# 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:

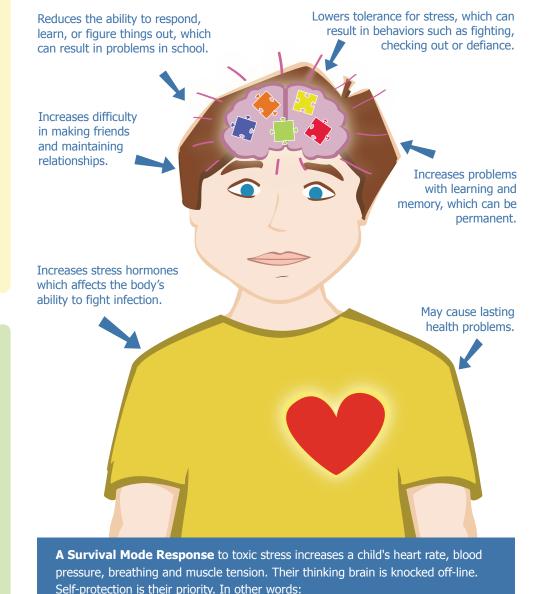
- 1. Emotional abuse
- 2. Physical abuse
- 3. Sexual abuse
- 4. Emotional neglect
- 5. Physical neglect
- 6. Mother treated violently
- 7. Household substance abuse
- 8. Household mental illness
- 9. Parental separation or divorce
- 10. Incarcerated household member
- 11. Bullying (by another child or 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.



"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/

Resilience Trumps ACEs www.resiliencetrumpsACEs.com

#### CDC-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/ace study/

#### Zero to Three Guides for Parents

http://www.zerotothree.org/aboutus/areas-of-expertise/freeparent-brochures-and-guides/

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