

Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

What are ACEs?

ACEs are significant childhood traumas as identified below which can result in actual changes in brain development. These changes may affect a child's learning ability, social skills, and can result in long-term health problems. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) views ACEs as one of the major health issues in the 21st century.

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

Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Depression
- Early initiation of sexual activity
- Early initiation of smoking
- Fetal death
- Health-related quality of life
- Illicit drug use
- Ischemic heart disease (IHD)
- Liver disease
- Multiple sexual partners
- Risk for 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 ability to respond, learn, or process effectively which can result in problems in school

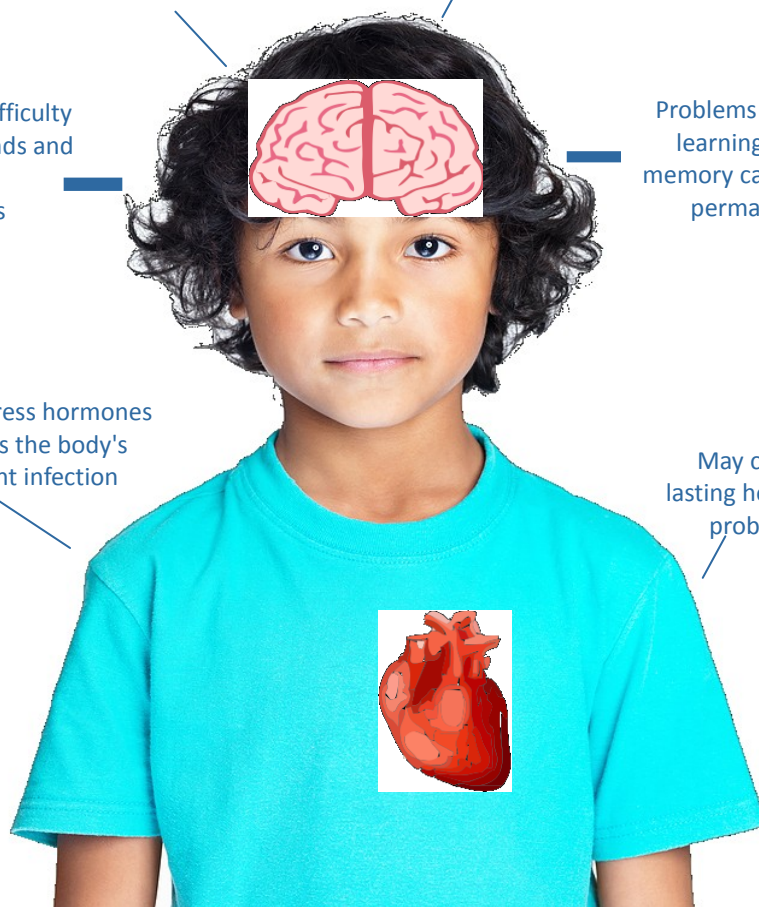
Lower tolerance for stress can result in behaviors such as aggression, checking out, and defiance

May have difficulty making friends and maintaining relationships

Problems with learning and memory can be permanent

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

May cause lasting health problems



A **Survival Mode Response** is one that increases heart rate, blood pressure, breathing and muscle tension. When a child is in survival mode, 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 brings hope!



What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to adjust (or bounce back) when bad things happen. Research shows resilience helps reduce the effects of ACEs. Protective factors are internal and external resources that help us to build our resilience.

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 protective factors at home, schools and in communities

What are protective factors?

- 1. Parental resilience**
Increasing parents' ability to problem-solve and build relationships with their child and others
- 2. Nurturing and attachment**
Listening and responding to a child in a supportive way and discovering and paying attention to the child's physical and emotional needs
- 3. Social connections**
Having family, friends or neighbors who are supportive and willing to help or listen when needed
- 4. Concrete supports**
Having their child's basic needs met, such as housing, food, clothing and health care
- 5. Knowledge of parenting and child development**
Increasing parents' knowledge of their child's development and appropriate expectations for their child's behavior
- 6. Social and emotional competence of children**
Helping their child to interact positively with others, manage emotions and communicate feelings

Resources:

Aces Too High

<http://acestoohigh.com>

CDC Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study
www.cdc.gov/ace/about.htm

Strengthening Families

www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies

Zero to Three Guides for Parents

<http://www.zerotothree.org>

Santa Barbara County ACEs Connection

<http://www.acesconnection.com/g/santa-barbara-county-aces-connection>