



Trauma & Toxic Stress

*Changing the Trajectory for
Florida's Most Vulnerable Children
to Help Them Thrive*

A convergence of compelling evidence has linked toxic early childhood adverse experiences with a lifetime trajectory of serious mental and physical health problems. The biology of adversity supports fundamental shifts in policy and practice across systems, which is the overall purpose of this three-year project. This goal is to mitigate the impact of toxic stress and trauma in infancy and early childhood by using a collective impact approach to create system change at state and local levels which will be accomplished with four key strategies:

1. **Widespread education about the impact of trauma.** There is an urgent need for protecting children from the impact of toxic stress. This requires a beginning step of educating a range of pediatricians, judiciary and child welfare staff, foster parents, teachers, childcare providers, and community based organizations about the impact of adverse childhood experiences and the mitigation of toxic stress to achieve optimal child development trajectories.
2. **Increase trauma screenings.** Develop and implement projects to screen and monitor families and young children for adverse childhood experiences, family violence and trauma risk.
3. **Expand evidence-based treatments.** Promote the expansion and coordination of networks of evidence-based supports and treatment services for families identified with trauma or risk for trauma, including trauma-informed prevention programs, trauma-informed mental health and substance abuse therapies and infant mental health treatments.

State Level Policy Task Force. A new interagency, multidisciplinary *Task Force on Trauma & Toxic Stress* will be established in collaboration with Florida's Children & Youth Cabinet to address state level policy issues and barriers to services. The Task Force's primary focus is the mitigation of toxic stress and trauma as a strategy to improve the physical, social, and emotional development. The targeted system improvements are to identify training needs, provide tools for trauma screening, ensure access to a continuum of trauma and mental health treatment; eliminate barriers to screening and services for young children; and to increase access to needed early childhood services; and to create and expand trauma informed systems of care.

Local Level Demonstration Projects. Efforts will mirror state level systems integration efforts in two communities targeting vulnerable young children involved in child welfare. Innovative "Baby Court" projects will be established in Escambia and Pasco Counties bringing together the medical community, child care providers, early intervention, child welfare and key partners focused on mitigation of stress and trauma for children in dependency courts.

At the end of the three-year project, measurable gains will show increased: (1) awareness of the impact of trauma across systems; (2) early identification of trauma and toxic stress, (3) utilization of evidenced based interventions and (4) trauma informed systems demonstrating that Florida's children are on a trajectory for healthy outcomes. The evidence is persuasive, the moral imperative compelling, and the opportunity before us to achieve substantially greater impacts than current efforts. For more information contact the Project Director, Dr. Mimi Graham at FSU (mgraham@fsu.edu) or 850-922-1302.