

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND YOUR GRANDCHILD

Grandparents often care for grandchildren that have been through Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES).



ACES are serious childhood traumatic events which include:

- Abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional)
- Neglect (physical or emotional)
- Parental Divorce
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Incarcerated household member
- Household mental illness
- Household substance abuse
- Homelessness

When children are exposed to these events, they can experience toxic stress which impacts their growing brains. This trauma can have a negative effect on their health and well-being.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE FOR MY GRANDCHILD?

Every child and experience is different. Here are some things you may notice:

- Has a hard time staying calm and controlled
- Does not finish tasks
- Seems to be overreacting to situations
- Fear of certain sights or sounds
- Clinginess or fear of being separated from caregiver
- Has a hard time stopping an activity and going to the next one (transitioning)
- Has a hard time paying attention, concentrating, or staying organized
- Acts overly aggressive, withdrawn, or reactive

CHILDREN CAN HEAL FROM TRAUMA



The good news is children have the chance to bounce back from these traumatic events. By creating a safe, stable, and loving home, you are helping your grandchild heal and overcome these hardships. By understanding how trauma impacts your grandchildren, you can parent from a place of compassion. This will strengthen your bond and connection with your grandchild.

CREATE REGULAR ROUTINES

Structure and boundaries help children feel safe.

- You can avoid power struggles when your grandchild knows what to expect for meals, playtime, school, and bedtime.
- Talk to your grandchild when there will be a change to your routine (parent visit, doctor's appointment, new babysitter, or fire drill at school).

HELP YOUR GRANDCHILD FEEL SAFE AND CALM

- Some sights, sounds, or events can trigger your grandchild.
- Triggers can make your grandchild act in an extreme, explosive, or unexpected way.
- Tell your grandchild that they are safe.
- Help your grandchild to calm down by taking deep breaths. This can help put their body into a more relaxed state. Do not tell your grandchild to breathe. Instead model deep breathing and let them follow your lead.
- Find out what activities are calming to your grandchild (coloring, music, back rub, quiet time). Try to do some of these things when they are upset.



HELP YOUR GRANDCHILD IDENTIFY AND LABEL WHAT THEY ARE FEELING.

Children who have been through traumatic events need extra help in understanding, expressing, and managing their emotions.

- Help your grandchild put their feelings into words. You could say: “When I have to go somewhere new I sometimes feel nervous, is this how you are feeling right now?”
- After you have helped your grandchild identify what they are feeling, help them figure out how to handle that emotion. You could say: “You said that you are feeling scared about your new school, let's talk about some things that you like about school and who you can go to if you are having a hard time tomorrow.”

GIVE YOURSELF A TIME OUT WHEN NEEDED.

- If your grandchild is upset or yelling, it is ok to walk away from the situation.
- Give yourself time to respond calmly. Don't react with anger.
- Try not to take your grandchild's behavior personally.
- Be confident that you are a good grandparent.
- Repeat a mantra to yourself “My grandchild is healing, when I am calm, they can be calm.
- Be a good role model during difficult times.
- Take a walk, meditate, breathe, give yourself time to feel grounded and calm.





GIVE CHOICES

- Try to give your grandchild choices and direct them towards positive behavior.
- If something upsets your grandchild, you can say: “You can choose to go to your room and calm down or we could go outside and take a walk, what would you like to do?”
- Help your grandchild get used to making good choices, solving their own problems, and taking control of their own lives.

ALLOW MORE TIME FOR TRANSITION

- Transitions can be upsetting for many children and trigger tantrums, fighting, or meltdowns.
- Give verbal warnings so they know what to expect. You could say: “In 10 minutes you need to turn off your video game and take a shower.”
- Praise good transitions. You could say: “I really like how you put your toys away and got ready for bed. Now we have more time to read. Good job.”

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Nurturing a grandchild starts with nurturing yourself. If you are busy and overwhelmed, start small. Take 15-30 minutes each day to do something you love. Join a support group, exercise, connect with friends, and do the things that are healing for you. You are helping your grandchild recover and thrive and it is important for you to be strong, energized, and healthy.



Ties That Bind is a program of the Jessie F. Richardson Foundation. With this program, we aim to connect grandparents and kinship caregivers with the resources they need.

Visit us at <http://tiesthatbindor.org/> for more.