

What is toxic stress?

When a child goes through prolonged or repetitive difficult experiences like losing a parent, getting bullied, or being exposed to violence, the stress builds up inside their body. If we don't do anything to help them process, manage, and reduce that stress, it can build up and turn into something called toxic stress. This can cause all sorts of problems down the line, from developmental challenges to serious health issues.

1 in 3 California kids could be at risk for toxic stress.

By knowing what can cause toxic stress, you can help your child through hard times when they need you the most. Experiencing hard things, or ongoing difficult situations, also called adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), without the right support to heal can lead to toxic stress. Some of the causes include:

- Loss of a loved one
- Divorce
- Mental illness
- Caregiver substance use
- Experiencing abuse
- Instability
- Neglect
- Witnessing violence
- Discrimination and racism
- Intergenerational and cultural trauma

The effects of toxic stress

Toxic stress can affect anyone, but it's especially harmful to young children. And without the right support, toxic stress can impact them throughout their life.

Near-Term Impacts:

- Lowered immunity
- Learning challenges
- Behavioral problems
- More emotional outbursts
- Trouble sleeping
- Anxiety
- Depression

Long-Term Impacts:

- Lower academic achievement
- Serious health conditions
- Chronic mental illnesses
- Increased substance use
- Violent behavior
- Unemployment and poverty

How to prevent toxic stress

As much as we wish it was possible to stop anything bad from happening in a child's life, we can't control everything. But parents and caregivers can create an even more supportive environment to help kids learn how to process hard things.

Here are 4 ways to support your child and prevent toxic stress:

Be calm

Calmness creates a peaceful environment that helps kids manage their emotions.

Be steady

Consistency helps make the world a little more predictable for kids.

Be there

Singing, reading, and playing with kids helps their brain grow.

Be nurturing

Showing love and affection builds a safe and secure connection.



**Stop toxic stress
before it starts.**

Scan the QR code to see more tips and additional resources.



**Give your child
a stronger
start without
toxic stress.**



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