

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/kids-count-data/virginia-data

Promote Resilience and Prevent Childhood Trauma

Research shows that chronic, severe stressors in childhood can cause toxic, traumatic biological responses to the developing brain, often with long-term consequences for health and wellness. Yet this research also tells us that responsive relationships with caregivers and strong community supports can buffer the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), allowing children to develop to their potential.

ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, to parental divorce or the incarceration of a parent or guardian. A growing body of research, based on the ground-breaking 1998 CDC and Kaiser Permanente study, has sought to quantify the prevalence of ACEs and illuminate their connection with negative behavioral and health outcomes, such as obesity, depression, and other chronic health conditions later in life.

ACEs do not have to dictate the future of the child. Children can thrive despite trauma in their lives.

A child's first five years of life are the most critical period for brain development. Research has demonstrated long-term and devastating impacts of ACEs. But despite trauma, children are resilient and can thrive if the right supports are in place in their family and their community.

Recognizing that children – and adults – are experiencing trauma, many child-serving systems now aim to become better informed on the effects of trauma. They can adopt measures to strengthen the resilience of the youth they serve, thereby helping to improve outcomes for children from early childhood education, to schools, to foster care and the juvenile justice system.

Call to Action

During the 2018 General Assembly session, please encourage policymakers to support these efforts to improve trauma-informed policy and practice:

✓ **Promote trauma-informed best practices**

Voices will advocate for Virginia to establish an interagency working group to evaluate the commonwealth's policies and practices that address ACEs and promote resiliency. This working group should develop a state framework to implement evidence-based trauma-informed policy and practice and use it to help identify innovations, interventions, and resources to support resilient children and communities. Voices will also advocate for additional state-funded grants for local organizations that promote innovative trauma-informed care.

✓ **Continue supporting the Governor's Children's Cabinet**

Voices will champion continued funding and staff support for the Governor's Children's Cabinet to ensure its continuance in the Northam administration. Established by Gov. Terry McAuliffe, the Children's Cabinet is a cross-secretariat, multi-agency collaborative dedicated to developing and implementing a comprehensive policy agenda to promote the well-being of the commonwealth's children from birth to age 21.

To find out more about opportunities to promote resilience and address childhood trauma, sign up for legislative updates from Voices for Virginia's Children at www.vakids.org.

