

## Family Stress

Even very young children are affected by family stress. While each day offers stimulating new experiences for young children, some chronic stressful experiences can damage the rapidly growing brain of a young child. The stresses of financial hardship, crowded housing, abuse and neglect, exposure to intimate partner violence, or family turmoil in early childhood can disrupt the architecture of the brain leading to increased risk of developmental delay and a host of long-term health problems, including alcoholism, depression, eating disorders, heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases. Community resources and public services are available for lessening the effects of chronic stresses on your child's health and development.

Fifty-three percent of provider referrals to 1st Five are related to family stress. Previous to the implementation of 1st Five, many providers were not asking about family stress, let alone referring families to services to relieve their stress. Even very young children are affected by family stress. While each day offers stimulating new experiences for young children, some stressful experiences can damage the rapidly growing brain of a young child. The stresses of financial hardship, abuse and neglect, exposure to intimate partner violence, or family turmoil in early childhood can disrupt the architecture of the brain leading to increased risk of developmental delay and a host of long-term health problems, including alcoholism, depression, eating disorders, heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases.

### Young Child Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence

Annie, a 4 year-old girl, was referred to 1st Five because she had been exposed to her father's violent behavior toward her mother and had begun exhibiting aggressive behavior herself. After talking with Annie's mother, the 1st Five coordinator referred her to the Tri-State Coalition Against Violence. The coordinator also referred the family to a counseling center, which has a young children's group for Annie to attend, and AEA for speech and hearing evaluations for both of the family's children. Annie's mother reported that she is coping better as a result of counseling and that Annie's behavior is improving as well.

**For more information, visit the following links:**

[Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain](#)

[In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development](#)

[The Effects of Early Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan](#)

[Intimate Partner Violence: The Role of the Pediatrician](#)

[The Long-Term Effects of Recession-Induced Child Poverty](#)