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.

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 the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.
- Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.
- Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.
- Increases problems with learning and memory, which can be permanent.
- Increases stress hormones which affects the body’s ability to fight infection.
- May cause lasting health problems.

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!”
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
- 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 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/acesudy/
- **Zero to Three Guides for Parents**

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