

Runaway and Homeless Youth Training & Technical Assistance Center



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Toxic Stress

What is it?	What do I need to know about it?
<p>Acute Stress:</p> <p>Adaptive response to threat, danger or pressure experienced as brief emotional discomfort and accompanied by predictable biochemical and physiological changes</p>	<p>How it works: Cortisol, adrenaline and/or other hormones flood the body to temporarily boost capacity</p> <p>Examples: Rapid response to avoid a car accident or extra drive and energy to meet a deadline</p> <p>Symptoms: Increased heart rate, dilated eyes, diversion of physiological resources to focus on response to threat.</p>
<p>Chronic Stress:</p> <p>Long-term exposure to significant environmental stressors with a sense of hopelessness which may become so fixed that people get used to it and fail to consider solutions</p>	<p>Examples: Feeling trapped in an unhappy marriage or miserable job, living in an environment of constant political conflict and violence, pervasive perfectionism or self-critical personality</p> <p>Consequences: Anxiety and depression; functional impairment of immune, cardiovascular, neuro-endocrine and central nervous systems; and elevated risk for serious chronic illness</p>
<p>Toxic Stress:</p> <p>Exposure to strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity during early development which causes changes to brain architecture and organ systems</p>	<p>Who: Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable during sensitive developmental periods.</p> <p>Consequences: Increased risk for physical & mental health issues and social problems during childhood (i.e. asthma, diabetes, ADHD, etc.) as well as increased risk of developing chronic illnesses (i.e. heart disease, depression, cancer, etc.) in adulthood.</p> <p>What helps? Positive adult support and protection</p>
<p>Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):</p> <p>Chronic conditions or traumatic events that expose children and adolescents to toxic stress</p>	<p>Examples: Child abuse, neglect, family or community violence, poverty or insecure resources to meet basic needs, bullying</p>

Toxic Stress

For More Information about Toxic Stress:

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Odgers, C. L. & Jaffee, S.R. (2013). Routine versus catastrophic influences on the developing child. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 34, 29-48. Retrieved from <http://www.annualreviews.org>