Are the words “toxic stress” toxic?
Speakers

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While some stress is normal and can have a positive effect, severe chronic stress can trigger a toxic stress response.

**Positive Stress**
Moderate and brief. When a young child is protected by supportive relationships with adults, she learns to cope with everyday challenges and her stress response returns to baseline. *Example: sports*

**Tolerable Stress**
Occurs when more serious difficulties, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster, or frightening injury, are buffered by caring adults. *Example: death of a relative*

**Toxic Stress**
When strong, frequent or prolonged adverse experiences such as extreme poverty or repeated abuse are experienced without adult support, a physiological “toxic stress response” can occur.

Learn more: Center on the Developing Child
[http://developingchild.harvard.edu/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/)
Knowledge about the impact of early trauma and toxic stress is expanding
Risk factors are not predictive factors because of protective factors.
What do you associate with the word “toxic”?

- Permanent
- Damaged
- Broken
- Unfixable
- Blame
- Harmful
- Dangerous
- Contagious
- Unclean
What words should be anchoring our work with families?

- Prevention
- Root causes
- Healing & Recovery
- Inequality
- Protective factors
- Resilience
- Buffering
- Thriving
- Family support
Trauma and Toxic Stress: 

*Shifting the Conversation*

- It needs to be about more than *understanding* and *intervening*. It’s equally important to:
  - Tackle root causes of stress.
  - Help parents and caregivers buffer their children from toxic stress responses.
  - Build protective factors in families and communities.
  - Celebrate, research, and promote resilience and thriving.
  - Build community-level strategies to support families, reduce and address adversity, and promote healing.
WORKING TOWARD Well-Being
COMMUNITY APPROACHES TO TOXIC STRESS

About the Early Childhood-LINC Learning Lab on Community Approaches to Toxic Stress

In recent years, significant attention has been paid to the concept of toxic stress and the impact of adverse experiences in childhood on lifelong health and development. As scientific understanding continues to grow, community leaders are searching for ways to prevent and respond to toxic stress in the lives of young children and their families as part of their broader efforts to achieve healthy development and well-being for all children. Leaders from six communities worked together in 2015 with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) through its the Early Childhood-LINC Learning Lab on Community Approaches to Toxic Stress (see sidebar) to learn from each other’s experiences, discuss the challenges and opportunities they face and generate ideas to improve the response to toxic stress in their own communities and in others.

This issue brief distills the experiences and recommendations of leaders from these six communities and from CSSP. It provides:

- A definition of toxic stress from a community perspective
- A framework for a comprehensive community approach to toxic stress, rooted within the broader context of working toward healthy development and well-being
- Practical examples of how member communities of the Early Childhood-LINC network are taking action
- Recommendations for next steps to promote and further develop

www.cssp.org
Introduction

In West Virginia, we care about each other, and we want our children to have long, healthy, happy lives. We all want our children to reach their fullest potential.

We know that our earliest experiences as children are critical in shaping who we become as adults. Positive experiences in childhood can build a strong foundation for learning, strengthen brain development and help us be healthier.

A growing body of research shows that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma also have a profound impact and can be a stumbling block to our health and well-being. When negative experiences outweigh positive experiences, it can lead to a physiological response in our bodies, which increases risks of many health issues.

The good news is that research also confirms that the presence of protective factors can buffer the impact of ACEs, so that adversity in childhood does not need to remain a stumbling block, but can be transformed into a stepping stone for a healthy, successful life.

This Issue Brief highlights the linkages between high ACE scores and common contemporary health problems facing West Virginians, including the ongoing opioid epidemic. More importantly, the Issue Brief also highlights effective strategies and protective factors that help prevent childhood adversity and build resilience for those who have experienced trauma.

We know that opportunity and adversity are not equally distributed across our population. Too many families are facing trauma and adversity on a daily basis and have experienced ACEs during their childhoods. We must work to enact policies and implement strategies that build protective factors that can counterbalance the effects of adversity and produce better outcomes, as well as preventing ACEs from occurring in the first place.
Discussion

• Please type questions into the chat box
Resources

- West Virginia ACEs Report: https://www.wvaces.org/
WE CAN – Work to End Child Abuse and Neglect

We invite you to share these posts and use them in your own materials. Follow us:

facebook.com/cantasd

twitter.com/cantasdcenter

All of the graphics are available for download on the CANTASD website: https://cantasd.acf.hhs.gov/we-can/

Hashtags:
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Join the National Conversation on Child Abuse and Neglect

cantasd.acf.hhs.gov

21st NCCAN

21st National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect
April 24—26, 2019  *  Join us via Live-Stream!
More information is available at nccan.acf.hhs.gov
Thank You & Next Steps

• Download the handouts to learn more. Click on the files in the “Handouts” box on your screen.

• Do you have innovative ideas, questions or concerns about trauma and resilience? Tell us about your work. Send an e-mail to hello@CANTASD.org with “Trauma and Resilience” in the subject line.

Upcoming:

April 11th: Workforce Well-being—Centering Yourself to Better Support Others

April 17th: Integrating Mindfulness to Support Well-Being and Resiliency for Those Working on Child Abuse and Neglect

NCCAN April 24-26th
• 3 Plenary Sessions
• 5 Master Sessions