

Help Patients with ACEs Reduce Toxic Stress

Use these strategies to treat patients and care for yourself in the process

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) like abuse, neglect and household dysfunction can have a cumulative effect. Some stress can be positive, but built-up, chronic or “toxic” stress can result in negative physical and emotional health outcomes.

Supportive protective factors

As health care providers, it’s crucial to recognize your power in offering real-time support and responding in a trauma-informed, supportive way. These approaches can greatly benefit our patients’ overall well-being and resilience.

You can help patients reduce factors that lead to ACEs for children and adolescents. Encourage awareness of protective factors like:

- **Concrete support:** Families who can meet their basic needs and know how to access care are better able to ensure the safety and well-being of their children.
- **Social and emotional competence:** Children who are nurtured and develop positive relationships with caring adults will experience improved behavior and development.
- **Resilience:** Parents with coping skills and resilience are better equipped to handle everyday stress.
- **Social connections:** It’s easier to care for children when parents are connected to a network of friends, family and neighbors.
- **Knowledge of parenting and child development:** Parents provide a safe space for children to grow independently by listening, communicating well and setting appropriate rules and expectations.
- **Nurturing and attachment:** Research shows that children who consistently receive affection and nurture do better academically, behaviorally and have the ability to cope with stress.



Promote self-care for patients

Educate patients to reduce stress by taking care of themselves in simple ways. Talk with them about:

- **Supportive relationships:** Staying in touch and connecting with loved ones, friends and community or faith-based groups can reduce isolation and relieve stress.
- **Daily exercise:** Sixty minutes of activity can help burn off stress.
- **Healthy sleep:** Ensure enough sleep by going to bed and waking up at the same time. Avoid caffeine and electronics near bedtime.
- **Good nutrition:** A healthy diet will help the body combat stress.
- **Behavioral health care:** Reach out to a mental health professional to schedule an appointment for supportive care.
- **Mindfulness:** Engage in mindfulness practices, like meditation, yoga or prayer to help regulate the stress response.

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Care for yourself

Stay aware of your own well-being and know how to recognize secondary traumatic stress when working with traumatized adults and/or adolescents. Studies show that physicians and other providers who work directly with traumatized patients are at higher risk of secondary traumatic stress, or the related conditions of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and vicarious trauma.

Empower yourself by recognizing indirect trauma and the effects of secondary traumatic stress. It may also be helpful to explore strategies to enhance your own resiliency and reduce your risk of traumatization.

Preventive strategies like the following can build resiliency:

- Use supervision to address secondary traumatic stress.
- Increase self-awareness of secondary traumatic stress.
- Maintain healthy work-life balance.
- Participate in a self-care accountability or buddy system.
- Develop and implement plans to increase personal wellness and resilience.
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Provider resources

Health Care Toolbox – go to healthcaretoolbox.org. The toolbox was created by the Center for Pediatric Traumatic Stress (CPTS) to increase awareness of medical traumatic stress in children, provide information and evidence-based recommendations for health care physicians and other providers, and guide parents and families to resources.

References

- [The California Surgeon General’s Playbook for Stress](https://osg.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/266/2022/05/california-surgeon-general_stress-busting-playbook.pdf) - https://osg.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/266/2022/05/california-surgeon-general_stress-busting-playbook.pdf
- [ACEs Aware: How to Reduce the Effects of ACEs and Toxic Stress](http://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/3-How-to-Reduce-the-Effects-of-ACEs-and-Toxic-Stress-English.pdf) - www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/3-How-to-Reduce-the-Effects-of-ACEs-and-Toxic-Stress-English.pdf
- [Six Protective Factors](http://www.ounce.org/cap/Six_Protective_Factors_Infographic.pdf) - www.ounce.org/cap/Six_Protective_Factors_Infographic.pdf
- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Traumatic Informed Care > Secondary Traumatic Stress > Introduction](http://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/secondary-traumatic-stress/introduction) - www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/secondary-traumatic-stress/introduction

ACEs Training and self-attestation requirements

Medi-Cal physicians and other providers who have completed the two-hour online ACEs training and submitted their self-attestation to the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) can continue or begin billing for ACEs screenings. You can complete the training, self-attest and begin billing the month of completing the attestation.



Take these steps:

- 1 Register for the two-hour online training at training.acesaware.org/aa/.
- 2 To self-attest, fill out the course evaluation and provide your National Provider Identifier number, or complete the [DHCS Trauma Screening Training Attestation form](#) available at <https://secure.medi-cal.ca.gov/TSTA/TSTAattest.aspx>



To learn more about the history of ACEs, how ACEs effects life-long health, the importance of screening for ACEs and trauma, and how to promote resilience among the populations you serve, [register for California ACEs](#) found under the Behavioral Health Training Series.



Adult patients with a history of significant childhood trauma can be at higher risk of experiencing health and behavioral problems during times of stress. The Plan encourages providers who care for such patients to educate them on how to deal with stress and ways to protect children and adolescents from trauma.