

# Virginia can build strong brains by addressing childhood trauma

*With appropriate supports, children can be resilient*

## SOME CHILDREN EXPERIENCE ADVERSITY THAT IMPACTS HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include:

Physical or emotional abuse or neglect

Separation from parent including death or incarceration

Living with or experiencing: domestic violence, parental substance abuse or mental illness, or community violence

### Some children experience these events as trauma

Trauma = when a child is threatened by an event that he or she has experienced or witnessed

### Sometimes these experiences are more than one-time events, and are experienced as stress

Toxic Stress = unrelenting stress caused by extreme poverty, neglect, abuse, or severe maternal depression



## THIS IMPACT ON THE BRAIN CAN LEAD TO CHANGES IN PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

### ACEs can negatively impact:

- Brain development
- Cognitive development
- Social-emotional development
- Ability to form secure emotional attachments
- Physical health

IN VIRGINIA

**19%**

OF CHILDREN HAVE EXPERIENCED TWO OR MORE ACEs

## RESEARCH HAS DEMONSTRATED LONG-TERM AND DEVASTATING IMPACTS OF ACEs

Children who experience toxic stress or trauma are more likely to have chronic health conditions as adults

If a child experiences three or more ACEs, as an adult they are...

**4x**

MORE LIKELY

TO REPORT HAVING POOR HEALTH

**7x**

MORE LIKELY

TO BE AN ALCOHOLIC

**12x**

MORE LIKELY

TO DIE BY SUICIDE

## CHILDREN ARE RESILIENT AND CAN THRIVE DESPITE TRAUMA IN THEIR LIVES

Research shows us how to counteract those experiences:

- Promote positive relationships with parents and other caregivers.
- Design our systems to better serve kids. Our systems - from schools, to child welfare, to mental health - need to understand how to recognize kids who've experienced trauma and how to help them become resilient.
- Support interventions that provide the social and emotional support necessary for children who experience trauma.
- Change our view of children: ask "what has happened to you?" instead of "what is wrong with you?"

\* All sources available at [vakids.org/elections](http://vakids.org/elections)



## Questions for Candidates

#VAVotes4Kids

- 1** Brain research demonstrates that growing up in poverty can create toxic stress that impacts physical and mental health. However, those experiences can be buffered by positive relationships with parents and caregivers. **What initiatives would you champion to mitigate the effects of toxic stress, or trauma, on children?**
- 2** A child's first five years of life are the most critical period for brain development. A key method to prevent trauma is to provide supportive parenting skills and strong family connections, especially during those first five years. **What role, if any, should state policymakers play to promote strong families?**
- 3** Children of color are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system. This system has the potential to exacerbate mental health and behavioral issues for children who have experienced trauma. **What efforts would you support to address racial disparities in the juvenile justice system?**
- 4** Research shows that we can reduce the number of children exposed to toxic stress or trauma if we can improve our childhood poverty rate. **What efforts would you promote to bring families out of poverty?**
- 5** Children can interact with many systems (schools, health and mental health, courts, and others) as they grow up. At times these systems do not work together and can create additional challenges for families. **What would you do to ensure better outcomes for families involved in multiple systems?**
- 6** A Children's Cabinet has been established to facilitate cross-agency collaborations in Virginia at the highest levels of state government. **If elected, how would you facilitate this type of cross-agency collaboration for children?**
- 7** Communities across Virginia are forming regional Trauma-Informed Community Networks (TICNs) to support training in trauma-informed approaches in health, courts, schools, and other systems. **What role, if any, should the state play in advancing these efforts?**

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