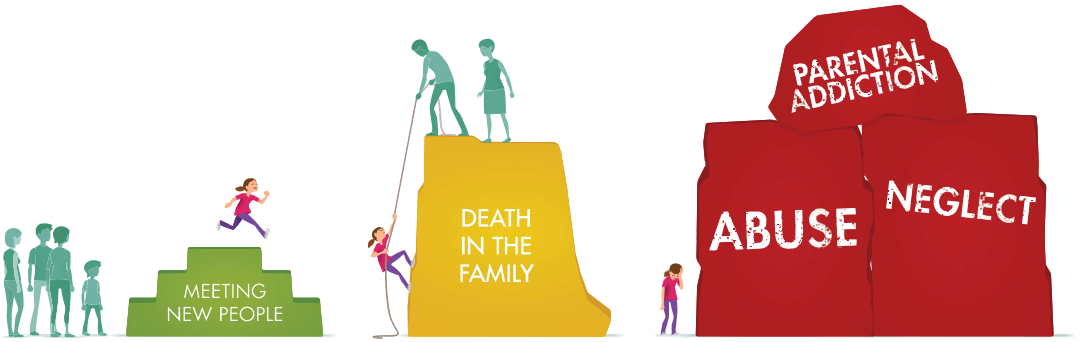
TOXIC STRESS

A force that disrupts Brain Architecture



POSITIVE STRESS | TOLERABLE STRESS | TOXIC STRESS

Stress shapes our *Brain Architecture.* The impact of stress on our brain depends on the intensity, how long it lasts, and whether we have support to help us through.

Not all stress is bad. Experiences that create "Positive Stress," like meeting new people, or starting school or a new job, develop important skills and prepare for future challenges.

"Tolerable Stress" occurs during difficult experiences, such as losing a loved one. These experiences can cause a strong stress response, but with safe, stable, supportive relationships around us, we can manage these challenges without experiencing lasting harm to the brain.

Toxic Stress is different. It happens when we face repeated hardships without supportive people around to help us through. Things like abuse, violence, or unstable living situations can create ***Toxic Stress***. Especially during childhood and adolescence, ***Toxic Stress*** can weaken our *Brain Architecture*, increasing the risk of future mental and physical health challenges.

Safe, stable, supportive relationships and *Serve and Return* interactions can help us to manage stress and build the skills and abilities we need to handle life's challenges.

IN PRACTICE: TOXIC STRESS

When someone is experiencing positive stress, support might include:

- Talking through what will likely happen (e.g., we will walk to school, say goodbye when the bell rings, then you will go into the classroom, etc.)
- Reminding them they are being brave to face this new challenge
- Asking what they are most excited about
- Asking what they are worried about so that you can help identify ways to manage it
- Reminding them of your support, no matter what happens

When someone is experiencing tolerable stress, support might include:

- Giving them time and space to process their thoughts and feelings
- Listening to them without judgment
- Reminding them of the people who are and will be around to support them
- Supporting them in the healthy ways they choose to manage stress
- Regularly reaching out to check in and provide extra support
- Offering practical support based on what you know about them, such as making their favourite meal, dropping off groceries, or helping with everyday tasks
- Helping them access professional support

When someone is experiencing *Toxic Stress*, the same supportive relationships can help. Additional support might include:

- Helping them identify and, where possible, reduce or remove the source of ***Toxic Stress***
- Taking steps to protect their safety and well-being, including reporting the source of ***Toxic Stress*** to the appropriate authorities when needed (e.g., child abuse or neglect)
- Helping them access professional or community support

Having support during difficult experiences can help us to manage stress and build resilience against future challenges.

Alberta family wellness initiative

Palix Foundation

AlbertaFamilyWellness.org/Stress