

# Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

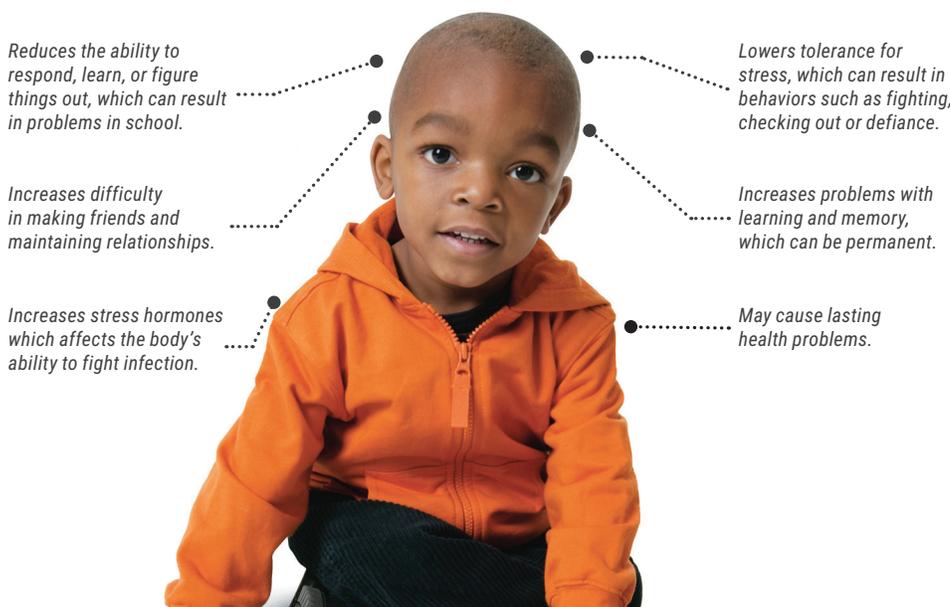


## What are ACEs?

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 a child from learning, from playing in a healthy way with other children and can result in long-term health problems.

## 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.



### Adverse Childhood Experiences can include:

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member
- Bullying (by another child or adult)
- Witnessing violence outside the home
- Witness a brother or sister being abused
- Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
- Being homeless
- Natural disasters and war

**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!”**

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

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

# 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, the effects of ACEs are reduced.

## Resilience trumps ACEs!

Parents, teachers and caregivers can help children by:

- Gaining an understanding of ACEs
- Creating environments where children feel safe emotionally and physically
- Helping children identify feelings and manage emotions
- Creating a safe physical and emotional environment 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 10

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

### CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

<http://cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy>

### Children's Trust of South Carolina

<http://scchildren.org>

### Triple-P Parenting

<http://triplep-parenting.net/glo-en/home>

### Resilience Trumps ACEs

<http://resiliencetrumpsACEs.com>

### Strengthening Families: A Protective Factor Framework

<http://cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies>

### Zero to Three Guides for Parents

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



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