living with a parent who abuses substances or has untreated mental illness



Toxic stress can alter our biology, passing on problems from generation to generation. Also, parents of kids who experience toxic stress may themselves have multiple ACEs, which can affect how they are able to support their children. Intervening with families across generations is essential in combating the effects of toxic stress.

Instead of asking a child:

"What's wrong with you?"

We ask:

"What happened to you?"

A strong relationship with a caring adult is the most important protective factor for kids.



Understanding a child's trauma history can help us understand their behavior.



Children's
Hospital of Wisconsin

Kids deserve the best.



ACEs

ADVERSE
CHILDHOOD
EXPERIENCES

- Studies show most people in the U.S. have **at least one** ACE
- People with four or more ACEs have a greatly increased risk of chronic health problems like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, alcoholism and suicide
- **14%** of Wisconsin residents have experienced 4 or more ACEs
- **40%** of Wisconsin children have at least one ACE

Effects of Toxic Stress

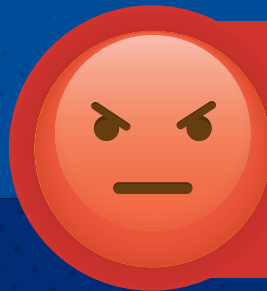
Behavioral results:

- Difficulty with learning, memory and self-regulation
- Problems building healthy relationships
- Difficulty concentrating, focusing or completing tasks
- Problems holding a job
- Oppositional behaviors leading to disciplinary problems, school expulsion, incarceration

Physical results:

A “red alert” state causes the body to pump adrenaline and cortisol continually, causing:

- Increased blood pressure
- Weakening of heart and circulatory system
- Type 2 diabetes
- Poor immune response
- Chronic inflammation



RED ALERT

Over time, living in “red alert” mode – a constant state of fight or flight – damages kids’ bodies and developing brains. Kids who experience toxic stress and aren’t protected by a **supportive environment or family member** may develop a host of “acting out” behaviors, or may withdraw and become disengaged.

Resilience

The way we understand kids who have experienced trauma is changing. Kids’ brains can change and the body wants to heal.

Protective factors are like a shield that can make the consequences of ACEs or traumatic stress less severe. The most important is a strong caring relationship with one adult (parent, family member or other).

Resilience is a skill that can be learned. The presence and participation of a caring adult or parent is critical to helping kids build resilience.



WE CAN HELP KIDS BUILD RESILIENCE THROUGH:

- Interventions like Parent Child Interaction Therapy and Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Teaching mindfulness and social interactions skills
- Community advocacy to help reduce the incidence of toxic stress
- Evidence-based parenting practices