

## The Impact of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

### The Challenge

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**Over two-thirds of children** report having experienced at least one traumatic event by the age of 16.\* 52% of children ages 2-5 years old have experienced a severe stressor in their lifetime.\*\* The pandemic and children's experiences in 2020 are likely to result in increases to these statistics.

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Children who have had exposure to ACEs are more likely to be **chronically absent** and are more likely to be **suspended and even expelled** from school (including preschool programs)—disproportionately so for children of color and especially Black boys.

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When children are exposed to trauma (particularly complex trauma) their **brains are in stress response** mode.

### The Impact

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**Exposure to adverse childhood events (ACEs) can have long term, wide-ranging impacts on children's physical health** (including frequent illness, obesity, asthma and speech problems) and **mental health** (including learning, memory, mood, relational skills and aspects of executive function).

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Suspensions and expulsions don't lead to behavior improvement—quite the opposite. Children who have been suspended from school are **more likely to drop out of high school and later, become incarcerated**.

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Not only does being in **flight, fight or freeze mode make it difficult for children to focus on learning**, long-term exposure to stress chemicals (toxic stress) can **damage the architecture of the developing brain**.



## The Impact of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – Continued

### The Challenge

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Children who've been exposed to trauma are more likely to **exhibit behaviors that challenge their teachers**. In these moments of heightened stress, teachers aren't always able to respond in ways that align with their goals for children's development and success.

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**Educators often have been impacted by ACEs themselves.**

### The Impact

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Most teachers have been trained with strategies for managing challenging behaviors through discipline practices. But **when the behaviors are associated with the response to toxic stress, discipline practices that blame children for their behavior don't work**. Children need supportive relationships to help them regulate their emotions and behaviors through preventative practices and intentional interactions.

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**Working with children who have been impacted by trauma can trigger teachers** who have experienced their own trauma and are already overwhelmed by their daily responsibilities. This can lead teachers to respond in less-than-ideal ways; leaving them feeling frustrated, isolated and upset by these challenging interactions.

\*Source: <https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma>

\*\*Egger, H.L., and Angold, A. (2006). Common emotional and behavioral disorders in preschool children: Presentation, nosology, and epidemiology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 47(3-4), 313-337.