

# Understanding ACEs

## Adverse Childhood Experiences

### What are ACEs?

ACEs are serious childhood traumas that result in toxic stress that can harm a child's brain. The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he is to struggle with learning, playing in a healthy way with other children, making friends, and can result in long-term health problems.

### Adverse Childhood Experiences can include:



Physical abuse



Verbal abuse



Emotional neglect



Physical neglect



Mental illness



Divorce



Substance abuse



Sexual abuse



Bullying



Witness violence outside the home



Mother treated violently



Incarcerated relative



Homeless



Natural disasters



Racism, sexism, or any other form of discrimination



Witness a sibling being abused

**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!"***



### How do ACEs affect learning and health?

When a child repeatedly experiences fear and trauma this changes the brain and can affect learning and overall health. This makes it difficult to

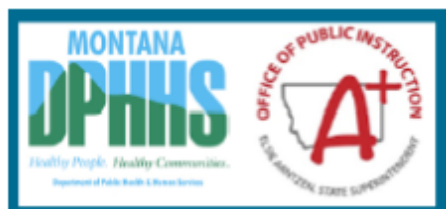
- process and remember information;
- trust others;
- make friends;
- focus on school work;
- keep behaviors in check; and,
- may lead to long-term health problems.

**Brandi Loch**

CFSD Program Planning Supervisor  
Child and Family Services Division

[brandiloach@mt.gov](mailto:brandiloach@mt.gov)

406.799.1823



**Christy Hendricks**

Foster Care Point of Contact  
Montana Office of Public Instruction

[Christy.hendricks@mt.gov](mailto:Christy.hendricks@mt.gov)

406.444.0794

## What is resiliency?

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from frustrations and to recover from setbacks. Resilient individuals adapt to change, stress or problems. They are able to take things in stride. The result of this bouncing back is a feeling of success and confidence.

*Here are some things you can do to build your child's resilience.*

### Be a Supportive Role Model



- Be calm and consistent
- Admit your mistakes
- Celebrate successes
- Volunteer together
- Encourage positive social connections

- Don't rush to solve problems or share the solutions
- Brainstorm solutions
- Discuss potential sequences

### Teach to Problem Solve



### Let Them Make Mistakes



### Build Confidence



### Praise Them



- Focus on strengths
- Provide genuine praise
- Focus praise on strategies, progress or effort: *"I can tell you've been working really hard."*
- Provide opportunities to learn new skills

- Talk about emotions
- Show and teach empathy
- Model and teach social skills
- Teach ways to express emotions

### Teach to Manage Emotions



**Resilience trumps ACES**

## Resources

ACEs Connection - [www.acesconnection.com/blog/handouts](http://www.acesconnection.com/blog/handouts)

Resilience Guide for Parents & Teachers - [www.developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/)

Resilience in Children: Strategies to Strengthen Your Kids - [www.psychom.net/build-resilience-children](http://www.psychom.net/build-resilience-children)