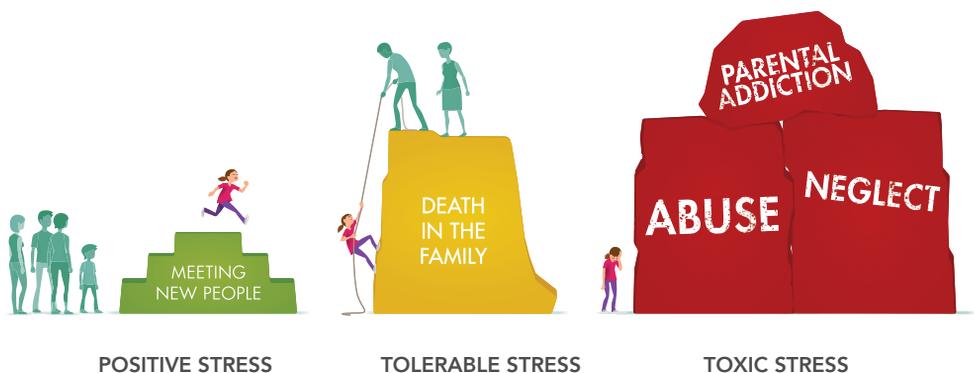


TOXIC STRESS

A force that disrupts brain architecture



Stress is one of the forces that shapes brain architecture in a developing child. Whether it strengthens or weakens brain architecture has to do with the kind of stress, its intensity and duration, and whether supportive caregivers are present in the child's life. Not all stress is bad. Events that create "positive stress" — like meeting new people or starting the first day of school — are healthy when supportive adults are around because they help prepare young brains and bodies for future challenges.

Other, more traumatic events, like a natural disaster or losing a loved one, aren't good for us. But if supportive caregivers are around to buffer the

stress response, these situations won't do lasting damage to the brain. That's called "tolerable stress."

A third kind of stress weakens brain architecture and can disrupt healthy development. "Toxic stress" occurs when no supportive caregivers are around to buffer the body's response to repeated negative experiences. Things that cause toxic stress may include abuse, neglect, parental addiction, violence outside the home, or chaotic environments. Young children whose brain development has been disrupted by toxic stress are at a much higher risk for later physical and mental health problems, including addiction.



BUILDING BETTER BRAINS

We all have the tools to help build better brains. By understanding the science behind brain development we can take action that will improve our physical and mental health and reduce risk for addiction across the lifespan.



AlbertaFamilyWellness.org/ToxicStress