How can you help? Stress and Childhood

It’s not a secret that we live in a stressful world. Stress is often thought of as an adult issue but children are exposed to stress every day through school, home or social interactions. There are three types of stress that can make a difference in the impact on a child’s brain and body: positive, tolerable and toxic stress. Potential effects of stress can last a lifetime for children, so it is important that families understand the difference between these types of stress.

Normal everyday stress
- Going to the doctor
- Losing a game
- A surprise party
- Sleeping with a stuffed animal

More complicated and challenging
- Divorce
- Natural Disaster
- Death of a loved one
- Physical, sexual or mental abuse
- Exposure to Violence
- Neglect

Severe, long-lasting and/or uncontrollable
- Natural Disaster
- Death of a loved one
- Physical, sexual or mental abuse
- Exposure to Violence
- Neglect

What are the signs your child is experiencing Toxic Stress?
Long-term stress response can disrupt a child’s development both physically and mentally.

- Sleep Issues
- Crying more than usual
- Overeating and other compulsive behaviors
- Frequent headaches or tummy aches
- Developing new fears
- Fear and anxiety triggered by places or people that remind them of the past
- Regressing to bed wetting or baby talk
- Poor coping skills
- Behavior and learning difficulties
- Mood swings
- Exposure to Violence
- Fear and anxiety triggered by places or people that remind them of the past

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How do you prevent damage from toxic stress?

- Eliminate or reduce exposure to extremely stressful conditions, such as recurrent abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver mental illness or substance abuse, and/or violence.
- Provide supportive, responsive relationships with caring adults. Stable, loving relationships can buffer against harmful effects.
- Intervene with support, services and programs that address any severe and long-lasting stressors to address the source of the stress and lack of stabilizing relationships.

“Everybody wins if we prevent toxic stress in young children, and everybody loses if we don’t.”
~ Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff, Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

Resources
- Stress Health - [www.stresshealth.org](http://www.stresshealth.org)

Who can help?
- Trusted educators
- Doctors
- Friends
- Clergy
- Mental health professionals

“Every kid is one caring adult away from a success story.” ~ Josh Shipp, author