



# Break the Cycle



**Toxic Stress Training**  
for Community Health Workers/Promotoras  
& Health Information Brokers

# TOXIC STRESS

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# **TOXIC STRESS TRAINING**

## **for Community Health Workers/Promotoras & Health Information Brokers**

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# TOXIC STRESS

## PROMOTORA CURRICULUM

### Objectives

*At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:*

- Define Toxic Stress
- Recognize the signs of toxic stress
- Raise awareness of how your own past may have impacted by toxic stress
- Understand how it impacts you and your family
- Recognize the effects of toxic stress on health
- Find out where to go for information/help

### What is Toxic Stress?

Toxic stress occurs when we are exposed to something extremely stressful over and over for a long period of time without emotional support.

We all experience stress. Toxic stress is different from typical everyday stress because it can lead to serious illness in adulthood.

### Examples of Toxic Stress

*Examples of toxic stress include:*

- Divorce/Separation
- Death of a Loved One
- Exposure to Domestic Violence
- Parent or Family Member in Prison
- Neighborhood Violence
- Extreme Poverty
- Parent or Family Member who Abuses Drugs/Alcohol
- Parent or Caregiver with Mental Illness
- Neglect

*Explain: We will use the Case of “Janie Doe” throughout this training. Read the Case Background individually then we will discuss how childhood experiences might have affected Janie’s adult life.*

### Case Background

Janie Doe was 5 years old when she was hit with a broom several times on her face, back, and on her hands by her father. He kicked her, slapped her, and slammed her against the wall, breaking her right hand. Janie saw her mother and father fighting almost every day. She saw her father beating her mother, especially when her father was drunk. Janie’s father yelled at her, screamed, threatened to kill her, and told her he hated her several times. At age 8, she was raped by a family member. Both parents were doing drugs and alcohol. Janie’s mother became very depressed and

tried to kill herself, and eventually was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. When Janie was a teenager she moved out of state to live with her uncle while her father was in jail for severe domestic violence against her mother.

*Ask: What were the examples of Toxic stress in Janie's childhood?*

*Facilitator reads Case below out loud*

## **Case**

*Janie as an adult*

Now, Janie is 54 years old. She has been experiencing mental health problems, such as depression, and anxiety. She suffers from heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma, and diabetes.

*Ask: Was there support? Who?*

*Why did the child not report?*

*Could TOXIC STRESS play a big part in these problems?*

# **Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)**

## **Gauging the Effect of Toxic Stress**

*Ask: Do You Know Your ACE Score?*

*Explain*

*Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) early in life is a significant predictor of long-term physical and mental health.*

*Let's take a look at whether or not toxic stress has impacted your life.*

*The ACE questionnaire has 10 questions. Your ACE score is the total of "Yes" answers. Each type of trauma counts as one. This questionnaire is ONLY for you. You don't have to share your score. You can shred it here or take it home with you.*

**Do: Administer the ACE questionnaire.**

# Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire (Adapted – Child Version)

Circle Yes or No for each set of questions.

#	Question	Yes	No
1.	A grown-up who lives with me says bad words to me a lot.		
	A grown-up who lives with me insults me a lot. A grown-up who lives with me puts me down a lot. A grown-up who lives with me tries to make me feel very badly about myself a lot. A lot of the time, I am scared that a grown-up who lives with me will hurt me.		
2.	A grown-up who lives with me pushes me a lot.		
	A grown-up who lives with me grabs me a lot. A grown-up who lives with me slaps me a lot. A grown-up who lives with me throws things at me a lot. A grown-up who lives with me has hit me so hard that they left a mark. A grown-up who lives with me has hit me so hard that they injured me.		
3.	Somebody older than me has touched my private parts.		
	Somebody older than me made me touch their private parts.		
4.	Do you, a lot of times, feel that no one in your family loves you?		
	Do you, a lot of times, feel that no one in your family thinks that you are important? Do you, a lot of times, feel that no one in your family thinks that you are special? Do you, a lot of times, feel that no one in your family looks out for each other a lot? Do you, a lot of times, feel that your family does not feel close to one another? Do you, a lot of times, feel that your family does not support each other?		
5.	Do you feel you do not have enough to eat at home a lot of the time?		
	Do you feel you have to wear dirty clothes a lot of the time? Do you feel you have no one to protect you a lot of the time? Do you feel your parents cannot take care of you a lot of the time because they are too drunk or on drugs? Do you feel your parents cannot take you to the doctor a lot of the time because they are too drunk or on drugs?		
6.	Are your parents separated or divorced?		
	Have you ever been away from a parent for a long time?		
7.	Does someone at home push your mother or stepmother a lot?		
	Does someone at home grab your mother or stepmother a lot? Does someone at home slap your mother or stepmother a lot? Does someone at home throw things at your mother or stepmother a lot? Does someone at home kick your mother or stepmother sometimes or a lot? Does someone at home bite your mother or stepmother sometimes or a lot? Does someone at home punch your mother or stepmother sometimes or a lot? Does someone at home hit your mother or stepmother with something hard sometimes or a lot? Has someone at home ever hit your mother or stepmother for a few minutes straight? Has someone at home talked about hurting your mother or stepmother with a gun? Has someone at home talked about hurting your mother or stepmother with a knife?		
8.	Does someone in your house cause problems when they drink?		
	Is someone in your house an alcoholic? Does someone in your house do drugs?		
9.	Is someone in your house depressed or mentally ill or very sad?		
	Has someone in your house tried to kill themselves?		
10.	Has anyone in your family ever been put in jail or prison or taken away by the police?		

*Explain: When you've finished answering the questions, add up your "Yes" answers to find out your ACE Score.*

*The scores on your ACE tells about tough situations you've gone through. A score of 4 or higher suggests you may be at a higher risk for health problems.*

*If you have a high ACEs score it is recommended that you discuss with your doctor.*

## **Gauging the Effect of Toxic Stress in Children**

*Explain: Toxic stress can have negative effects on a child's learning, behavior, emotion, and health. Recognizing signs of toxic stress can help to seek treatment.*

*Ask: What might be some signs of toxic stress be in children?*

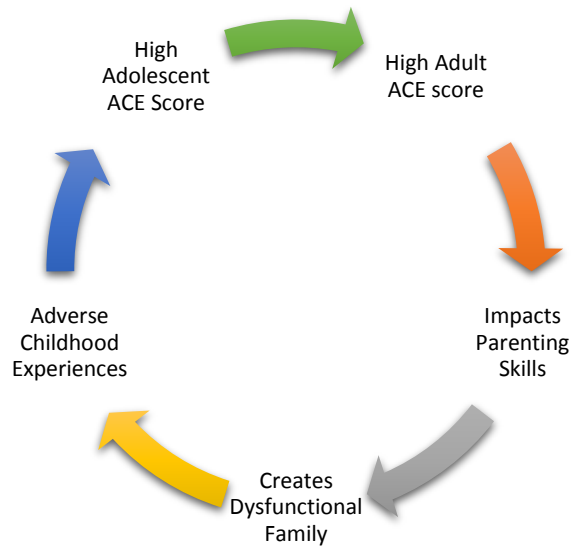
*Signs of toxic stress in children include:*

- Problems in school
- Becoming easily irritable
- Being hyperactive and impulsive
- Difficulty relaxing
- Difficulty concentrating
- Becoming withdrawn
- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Asthma





# Impact of High ACE on Parenting



*Explain:* When we look at this image we see a circle. This is a vicious circle or cycle, which means a problem lead to another problem continuously.

*Ask:* How would this cycle describe Janie’s situation

*“What goes around comes around.” This explains how adverse childhood experiences lead to high ACEs scores and impact parenting skills, which creates dysfunction in the family (drugs/alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, physical violence, lack of emotional support) and high child ACEs score.*

## Impact of Toxic Stress on Health

*Exposure to toxic stress in early childhood increases the risk of:*

Disrupting the brain development architecture

Toxic stress can affect learning, behavior, and health

Impacts of Toxic Stress on Health



Image 1



Image 2

*Ask: Look at the two images, which of these trees has been exposed to toxic stress?*

**Suggestions:** Image 2 because it has fewer branches. The tree presented in image 1 looks healthier because it has more branches.

*Explain: Like adverse environmental condition, such as extreme sun heating or cold, lack of water, and fertilizer can affect plant grow, toxic stress can affect the way the brain develop. No toxic stress, better brain development.*

## **How Toxic Stress Affects the Human Body**

Adverse childhood experiences lead to adult health problems



Toxic stress can cause damage to the body in many different ways over time.

# Long Term Effects of Toxic Stress

## **Depression**

A mental illness marked by feelings of profound sadness and lack of interest in activities

A persistent low mood that interferes with the ability to function and appreciate things in life

## **Anxiety**

A state of dread, tension, and unease. It is considered a normal response to stress or uncertain situations.



## **Cardiovascular Disease (Heart Disease)**

Veins and arteries where blood flows become sick and weak.

Blood cannot flow properly

## **Cancer**

Occurs when cells in the body divide without control or order

Uncontrolled cells form a growth or tumor

Growths can invade and spread to other parts of the body

## **Asthma**

A chronic disease that narrows the airways or tubes of the lungs, making it difficult to breathe.



### **Frequent Headaches**

Pain arising from the head or upper neck of the body  
Sometimes with no apparent cause

### **Frequent Back Pain**

Chronic back pain persists even after an initial injury or underlying cause of acute low back pain has been treated.

## **STOPPING THE CYCLE**

### **How can I help my child and my family?**

Caring and supportive relationship is KEY

Provide good social support

Parents

Other family members

Good adult

Teacher

There are things you can do in the community.

Encourage your child to....

Join a church group

Participate in sports

Join a club in school

Participate in community activities

## Examples

Positive parent-child interactions

Spend time engaging in activities with your child and family

Play sports, play board games, dance, sing, etc.

Eat meals together

Let your kids read to you regardless of your reading level

Have good and open communication with your child

Listen to what your kids have to tell you even when you are feeling tired

Listen calmly even when what they are saying is disturbing

Tell your kids how much you love them



*Ask: What is the key component or common element in these examples?*

*(Communication)*

*Explain: By joining a parent group to learn effective parenting techniques/skills you would learn to:*

*Communicate effectively with different age children*

*Set rules without fighting*

*Maintain discipline in a positive way*

## Community Resources

Use the resources that are available in your community

If you are in need of housing, food and medical treatment seek help from various government agencies.

## Safety

Keep yourself and your family safe

Teach your children about safety

Know where your children are, what they are doing, and who they are with

Tell your kids that, if there's violence, their job is to stay safe, not to protect you

Find a safe place for them to stay in case of violence, such as with a neighbor or in a locked room

Teach them to call 911 and what to say

## Why Is This Important?

Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to the effects of toxic stress because childhood is a crucial period for brain and physical development.

Children and adolescents who are exposed to toxic stress are at a high risk of developing illnesses as adults, and living in dysfunctional environment themselves.





## **When Should I Talk to a Professional?**

Toxic stress can affect your health and your family's health in many ways.

You should consider talking to your doctor when you notice signs of toxic stress.

You can talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about screening and treatment for toxic

stress.

## **Where Can I Find Help?**

Visit:

[www.fsustress.org](http://www.fsustress.org)

# TOXIC STRESS

## HEALTH INFORMATION BROKERS (HIBs)

### CURRICULUM

#### Objectives

*At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:*

Define toxic stress.

Recognize the signs of toxic stress.

Understand of what could be going on in your own life now.

Recognize ways toxic stress may be impacting you now.

Recognize ways it could have long-term effects on you.

Find out where to go for information/help.

#### What is Toxic Stress?

Toxic stress occurs when a child experiences something extremely stressful over and over for a long period of time without the emotional support of an adult or caregiver.

We all experience stress. Toxic stress is different from typical everyday stress because it can lead to serious illness in adulthood.

#### Examples of Toxic Stress

*Examples of toxic stress include:*

Divorce/Separation

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*Explain: We will use the Case of “Janie” throughout this training. Read the Case Background individually then we will discuss how childhood experiences might have affected Janie’s adult life.*

#### Case Background

Janie Doe was 5 years old when she was hit with a broom several times on her face, back, and on her hands by her father. He kicked her, slapped her, and slammed her against the wall, breaking her right hand. Janie saw her mother and father fighting almost every day. She saw her father beating her mother, especially when her father

was drunk. Janie's father yelled at her, screamed, threatened to kill her, and told her he hated her several times. At age 8, she was raped by a family member. Both parents were doing drugs and alcohol. Janie's mother became very depressed and tried to kill herself, and eventually was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. When Janie was a teenager she moved out of state to live with her uncle while her father was in jail for severe domestic violence against her mother.

*Ask: What were the examples of Toxic stress in Janie's childhood?*

*Facilitator reads Case below out loud*

## **Case**

*Juana as an adult*

Now, Juana is 54 years old. She has been experiencing mental health problems, such as depression, and anxiety. She suffers from heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma, and diabetes.

*Ask: Was there support? Who?*

*Why did the child not report?*

*Could TOXIC STRESS play a big part in these problems?*

# **Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)**

## **Gauging the Effect of Toxic Stress**

*Ask: Do You Know Your ACE Score?*

*Explain*

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*If you have a high ACEs score it is recommended that you discuss with your doctor.*

## **Gauging the Effect of Toxic Stress in Children**

*Explain: Toxic stress can have negative effects on a child's learning, behavior, emotion, and health. Recognizing signs of toxic stress can help to seek treatment.*

*Ask: What might be some signs of toxic stress be in children?*

*Signs of toxic stress in children include:*

- Problems in school
- Becoming easily irritable
- Being hyperactive and impulsive
- Difficulty relaxing
- Difficulty concentrating
- Becoming withdrawn
- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Asthma



## **Impact of Toxic Stress on Health**

*Exposure to toxic stress in early childhood increases the risk of:*

- Disrupting the brain development architecture
- Toxic stress can affect learning, behavior, and health
- Impacts of Toxic Stress on Health



Image 1



Image 2

*Ask: Look at the two images, which of these trees has been exposed to toxic stress?*

**Suggestions:** Image 2 because it has fewer branches. The tree presented in image 1 looks healthier because it has more branches.

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A state of dread, tension, and unease. It is considered a normal response to stress or uncertain situations.



## **Cardiovascular Disease (Heart Disease)**

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## **Cancer**

Occurs when cells in the body divide without control or order  
Uncontrolled cells form a growth or tumor  
Growths can invade and spread to other parts of the body

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### **Frequent Headaches**

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Sometimes with no apparent cause

### **Frequent Back Pain**

Chronic back pain persists even after an initial injury or underlying cause of acute low back pain has been treated.

## **STOPPING THE CYCLE**

### **What can I do?**

Caring and supportive relationship is KEY

Talk to your doctor

Talk to the psychologist at the clinic

Talk to your teacher

Talk to the youth leader at church

Learn how to develop positive coping skills

How to deal with it.

There are things you can do in the community.

Join a church group

Participate in sports

Join a club in school

Participate in community activities

## Examples

Positive parent-child interactions  
Spend time engaging in activities with your parents/caregivers, family and friends  
Play sports, play board games, dance, sing, etc.  
Eat meals together with your family  
Have good and open communication with your parents/family



*Ask: What is the key component or common element in these examples?*

*(Communication)*

## Community Resources

Use the resources that are available in your community  
If you are in need of housing, food and medical treatment ask your parents/caregivers to seek help from various government agencies.

## Safety

Keep yourself safe.  
Learn safe routes to walk in the neighborhood, and know places to go when seeking help.  
Tell your parents/guardians where you are at all times.  
Never go anywhere with someone you don't know and trust.  
Don't use alcohol or other drugs.  
If someone tries to hurt or abuse you, say no, get away, and tell a trusted adult.  
Recognize if you feel very sad or nervous. Tell your doctor.  
If you are having problems with school work, get help.

## Why Is This Important?

Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to the effects of toxic stress because childhood is a crucial period for brain and physical development. Children and adolescents who are exposed to toxic stress are at a high risk of developing illnesses as adults, and living in dysfunctional environment themselves.





## **When Should I Talk to a Professional?**

Toxic stress can affect your health and your family's health in many ways.

You should talk to your parents/guardians and ask them to make an appointment with your doctor if some of these stressful events are occurring in your life.

The American Academy

of Pediatrics (AAP) think this is so important that they want your doctor to ask you about this and for you to tell your doctor.

During your visit, your doctor or healthcare provider may screen and/or treat for toxic stress.

Remember: Adolescents can go privately to see the doctor.

## **Where Can I Find Help?**

Visit: [www.fsustress.org](http://www.fsustress.org)