## 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.





More complicated and challenging



Divorce



Natural Disaster



Death of a



Severe, long-lasting and/or uncontrollable



Physical, sexual or mental abuse



Neglect

Exposure to Violence

#### What are the signs your child is experiencing Toxic Stress?

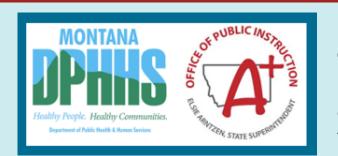
Long-term stress response can disrupt a child's development both physically and mentally.

- Sleep Issues
- Frequent headaches or tummy aches
- Regressing to bed wetting or baby talk
- Crying more than usual
- Developing new fears
- Poor coping skills
- Behavior and learning difficulties
- Mood swings

- Overeating and other compulsive behaviors
- 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."

To. Jack P. Shonkoff, Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

#### Sleep

Children who get the right amount of sleep have less trouble with focus and behavior at school and manage stress more easily.



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#### Exercise

Children who exercise have more confidence and higher self-esteem. They are better able to handle life's daily challenges.



### Parent Super Powers!

Research shows parents can be the most powerful force in preventing or even reversing the impact of toxic stress!



#### **Good Nutrition**

Regular family mealtimes can help prevent compulsive overeating.



Mindfulness is paying close attention to what you are feeling and experiencing. Mindfulness can help your child stay calm and in control.



#### **Mental Health**

Counseling and other mental health services can be helpful for children who have faced trauma.



#### **Supporting Relationships**

Safe and nurturing relationships can help protect children's brains and bodies from the harmful effects of stress and trauma.

#### Resources

Stress Health - www.stresshealth.org

**A Guide to Toxic Stress** 

www.developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/

**NAMI: What You Should Know about Toxic Stress** 

www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/August-2017/What-You-Should -Know-About-Toxic-Stress

#### 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