

WEBINAR | JUNE 2024

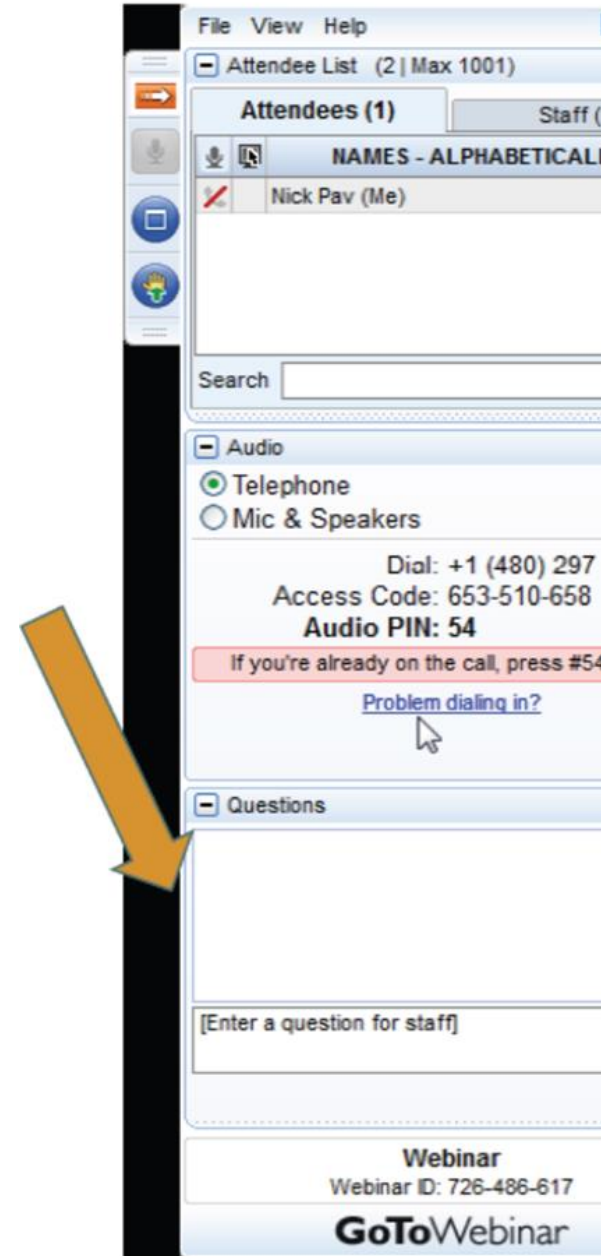
Understanding and Managing Toxic Stress

ALLIANCE
for **CHILDREN'S**
RIGHTS



LOGISTICS

- Webinar resources, including recording and supplemental materials, will be posted at <https://allianceforchildrensrights.org/resources/>
- All attendees are muted during webinar.
- Please submit questions using the “Questions” function on your GoToWebinar dashboard.





AGENDA

Understanding Toxic Stress

Navigating Social Media

Managing Toxic Stress to Support
Young People & Building Resilience

Resources

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PRESENTERS

UNDERSTANDING TOXIC STRESS

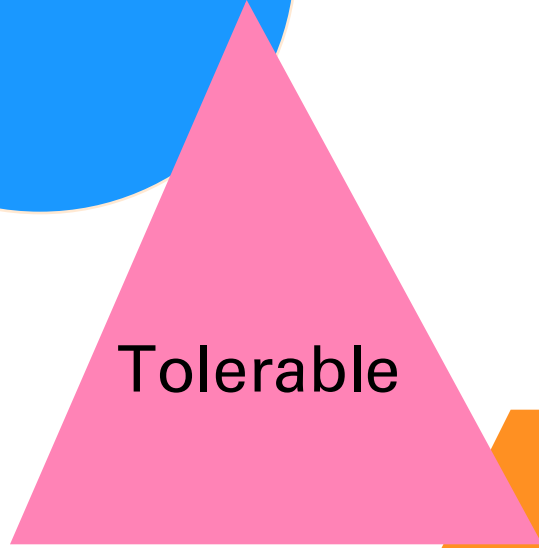
Stress can be defined as a **state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation**. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way we respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to our overall well-being.

- World Health Organization





Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels



Serious, temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships



Prolonged activation of stress response systems in the absence of protective relationships

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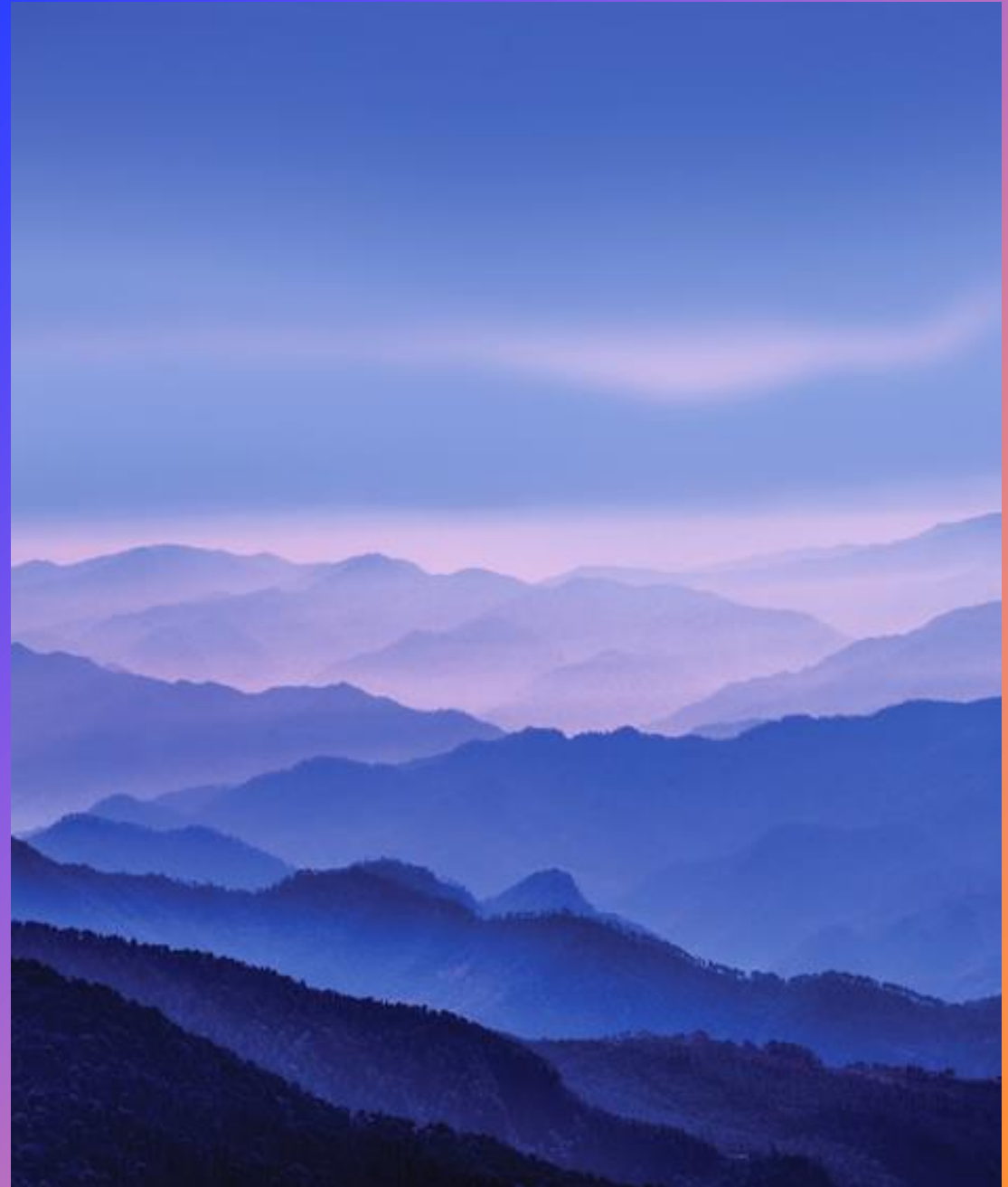
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DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

Toxic stress can manifest in various ways in both youth and adults, including:

- **Behavioral Outcomes**
- **Physical Health Issues** – weakened immune system, stomachaches, headaches
- **Mental/Emotional Distress** – anxiety, depression
- **Cognitive Impairments** – prolonged exposure to toxic stress can impair cognitive development that lead to difficulties in learning, memory and executive functioning.





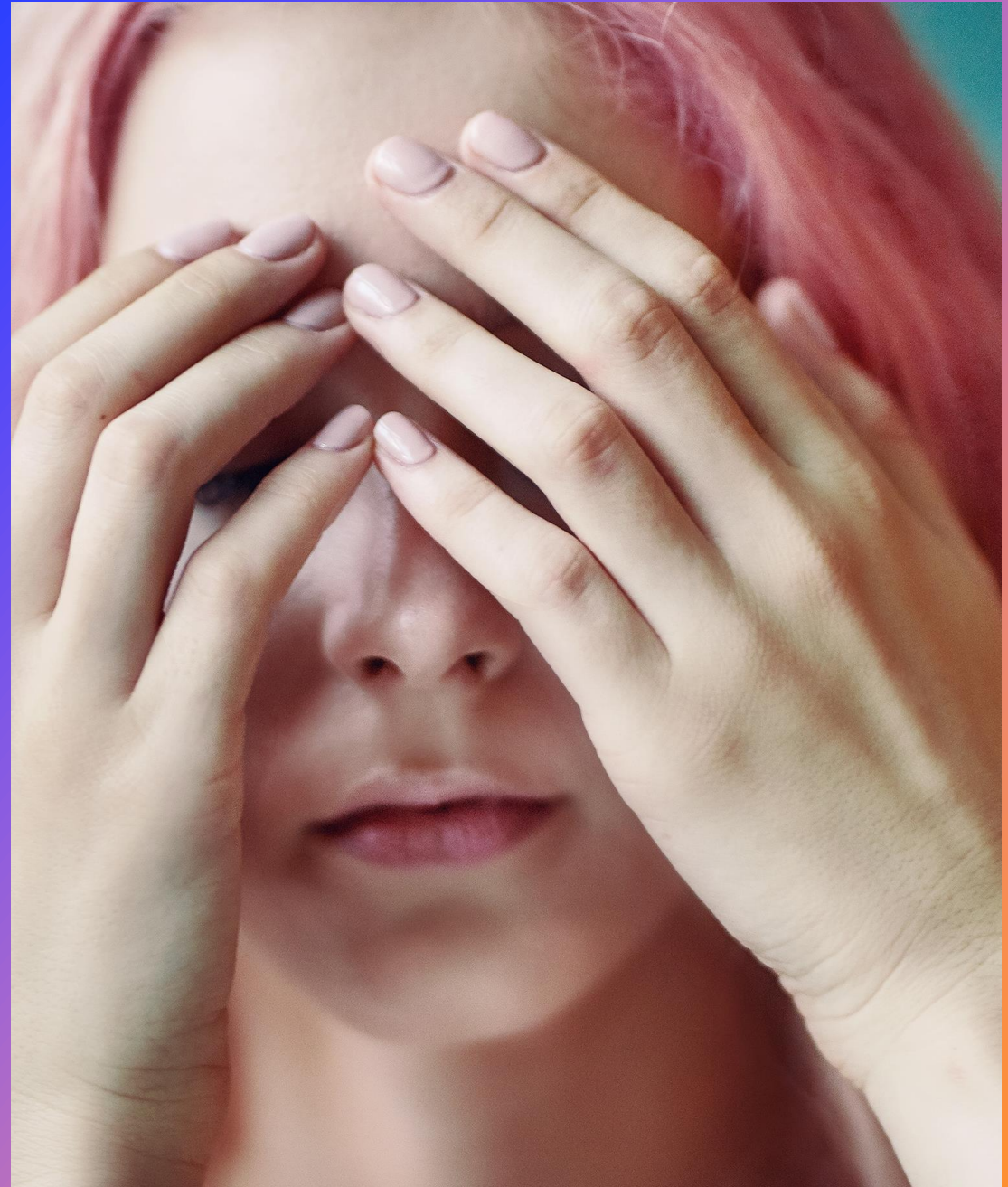
CURRENT STRESSORS

Daily active threats to child well-being and long-term health all have an effect on the ways in which a child or young person navigates stress, for example:

- widening economic inequities,
- deeply embedded structural racism,
- separation of children from their parents,
- ramifications from the pandemic.

REACTING TO STRESS

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. Coping styles and symptoms of stress vary from person to person.



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Mitigating Toxic Stress

NAVIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA



WARNING LABEL ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

“It is time to require a surgeon general’s warning label on social media platforms, stating that social media is associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents. A surgeon general’s warning label, which requires congressional action, would regularly remind parents and adolescents that social media has not been proved safe. Evidence from tobacco studies show that warning labels can increase awareness and change behavior.”

– U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy

NAVIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA

- Create social supports
- Assign yourself a screen time limit
- Inform an adult if you feel unsafe online



NAVIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- Limit Screen Time
- Implement Parental Monitoring
- Model What Healthy Engagement With Social Media Looks Like
- Pay Attention to Problematic Usage



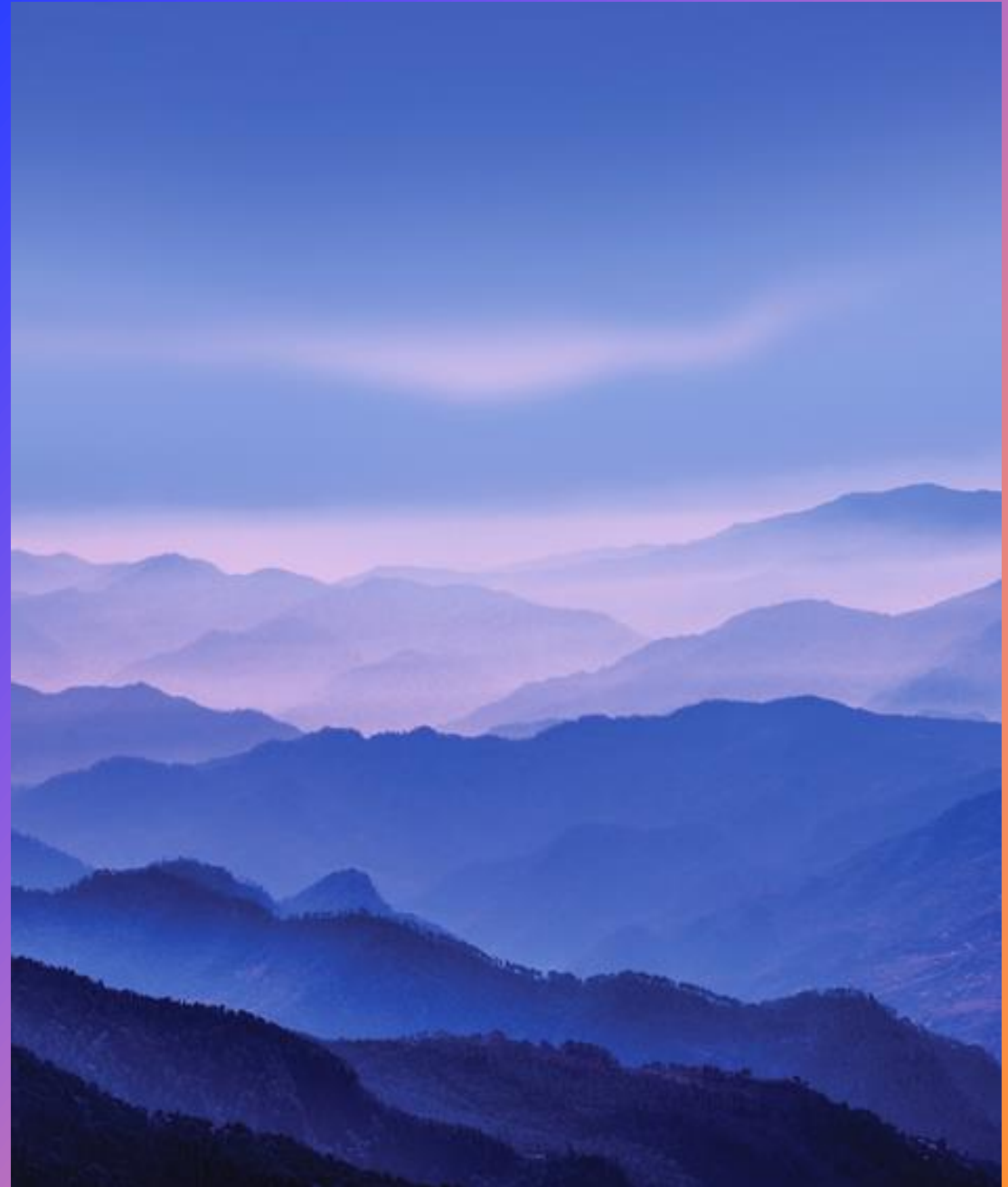


Identifying Triggers and Developing Coping Strategies

NAVIGATING STRESSORS

IDENTIFYING STRESSORS

- Identify triggers and signs of stress
- Develop a Wellness Plan
- Engage in supportive relationships with fellow caregivers and support groups





IDENTIFYING YOUR OWN STRESSORS

- Identify one or two triggers.
- Identify the physical sensations you have in your body when triggered.
- Identify which emotions spark up for you.
- Think about what calms you when you have a stress response. What gives you a feeling of ease and peace?



STRESSORS CAUSED BY EXPERIENCES

Some experiences can make stress management more difficult:

- Physical and mental health
- Experiencing discrimination or hate
- Difficult relationships
- Experiencing loneliness
- Financial concerns
- Lack of supports and services/housing
- Single parenting/caregiving
- Lack of safety and protection





STRESS MANIFESTATIONS

If you or the youth in your care is feeling stressed, you/they might feel:

- Irritable, angry, impatient or wound up
- Overburdened or overwhelmed
- Anxious, nervous or afraid,
- Like your thoughts are racing
- Like you can't switch off
- Unable to enjoy yourself
- Depressed or uninterested
- Like you've lost your sense of humor
- A sense of dread or worry
- Neglected or lonely
- Existing mental health issues getting worse





PHYSICAL SIGNS OF STRESS



- Difficulty breathing
- Panic attacks
- Blurred eyesight
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue or muscle aches and headaches
- Chest pains and high blood pressure
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Digestive issues
- Feeling sick, dizzy or faint
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Developing rashes or other skin issues
- Sweating
- Changes to menstrual cycle
- Existing physical health problems getting worse



STRESS BEHAVIORS

- Find it hard to make decisions
- Unable to concentrate
- Unable to remember things
- Constant worry or feelings of dread
- Snapping at others
- Biting nails
- Picking or itching skin
- Teeth grinding
- Over- or under-eating
- Smoking, use of recreational drugs or alcohol
- Restlessness
- Crying or feeling tearful
- Overspending or shopping
- Over- or under-exercising
- Withdrawing from others

MINDFULNESS MOMENT



**MANAGING TOXIC
STRESS TO
SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE
*BUILDING RESILIENCE***



STRESS MANAGEMENT: DOING WHAT MATTERS IN TIMES OF STRESS

- **Grounding**
 - Engage your senses, connect with your breath.
- **Unhooking**
 - Notice difficult thought or feeling.
 - Name it, describe it.
- **Acting on Your Values**
 - Take action to be the kind of person you want to be.
- **Being Kind**
 - To yourself & others.
- **Making Room**
 - Focus your attention on a difficult thought or feeling. NOTICE and NAME it, then observe it with curiosity.



STRESS MANAGEMENT



Managing Triggers:

- Know what your triggers are
- Recognize physical changes you experience
- Develop a plan that builds on your strengths and tends to what you need in the moment
- Practice this plan several times a day whenever you notice even a slight stress reaction

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Connecting with others

- Keep in touch with family and friends and share your concerns and feelings with people you trust. Connecting with others can lift our mood and help us feel less stressed.

Eating healthy

- What we eat and drink can affect our health. Try to eat a balanced diet and to eat at regular intervals. Drink enough fluids. Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables if you can.

Movement

- Regular daily movement can help to reduce stress. This can include walking, as well as more intensive exercise, dancing, playing a sport however you like to move, just do it more!

Limiting time following news

- Spending too much time following news on television and social media can increase stress. Limit the time you spend following the news if it increases your stress.

WELLNESS PLAN ACTIVITY



- **Develop your Everyday Self-Care Plan**
 - Activities we do every day to promote our physical health. This includes the basics eating nourishing meals, hydrating (water intake), sleep, and movement.
- **Practice Mindfulness - Being in the Moment**
 - Anything that helps you feel present in the moment. This includes activities that help clear your mind, engage your senses, and feel calm.
- **Plan to Manage Stress in the Moment**
 - Actions you can do in the moment anytime, and anywhere that nurture you when you feel stressed or triggered.

STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS

- Identify the time of day when you have the most energy
- Prioritize tasks
- Set small, achievable goals
- Vary your activities
- Try not to do too much at once
- Establish healthy boundaries
- Have breaks and take things slowly
- Identify your support person

- **Create** supportive and responsive relationships
- **Observe** behavior
- **Communicate** with the child or youth and create a safe space
- **Help** the child or youth identify positive tools or strategies to manage adversity
- **Promote & practice** positive coping skills
- **Collaborate** with the cross systems that interact with the child
- **Advocate** for policies and practice change that inform and prioritize trauma-informed approaches that support youth who are experiencing toxic stress

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTIVE CAREGIVING

BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUTH

Allow time for rest

Gaining trust

Power of exposure to various wellness practices/approaches/activities

Power of mentorship and community building

Explore curiosities and learnings

Voice. Choice. Empowerment.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Physical
Resilience

Mental
Resilience

Emotional
Resilience

Social
Resilience

RESILIENCE STRATEGIES



Lean on healthy relationships: Build a supportive network of people who care about you and spend quality time (even if virtually) with them.



Take care of your body: It's easier to maintain your mental and emotional health when you feel good. Make an effort to eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise.



Avoid harmful behaviors: Look for healthy ways to deal with difficult emotions. Trying to escape these emotions through substance use will create more stress.



Take charge: We can't always control our circumstances, but we can control our response. Break problems into manageable tasks and move forward.



Check in with your feelings: When stressful events occur, it's important to take a step back and reflect before we react. It helps to understand where your emotions are coming from before you share them.



Learn from the past: Recognize who or what was helpful (or unhelpful) the last time you were in a stressful situation. Remembering past challenges can help you overcome new ones.



Ask for help when you need it: Reaching out to family or friends, a health care professional, or a community resource isn't easy, but knowing how to accept help is a sign of strength.

RESOURCES

- [How Toxic Stress Can Affect Children’s Development | First 5 California](#)
- [Doing what matters in times of stress: an illustrated guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.](#)
- [Exploring how social networking sites impact youth with anxiety: A qualitative study of Facebook stressors among adolescents with an anxiety disorder diagnosis | Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace](#)
- Nesse, R. M., Bhatnagar, S., & Ellis, B. (2016). Evolutionary origins and functions of the Stress Response System. *Stress: Concepts, Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior*, 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-800951-2.00011-x>
- Oberle, E., Ji, X. R., Alkawaja, M., Molyneux, T. M., Kerai, S., Thomson, K. C., Guhn, M., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Gadermann, A. M. (2023). Connections matter: Adolescent social connectedness profiles and mental well-being over time. *Journal of Adolescence*, 96(1), 31–48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12250>
- [ScienceNews](#)
- [TARGET \(Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education Therapy\)](#)
- [The U.S. is no longer one of the 20 happiest countries. If you're young, you probably know why. \(nbcnews.com\)](#)
- [Toxic Stress \(harvard.edu\)](#)
- [Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services.](#)
- [Understanding Stress: Positive, Tolerable and Toxic - one tough job](#)
- [Youth Online: High School YRBS - T-Test Los Angeles, CA 2021 and United States 2021 Results | DASH | CDC](#)
- <https://www.apa.org/topics/racism-bias-discrimination/health-disparities-stress>



CAREGIVER RESOURCES

- [Caregiver stress: Tips for taking care of yourself - Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Mental Health Resources for Parents | Mental Health America \(mhanational.org\)](#)
- [Self-Care-for-Foster-Parents.pdf \(cssp.org\)](#)
- [AECF-FosterParentResourceGuide-TST-FC-2017.pdf](#)
- [Keeping teens safe on social media: What parents should know to protect their kids \(apa.org\)](#)
- [Help-Children-and-Teens-Manage-Stress-Flier-3-18-2020.pdf \(nea.org\)](#)
- [Heart & Compass- Holistic Peer Support Working with Trauma](#)
- [stopbullying.gov](#)
- [Love is Respect](#)
- [Take it Down](#)

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STAY CONNECTED

allianceforchildrensrights.org

THANK
YOU



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