



NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

# Toxic Stress, Trauma and Early Childhood



Child abuse, neglect, separation from primary caregivers, family mental illness and substance abuse, and domestic violence are common adverse experiences that can cause significant stress in the lives of young children and their families. Many studies such as the ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) Study have demonstrated a strong link between childhood trauma and developmental and health problems throughout life. The more adverse experiences a child has been exposed to, the higher the risk for health and mental health problems. However, traumatic or early adverse experiences do not have the same effect on every child. When families, early childhood programs and home visitors understand the effects of trauma and toxic stress and build trusting positive relationships, children can thrive.

The resources here provide insight into caring for children experiencing trauma or toxic stress. The handout, *Promoting Resilience*, provides more information for caregivers who seek to counter the effects of adversity experienced by young children.

## For Program Managers

### Tackling Toxic Stress

In this series of articles from the Center on the Developing Child, find out how the topic of toxic stress has driven federal research and policy changes.



*“The antidote to toxic stress is safe, stable, and nurturing relationships.”  
Andrew Garner, M.D., Ph.D.,  
former chair of the American Academy  
of Pediatrics (AAP)*

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

It is a myth that young children are not completely aware of their surroundings and remain unaffected by violence. 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 Practitioners**

#### **Fostering Healing Through Trauma-Informed Practices**

Programs can adopt trauma-informed practices and strategies such as creating a physically and emotionally safe space for children and families as well as understanding how trauma impacts children, families, staff, communities and systems.

### **Understanding Trauma in an Early Childhood Context**

In this webinar experts explore what trauma is and how to recognize its signs and symptoms in young children. They also discuss strategies to promote resilience in children and the adults who care for them.

### **ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions**

A summary of toxic stress and trauma, and how it affects young children. Links to other resources regarding the effect on brain architecture, the social determinants of toxic stress, neglect, and resilience are available.

### **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 affect a child’s lifelong health and well-being. Find out how Head Start programs and health care professionals can support children and families to help prevent toxic stress. The user’s guide shows how best to use this resource.

### **Supporting Recovery After Trauma**

This web page offers multiple resources for early educators on how to address traumatic experiences of varying types for young children and their families.



### **Spotlight on Child Maltreatment: Building Resilience in the Face of Adversity**

An effective way to support children who have experienced maltreatment is to help them build resilience in the face of adversity. This information explores practices for building resilience in children with disabilities or suspected delays who have also experienced maltreatment.

### **Promoting Empathy, Understanding Trauma**

This two-part webinar training equips teachers with the tools to understand trauma and its effect on young children and manage their own reactions. It assists program leaders with approaches to build organizational capacity to serve children and families affected by traumatic events.

## **For Families**

### **Helping Your Child Cope After a Disaster**

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. This tip sheet advises parents on how best to support young children after a disaster.

### **Parent Tips for Helping Infants and Toddlers After Disasters**

This tool from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network helps parents understand the challenging and sometimes confusing behaviors of very young children in response to a disaster. By explaining the behaviors and providing concrete steps to address each behavior, parents are able to support the resilience of very young children after a traumatic event. Also available in [Spanish](#).

### **Children and Domestic Violence**

In this series of parent handouts, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, talks to parents frankly about how they can support their child who experiences or witnesses domestic violence. Topics include keeping children safe, talking about feelings, celebrating a child's strengths, and parental self-care. Available also in [Spanish](#).



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Contact Us: The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback as well as your suggestions for topics for future resources!

Please forward your comments to: [health@ecetta.info](mailto:health@ecetta.info) or call us at 888-227-5125.

***School readiness begins with health!***