



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Mental Health Newsletter

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Trauma, Toxic Stress, and Resilience

When families, early childhood and home visiting programs understand the impact of trauma and toxic stress and work to build trusting positive relationships, children can thrive. For instance, we know that when the stress response systems in the body and brain are activated over long periods of time, healthy development can be derailed.¹ Unfortunately, adversity that causes significant stress (e.g. child abuse, neglect, separation from primary caregivers, family mental illness and substance abuse, domestic violence, etc.) is all too common in the lives of young children and their families. Many studies including the ACES study (adverse childhood experiences) have demonstrated a strong link between childhood trauma (significant adversity) and developmental and health problems throughout life. In fact, the more adverse experiences a child has been exposed to, the higher the risks are for health and mental health problems.² However, traumatic or early adverse experiences do not have the same impact on every child.



Families and other caregivers who provide nurturing and responsive care can be the key ingredient to supporting a child’s resilience. Review the resources below to learn more about trauma, toxic stress, and resilience.

September is [National Preparedness Month](#). While emergencies are never planned, being prepared can make a big difference in helping children and adults feel as safe as possible. Preparing for emergencies includes having specific conversations with the program’s mental health consultant and community mental health providers about their availability to support the program after a crisis or emergency.

¹ (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2005/2014). Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper 3. Updated Edition. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>).

² <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acesstudy/index.html>



What's Relevant on ECLKC

Supplemental Resource to the Head Start Emergency Preparedness Manual: 2015 Edition—Responding to Crises and Tragic Events: Information and Handouts

These tip sheets and sample letters were developed to help you respond to the needs of staff and families. These resources can be used if your program has been directly affected by a crisis. They can also be used if a recent event in the news has raised awareness of the need for emergency planning. They are designed for you to use and adapt to your unique situation.

Breaking Through: Video and User's Guide to Understand and Address Toxic Stress

View this 20-minute educational video to learn how toxic stress can impact a child's lifelong health and well-being. Also, find out how Head Start programs and health care professionals can support children and families to help prevent toxic stress. The user-friendly guide shows how best to use this resource. It also includes a breakdown of the video segments by topic area.

Silent Realities: Supporting Young Children and Their Families Who Experience Domestic Violence

Older children and adults are affected by exposure to violence, but it is a common belief that young children are not completely aware of their surroundings and remain unaffected. This belief is a myth. Children are affected by their exposure to violence, but often lack the ability to cope. Family services, parent involvement, and other social services staff may use this resource to design programs to help young children cope with traumatic events.

For Families

Tips for Talking to Children After a Disaster

Children respond to trauma in many different ways. This information may help parents and teachers identify the signs, recognize problems, and respond appropriately to children and toddlers coping with trauma, change, and loss. Children from age 1 to 5 find it particularly hard to adjust to change and loss. They have not yet developed their own coping skills, so they must depend on parents, family members, and teachers to help them through difficult times

Other Resources

Social and Behavioral Determinants of Toxic Stress

In this science talk, David Williams of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health looks at the social and behavioral factors—including socioeconomic status, race, discrimination, and place—that play a role in triggering toxic stress for children and adults. He also discusses what effective solutions for reducing toxic stress and improving health must look like.

Key Concepts—Toxic Stress

Extensive research on the biology of stress now shows that healthy development can be derailed by excessive or prolonged activation of stress response systems in the body and brain. Such toxic stress can have damaging effects on learning, behavior, and health across the lifespan. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University provides a variety of resources on toxic stress.

Key Concepts—Resilience

Reducing the effects of [significant adversity](#) on children's healthy development is essential to the progress and prosperity of any society. Science tells us that some children develop resilience, or the ability to overcome serious hardship, while others do not. Understanding why some children do well despite adverse early experiences is crucial, because it can inform more effective policies and programs that help more children reach their full potential. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University provides a variety of resources on resilience and early childhood.

Make Sure to Check Out These Audio-casts, Webinars & Webcasts Focused on Trauma, Toxic Stress, and Resilience

Adverse Childhood Experiences: Early Experiences DO Matter!

View this plenary webcast from the 17th Annual Virtual Birth to Three Institute which provides an overview of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study with specific



emphasis on the study's findings and implications most related to the Early and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start population. The plenary discusses how early childhood experiences are powerful indicators

of adult health, functioning, and well-being. Specific attention is given to the impact of primary prevention on children and families, including potentially decreasing the influence of risk factors, building resilience with families, and breaking the intergenerational cycle of adverse experiences.

The Impact of Trauma and Toxic Stress on Infant and Toddler Development

Early Head Start caregivers, teachers, and parents are central in the lives of infants and toddlers who have experienced toxic stress. In this webinar, learn from panelists the impact of trauma and toxic stress on brain and social-emotional growth. Strategies for adults to use in supporting very young children are also discussed.

Little Listeners in an Uncertain World

In the wake of devastating acts of terrorism and natural disasters, programs continue to be challenged to provide stability, security, and support to children and families. In reality, children and families across the country experience trauma from less publicized community events on a daily

basis. What can program staff do to provide optimal support to children and families? In this audiocast, listen to a program's staff discuss their real-life experiences with community trauma as they highlight principles for practice in working with families and young children affected by catastrophic events.

Promoting Resilience and School Readiness: What Does It Take? Plenary

View this webcast from the Office of Head Start's 2nd National Birth to Five Leadership' Institute to learn more about promoting resilience in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Partnering with Families Who Are Coping with Adversity

Many families are struggling with and experiencing increased levels of adversity. View this webinar from the 17th Annual Virtual Birth to Three Institute to learn about supporting families facing these the challenges and locating resources within the community to lessen any negative impact. How programs ensure that their community partnerships support the needs of the families they serve is also explored.

Providing a Safe Haven to Expectant Families and Infants, Toddlers and Their Families in Your Program

Listen to this audiocast from the Early Head Start National Resource Center, learn the federal definition of homelessness and identify causes of homelessness. Faculty also identify health and developmental concerns for young children that stem from homelessness and offer programmatic strategies to support families experiencing homelessness.



NATIONAL CENTER ON Early Childhood Health and Wellness

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call (888) 227-5125.

Subscribe or view all issues of the Mental Health Services Newsletter on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/newsletters/newsletters.html>.

School readiness begins with health!