

Michigan ACE Initiative

Stress & Early Brain Development

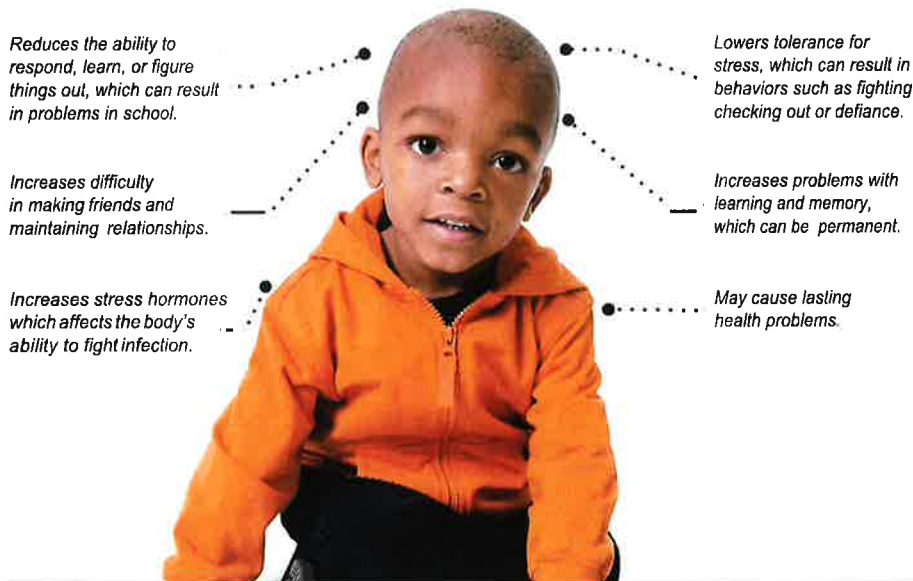
Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

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 a 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.



Adverse Childhood Experiences can include:

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member
- Bullying (by another child or adult)
- Witnessing violence outside the home
- Witness a brother or sister being abused
- Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination
- Being homeless
- Natural disasters and war

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!”

Exposure to childhood ACEs can increase the risk of:

Adolescent pregnancy
Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
Depression
Heart disease
Illicit drug use

Intimate partner violence
Liver disease
Multiple sexual partners
Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

Smoking
Suicide attempts
Unintended pregnancy

The good news-Resilience Brings 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, the effects of ACEs are reduced.

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

Resilient parents who know how to solve problems, who have healthy relationships with other adults 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

Helping children interact in a healthy way
With others, manage their emotions and
Communicate their feelings and needs

6. Building social and emotional skills

Understanding how parents can help their children grow in a healthy way and what to expect from children as they grow

Resources

www.miace.org

www.mahp.org/foundation

Resilience Trumps ACEs

www.resiliencetrumpsaces.org

CDC Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study

www.cdc.gov/ace/about.htm

The MAHP Foundation received funding from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund to support the Creating Healing Communities: A Statewide Initiative to Address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Michigan. [Learn more here.](#)

