



Highlights on Toxic Stress from Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Early exposure to adverse experiences, such as child abuse or neglect, poverty, neighborhood and domestic violence, and parental mental illness causes enduring trauma to a child's developing brain.

Known as "**toxic stress**," adverse experiences in infancy and early childhood disrupt the developing brain architecture and can lead to permanent changes in learning, behavior and physiology. The effect of toxic stress is cumulative¹, and it is most harmful when there are numerous stressors over an extended period of time.

Research suggests that toxic stress levels in early childhood contribute to the development of adult chronic disease, including cardiovascular disease, autoimmune diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and depression.

Adverse experiences include: frequent socioeconomic hardship, parental divorce or separation, parental death, parental incarceration, witnessing domestic violence, witnessing violence in the neighborhood, experiencing racial or ethnic discrimination, living with someone who is mentally ill or suicidal, and living with someone who has problems with substance abuse.²

Nearly one in four infants and toddlers in the U.S. has experienced one or more adverse experiences. Even after excluding economic hardship, children under age three who live in poverty are four times more likely to experience two or more adverse experiences.

The Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook – Toxic Stress Indicators

Published annually since 1995, the *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* is the primary publication of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. The *Factbook* tracks the progress of 71 indicators, across five areas of child well-being. The *Factbook* provides a statistical portrait of the status of Rhode Island's children and families, incorporating the best available research and data.

The following indicators from the *2015 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* track progress on factors directly related to toxic stress:

- [Infants Born at Highest Risk](#)
- [Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
- [Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)
- [Children Witnessing Domestic Violence](#)
- [Children in Poverty](#)
- [Racial and Ethnic Disparities](#)
- [Evidence-Based Family Home Visiting](#)

¹ Harvard Center for the Developing Child, 2015

² Murphey, D., Cooper, M., & Forry, N. (2013). *The youngest Americans: A statistical portrait of infants and toddlers in the United States*. Bethesda, MD: ChildTrends.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Publications Related to Toxic Stress

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's publications provide an in-depth analysis of current issues affecting Rhode Island children and families, incorporating the best available data, research, and best practices.

- *Early Learning Fact Sheet: [Focus on Evidence-Based Family Home Visiting, October 2015](#)* – Healthy brain development depends on attentive, nurturing caregiving in infancy and early childhood. Research shows that there is a negative impact on brain development when young children do not have consistent, supportive relationships with caregivers and are exposed to “toxic stress.” Providing early and intensive support to families with multiple risk factors improves child development outcomes. This report includes data and information on infants born with key risk factors, and provides a comprehensive overview of Evidence-Based Family Home Visiting Programs in Rhode Island.
- *Issue Brief: [Infants, Toddler, and their Families in Rhode Island, June 2015](#)* – This report includes information and data on issues affecting Rhode Island infants, toddlers, and their families, including: economic security, parental education, family home visiting programs, quality early childhood education, healthy births, developmental screenings and other health issues, and paid family leave.
- *[Next Steps for Rhode Island's Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families, June 2015](#)* – *Next Steps* is a set of recommended policy priorities for Rhode Island infants, toddlers, and their families. Developed under the leadership of a public-private steering committee using input from more than 200 early childhood experts from across the state and technical assistance from Zero to Three, *Next Steps* has been endorsed by a variety of statewide planning groups, including the Rhode Island Early Learning Council & Successful Start.
- *Issue Brief: [Child Poverty in Rhode Island, January 2015](#)* – Poverty is an issue affecting children and families in every city and town in Rhode Island. Children in poverty, especially those who experience poverty in early childhood and for extended periods, are more likely to have physical and behavioral health problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, and earn less or be unemployed as adults. Children in poverty are less likely to be enrolled in preschool, more likely to attend schools that lack resources and rigor, and have fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Statewide and community-specific child poverty rates are presented in the *Issue Brief*.
- *Issue Brief: [Young Children with Developmental Delays & Disabilities, November 2013](#)* – This report outlines the benefits young children receive from early developmental screenings and high-quality intervention and education programs, and key issues related to young children with disabilities. Children who are most at risk for developmental problems are those that have experienced multiple risk factors during early childhood.
- *Issue Brief: [Disparities in Children's Health, February 2012](#)* – This report provides information on racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and child health in Rhode Island, including perinatal health, infant health, asthma, and obesity.

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Founded in 1994, [Rhode Island KIDS COUNT](#) works to improve the health, safety, education, economic security, and development of Rhode Island's children.