

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

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 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 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. Despite trauma, children are resilient and can thrive if the right supports are in place in their family and their community.

Voices for Virginia's Children offers these recommendations to the General Assembly and the Northham Administration:

1. **Create an Interagency Trauma-Informed Care Workgroup:** This proposal for budget language and \$150,000 to provide staffing and technical expertise would establish an inter-agency workgroup to define trauma-informed practices, align practices across agencies, and identify unmet needs. This workgroup represents a first step at better defining trauma-informed practice and policy and aligning efforts across many children's services. Item 128#1h (Patron: Peace) Item 128#1s (Patron: Carrico)
2. **Additional Resources for Family and Children's Trust Fund Grants:** This request of \$250,000 will provide additional grants through the Family and Children's Trust Fund (FACT) to support innovative practices to prevent childhood trauma at the local level. These funds will focus on prevention and early intervention with an emphasis on interventions for families with young children. FACT is encouraged to seek additional private resources as matching funds. Item 334#2h (Patron: Peace) Item 334#2s (Patron: Carrico)
3. **Fund Tools for Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion:** Additional funds are needed to support legislative efforts to reduce suspension and expulsion in early grades. Several budget amendments were introduced to increase funding for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as well as the continuation of the Virginia Tiered System of Support (VTSS) targeted to Title I schools. VTSS: Item 129#4h (Patron: Peace) Item 128#1s (Patron: Favola) and PBIS: Item 135#16h (Patron: Bourne) Item 135#6s (Patron: McClellan)
4. **Continue the Children's Cabinet:** We will seek support from the Northham Administration to continue the Governor's Children's Cabinet. We hope this will build on the good model established under the McAuliffe Administration by reviewing child outcomes, identifying existing resources, and facilitating coordination on issues such as childhood trauma.