

Neurodevelopmental Disabilities and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

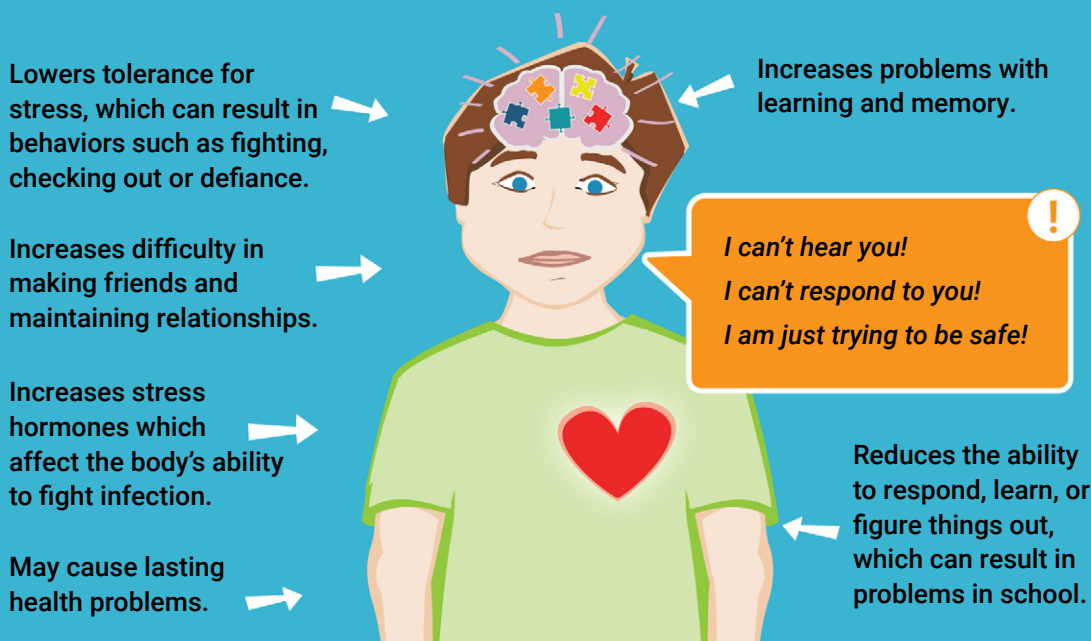


What are ACEs?

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are serious childhood traumas that can result in toxic stress.
- Prolonged toxic stress can damage the developing brain and body and affect overall long-term health outcomes.
- Due to increased isolation, limited access to support services, and family hardship during the COVID-19 global pandemic, recent studies suggest children and youth are at an increased risk of ACEs.

Neurodevelopmental Disabilities and ACEs

- Children with neurodevelopmental disabilities (NDD) are more likely to be victims of, and less able to report, abuse.
- Recent studies found that one in three children with disabilities have experienced at least one ACE.
- The five most prevalent ACEs for children with disabilities were related to food and housing, parental divorce, alcohol/drug use, parent/guardian incarceration, and abuse by an adult, all related to family challenges.
- Children with autism and other NDDs are less likely to be screened for trauma and ACEs.



Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

- Adolescent pregnancy
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Asthma
- Depression
- Heart disease
- Intimate partner violence
- Liver disease
- Sexually-transmitted disease
- Smoking
- Suicide

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) can include:

- Abuse: Emotional/physical/sexual
- Bullying/violence of/by another child, sibling, or adult
- Homelessness
- Household: Substance abuse/mental illness/domestic violence/incarceration/parental abandonment, divorce, loss
- Involvement in child welfare system
- Medical trauma
- Natural disasters/war/pandemics
- Neglect: Emotional/physical
- Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
- Violence in community

! Survival Mode Response

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.



Help children identify, express, and manage emotions.



Create safe physical and emotional environments (home, school, community, systems).



Understand, prevent, and respond to ACEs.

What is resilience?

Research shows that if caregivers provide a safe environment for children and teach them how to be resilient, that helps reduce the effects of ACEs.

What does resilience look like?

Having resilient parents and caregivers who know how to solve problems, have healthy relationships with other adults, and build healthy relationships with children.

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.

Building social connections:

Having family, friends, neighbors, community members who support, help, and listen to children.

Learning about parenting, caregiving and how children grow:

Understand how caregivers can help children grow in a healthy way, and what to expect from children as they grow.

Building social and emotional skills:

Help children interact in a healthy way with others, manage emotions, communicate their feelings and needs, and rebound after loss and pain.

Meeting basic needs:

Provide children with safe housing, nutritious food, appropriate clothing, and access to health care and good education, when possible. Make sure children get enough sleep, rest, and play.



How adults can help children with NDD during COVID-19 and other ACEs

- **Schedules** improve consistency and predictability. Visuals can help provide cues and prepare the child.
- **Coping with Emotions:** Acknowledge and validate the emotional stress the child may be experiencing. Model coping skills, such as taking deep breaths, taking a break, or asking for help from others when overwhelmed.
- **Control and Choices:** Use visuals to help the child understand what the child can and cannot control. Providing the child with choices when you can allow them a sense of control.

Community Resources



The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted many families and has created additional emotional and financial stress. Below are local organizations that can help connect you to resources.

- **KidCentral TN**
www.kidcentraltn.com
kid.central@tn.gov
- **Tennessee Disability Pathfinder**
DisabilityPathfinder.org
(800) 640-4638

