

# YOUR CHILD: How Stress Impacts Brain Growth, Development & Behavior

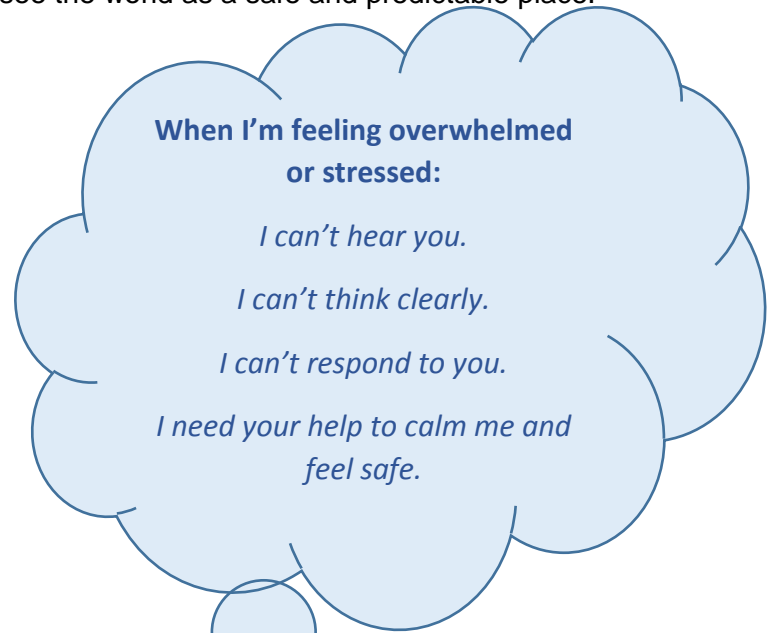
**Stress** and challenging experiences are a normal part of life for all families. Sometimes these experiences can feel overwhelming or challenge the child's ability to see the world as a safe and predictable place.

## Some particularly stressful experiences can include:

- Sudden, unexpected or frequent changes in caregiver, school, program or home life
- Witnessing abuse of a family member, loved one, or pet
- Experiencing abuse or neglect
- Witnessing community violence
- Loss of a family member or friend
- Experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia, or any other form of discrimination
- Homelessness
- Mental illness and/or substance abuse by a parent
- Hospitalization or family illness
- Divorce
- Incarceration of parent or family member
- Not enough money for food or other basic life necessities
- Family financial struggles
- Natural disasters

## A child who is struggling to make sense of challenging or traumatic experiences **MAY** show some of the following behaviors:

- Excessive distractibility
- Difficulty concentrating and learning
- Difficulty making and/or keeping friends
- Difficulty participating in group experiences
- Difficulty moving from one activity to another (transitions)
- Excessive screaming
- Destroying property
- Difficulty in calming self
- Difficulty sleeping
- Toileting issues
- Silent and/or withdrawn
- Hurting self or others
- Fearfulness, easily startled or checking out



*Stress reduces the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.*

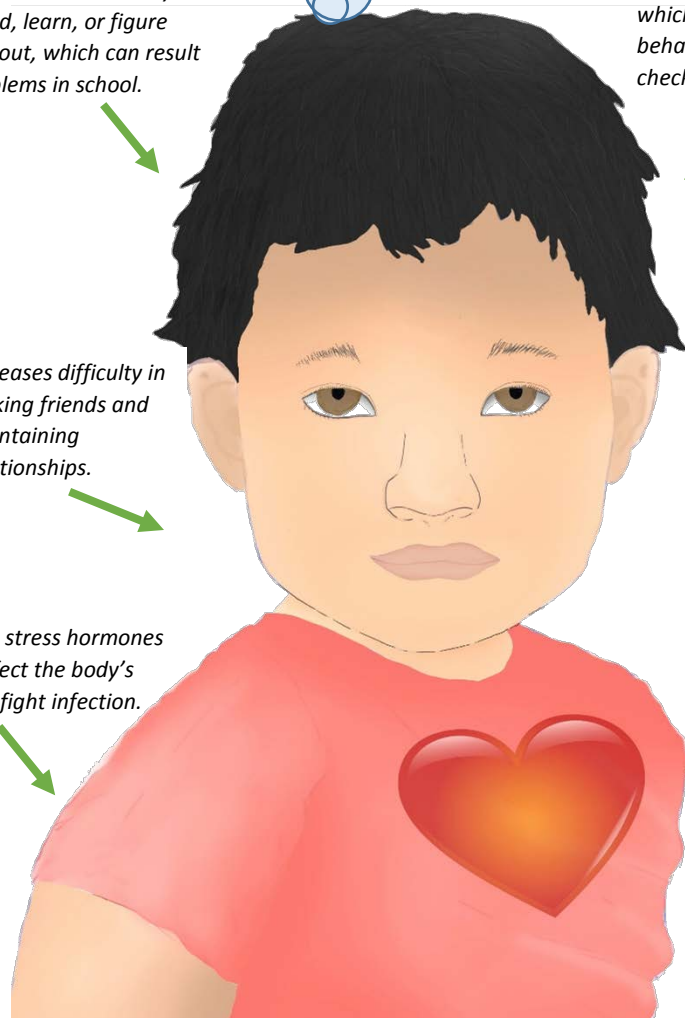
*Interferes with coping, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.*

*Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.*

*Increases problems with learning and memory.*

*Increases stress hormones which affect the body's ability to fight infection.*

*May cause lasting health problems.*



# The good news: Resilience can bring back health and hope!

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## What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to return to being healthy and hopeful after bad things happen. Even if children experience challenges, they can still be resilient! Research shows that if caregivers provide a safe environment and help children build resilience, this can reduce the effects of trauma and stress.

## Help me build resilience by:

### 1. Caring for and nurturing our relationship

Listening to and responding patiently in a supportive way, paying attention to children's physical and emotional needs.

### 2. Building social connections

Having family, friends, teachers, and a community who support, help and listen to children. Enjoy the positive moments.

### 3. Meeting my basic needs

Providing children with safe housing, nutritious food, appropriate clothing, and access to health care and good education.

### 4. Learning about parenting and how children grow

Understanding how caregivers can help children grow in a healthy way, and what to expect from children as they grow. Acknowledging feelings, efforts and progress.

### 5. Building social and emotional skills

Helping children interact in a healthy way with others, manage their emotions, and communicate their feelings and needs.

### 6. Nurturing and growing your own resilience

Knowing how to solve problems, having healthy relationships with other adults, and building positive relationships with children. Finding ways to stay calm in times of stress and reaching out for help. Developing predictable routines and expectations for yourself and for children.

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## If you need extra support:

(Ask any of these providers about free or low-cost services for eligible families.)

**Insert local resources into this text box.**



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Developed by the Washtenaw Trauma Informed Collaborative (WTIC) of Washtenaw County, MI and intended to be shared everywhere. Images created by Ari Mabry, age 15, resilient leukemia survivor of medical trauma and PTSD, who valued the support and services he received to help him cope with the trauma he endured.

**For more information on trauma and toxic stress, or to access resources, visit [www.michigan.gov/traumatoxicstress](http://www.michigan.gov/traumatoxicstress).**