

## Physical and Brain Development: Stress

### Teaching Tips:

- Many educators find it helpful to teach stress after having introduced the concepts in the temperament and self-regulation modules.
- Many parents understand that stress is a part of everyday life for adults. However, the concept that children experience stress is often new. It may be useful to start with a conversation about how stress can be both helpful and harmful to either children or adults.
- As you teach parents about stress, remember to connect the concepts back to parenting. Helping parents understand how their own stress impacts their child's behavior can be a good discussion group topic or journal exercise.
- Use the key messages below as a focus for teaching this topic as well as a summary of the content.

### Learning Objectives for Parents and Caregivers

---

After learning about stress, parents and caregivers will be able to:

- 1) Identify the three types of stress that affect the developing child
- 2) Understand the impact of repeated, long-term stress on children
- 3) Explain how parental support and involvement helps to regulate an infant's stress responses through calming and self-soothing
- 4) Understand the role that stress plays in a young child's social and emotional development
- 5) Consider the sources of their own stress and how it plays out in their relationships with their child

### Key Messages for Parents and Caregivers

---

- 1) Learning to cope with stress is an important part of a child's development.
- 2) A child between the ages of birth and five is especially vulnerable to the effects of stress.
- 3) A young child cannot cope with the negative effects of stress without relying on a supportive relationship with a parent or caregiver.
- 4) Not all stress is bad. Some stress is a normal part of life.
- 5) "Toxic stress" occurs when a child is subjected to high levels of stress for extended periods of time. This type of stress is extremely detrimental to development.



- 6) Infants cannot regulate their own stress response. They rely on parents and caregivers to help them calm and self-soothe, especially during the first year.
- 7) A child's ability to cope with stress in the early years has consequences for physical and mental health throughout life.
- 8) The relationships children have with their caregivers play a critical role in the development of the stress response system during the early years of life.
- 9) The presence of a sensitive and responsive caregiver can protect infants and toddlers from experiencing excessive stress—even children who tend to be temperamentally fearful or anxious—and help them cope better.

