



A collaboration of individuals and organizations that work together to make sure that all families can raise healthy children from the start.

The Impact of Early Adversity on Children's Development

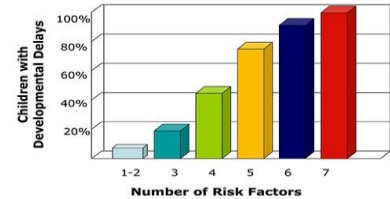
Early Experiences Influence the Brain

From the prenatal period through the first years of life, the brain undergoes its most rapid development, and early experiences determine whether its architecture is sturdy or fragile. During early sensitive periods of development, the brain's circuitry is most open to the influence of external experiences, for better or for worse. During these sensitive periods, healthy emotional and cognitive development is shaped by responsive, dependable interactions with adults, while chronic or extreme adversity can interrupt normal brain development. For example, children who were placed shortly after birth into orphanages with conditions of severe neglect show dramatically decreased brain activity compared to children who were never institutionalized.

Chronic stress can be toxic to developing brains.

Learning how to cope with adversity is an important part of healthy child development. When we are threatened, our bodies activate a variety of physiological responses, including increases in heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones such as cortisol. When a young child is protected by supportive relationships with adults, he learns to cope with everyday challenges and his stress response system returns to baseline. Scientists call this positive stress. Tolerable stress occurs when more serious difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, or a frightening injury, are buffered by caring adults who help the child adapt, which mitigates the potentially damaging effects of abnormal levels of stress hormones. When strong, frequent, or prolonged adverse experiences such as extreme poverty or repeated abuse are experienced without adult support, stress becomes toxic, as excessive cortisol disrupts developing brain circuits.

Significant Adversity Impairs Development in the First Three Years



Toxic stress experienced early in life and common precipitants of toxic stress—such as poverty, abuse or neglect, parental substance abuse or mental illness, and exposure to violence—can have a cumulative toll on an individual's physical and mental health. The more adverse experiences in childhood, the greater the likelihood of developmental delays and other problems. Adults with more adverse experiences in early childhood are also more likely to have health problems, including alcoholism, depression, heart disease, and diabetes.

Early Intervention can prevent the consequences of early intervention.

Research shows that later interventions are likely to be less successful—and in some cases are ineffective. For example, when the same children who experienced extreme neglect were placed in responsive foster care families before age two, their IQs increased more substantially, and their brain activity and attachment relationships were more likely to become normal than if they were placed after the age of two. While there is no “magic age” for intervention, it is clear that, in most cases, intervening as early as possible is significantly more effective than waiting.

Suggested citation: Center on the Developing Child (2007). *The Impact of Early Adversity on Child Development* (InBrief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.



Upcoming ACES SUMMIT

Dec 4-7; Registration is still open

Click here

<https://azaces.org/summit2023>

Articles and More

ACEs, and adversity's impact

- [Is childhood adversity a lens for moral judgments?](#)
- [Early childhood adversity and body mass index in childhood and adolescence: linking registry data on adversities with school health records of 53,401 children from Copenhagen](#)
- [Is trauma the same thing as adversity?](#)
- [Impact of childhood maltreatment on adult resilience](#)
- [History of adverse childhood events linked to increased risk of head or neck injury and concussion](#)

Resources

[How to Prioritize Self-Care During the Holidays | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

[Taking Good Care of Yourself | Mental Health America \(mhanational.org\)](#)



Self-care tips for the Holidays!

1. Know and Respect Your Limits
2. Set Reasonable Expectations
3. Avoid Known Triggers
4. Find Ways To Give Back
5. Decorate For Comfort
6. Be Extra Giving To Yourself

Some tips for self-care include:

- **Live Healthy**, eat healthy foods, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, and avoid drugs and alcohol. Manage stress and go for regular medical check-ups.
- **Practice good hygiene**. Good hygiene is important for social, medical, and psychological reasons in that it not only reduces the risk of illness, but it also improves the way others view you and how you view yourself.
- **See friends** to build your sense of belonging. Consider joining a support group to make new friends.
- **Try to do something you enjoy every day**. That might mean dancing, watching a favorite TV show, working in the garden, painting or reading.

Setting goals for the New Year: Here are some templates to start your goal planning today

[The Importance, Benefits, and Value of Goal Setting \(positivepsychology.com\)](#)

[Supercharge Your Success: The Ultimate Goal Setting Worksheets - Quenza](#)

Check us out on Social Media:



[AZ ACES Consortium \(@acesconsortium\) / Twitter](#)



[AZ ACE Consortium](#)



[AZ-Aces-Consortium](#)