



Tennessee’s future prosperity depends on our ability to foster the health and well-being of our children. When our community invests proactive supports for families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

Wise investments in children and families should be made in the earliest years of life, when experience are literally shaping how the brain develops, establishing either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows.

A focus on ACEs

When children experience chronic exposure to adverse events during the first thousand days of life—such as the loss of a parent through illness, death or incarceration; abuse or neglect; or witnessing violence or substance abuse—it undermines their future physical and behavioral health.

Data show that harms associated with these “adverse childhood experiences” (ACEs) range widely, from school failure to criminality to addiction to heart disease and diabetes.

The good news: in many cases, ACEs can be prevented, and caregivers and communities hold the keys to prevention. The **Universal Parenting Places (UPPs)**, with two current locations in Memphis, and two more to open in 2017, offer parents judgement-free counseling and support, at no cost, to prevent common childrearing challenges from becoming chronic problems later in life.

Toxic stress

Until very recently, the effects of childhood trauma were viewed as primarily “psychological.” Now studies in medicine and neurobiology reveals that the chief impact is in fact biological: “toxic stress” (a response that can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity) disrupts brain development in children.

ACEs can have lasting effects on...



Health

(obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones)



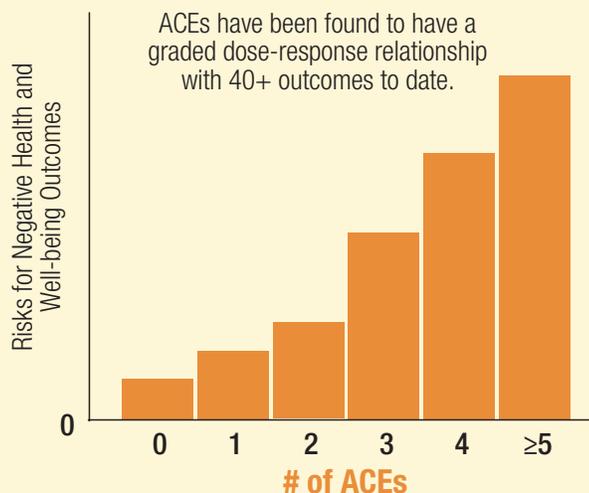
Behaviors

(smoking, alcoholism, drug use)



Life Potential

(graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time for work)



*This pattern holds for the 40+ outcomes, but the exact risk values vary depending on the outcome.

Indeed, the latest research shows that toxic stress affects babies' most fundamental developmental processes, including epigenetics—proteins that circulate around DNA and cause certain genes to be differently expressed from the original coding.

This emerging brain science, and the ground breaking CDC-Kaiser ACE Study, indicate that the most effective time to intervene in negative relationships, environments, and behaviors is at the earliest point of detection of challenges by the family.

A preventive approach for all

Most support programs target high-risk or low-income parents, often after problems have developed and carry some stigma. But because toxic stress in families crosses all socio-economic, racial and ethnic barriers, UPPs are offered at no cost to all parents and caregivers.

In the same way that visits to the pediatrician provide answers to common medical questions that help parents prevent physical disease, the UPPs utilize the latest findings from neurobiology and family therapy to provide state-of-the-art solutions to common concerns affecting children's emotional health.

We know that safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments have a positive impact on a broad range of health problems, and on the development of skills that will help children reach their full potential.

UPP founding principles and training materials are based on the work of international speaker Robin Karr-Morse, founder of The Parenting

Institute, based in Portland, Oregon, and on the understanding parenting is challenging for everyone; therefore, all families are welcome.

An investment upstream

“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.”
– *Desmond Tutu*

Research has shown strong returns on investments in programs focused on toxic stress reduction. One pilot program in North Carolina, notable because it took a universal rather than targeted approach to outreach, was found in a Duke University study to return \$3 for every \$1 invested. The program has only been in operation since 2008, meaning those returns are realized within the child's first three years of life.

Beyond these specific findings, given what we know already about the scale of toxic stress exposure nationally, the potential savings associated with lower crime rates; higher educational attainment; improved mental health; reduced incidence of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and other life-threatening illnesses are staggering.

As Tennesseans understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences, they will realize the future economic development and prosperity of the state depends on what we do now to prevent these experiences whenever possible and to wrap services around children and families when toxic stress cannot be prevented. Together, we can offer a more effective, more empathetic parent support delivery system—and a stronger Tennessee.

Locations

UPP at Baptist Memorial Hospital for Women
6225 Humphreys Blvd., 5th Floor
901-227-9558

UPP at Knowledge Quest
990 College Park Drive, Ste. 104
901-207-3694

Coming in 2017..

UPP at Perea Preschool in Klondike Elementary
UPP at Christ Community Health Services in Raleigh

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