



Overview of the Seven Stress Busters

People can prevent and heal from toxic stress at any age. As trusted community partners, community-based organizations are uniquely positioned to provide tools and strategies to help individuals, no matter where they are in life.

How can CBOs incorporate Stress Busters into interactions with clients? Take a whole-picture, trauma-informed approach and discuss with clients what they may need and want to prioritize, including:

- ✓ Support for immediate stressors like housing and food
- ✓ Ways to address the body's internal stress response:
 - Tools to use in the moment to manage anxiety, stress, anger, etc. (for techniques to calm the stress response; see the *Listen, Partner, Connect: Framework and skills for a trauma-informed approach with clients* chapter of the toolkit)
 - Strategies to use for long-term healing of the body's stress response (Stress Busters)

The purpose of having a conversation with clients is not to be prescriptive, but to bring genuine curiosity and partnership to a process of healing. Different clients will be interested in trying different Stress Busters. For more information on how to structure these conversations, see the *Listen, Partner, Connect: Framework and skills for a trauma-informed approach with clients* chapter of the toolkit).

The seven Stress Busters have all been shown to improve neurologic, endocrine (the hormone system), and immune function, essentially preventing and healing toxic stress physiology.¹ It can be helpful to explain all seven Stress Busters and ask which ones the client feels like they're doing well with, and which they might like to work on. Start with one Stress Buster of interest, and work with the client from there, such as adding other Stress Busters over time.

If helpful, use the handout, [Stress Busters: Healthy Ways to Manage Stress](#) or the following descriptions as a conversational guide or script to introduce clients to the Stress Busters.



Source: Bhushan D, et al. *The Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health*. Office of the California Surgeon General, 2020 DOI: 10.48019/PEAM8812:8 Gilgoff et al. *Adverse Childhood Experiences, Outcomes, and Interventions*. *Pediatric Clinics* 2020; 67(2): 259-73.13

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Supportive relationships

Having one or more people in our lives who we trust and can count on to be there for us is one of the most important factors that can protect us from toxic stress and improve overall health and well-being. For a child, even having just one trusted adult can make a big difference in helping them cope with adversity. Supportive relationships can lower stress hormones, enhance immune function, and improve self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of security. Over a lifetime, supportive relationships, which can include close interpersonal relationships and social networks, promote healthy brain development and function, decrease blood pressure and the risk of heart disease, and help us live longer.

Quality sleep

Stress has a significant impact on sleep patterns, including difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep. The impacts of disrupted sleep can be far-reaching, including fatigue, reduced cognitive function, impaired emotion regulation, and increased risk for Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and depression. While sleep disturbances in both childhood and adulthood are common after adversity and trauma, when we have supports and are able to get enough regular, uninterrupted quality sleep, it enables the body to maintain a state of stability that can prevent toxic stress and also help the body offset and heal from the impacts of toxic stress.

Balanced nutrition

There is a clear connection between stress and nutrition, and research shows that both have a significant impact on our overall health and well-being. Prolonged stress can disrupt the body's hormonal balance, leading to changes in appetite, metabolism, and immune function. Recent studies suggest that what we eat can influence our body's response to stress. Therefore, having a healthy, balanced eating pattern can fuel our body to prevent and treat toxic stress.

Physical activity

Physical activity helps us by promoting a positive stress response and increasing our resilience. Research shows that physical activity can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, mental health disorders, and mortality; improve respiratory endurance, help maintain a healthy weight, and promote muscle development; improve memory and attention, cognition, academic achievement, psychosocial functioning, and immune function; and mitigate or improve outcomes, specifically for people with a history of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or trauma.

Mindfulness practices

Mindfulness is a tool that can help us manage stress and improve our health and well-being. Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present moment, without judgment, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Mindfulness can enhance focus, lower blood pressure, boost the immune system, and create a sense of calm during stressful times.

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Experiencing nature

Clinical studies have demonstrated that spending time outdoors in nature can reduce cardiovascular risks, enhance cognitive functions, improve self-esteem and psychological well-being, promote happiness and life satisfaction, decrease stress levels, and foster resilience for mental and emotional well-being.

Mental healthcare

Research shows that mental and behavioral health interventions can significantly prevent and heal toxic stress in both children and adults. For example, studies have shown that psychosocial interventions can improve brain health, heart health, and immune system function.

Watch [this video](#) from the California Surgeon General's Office about ACEs and Stress Busters.



Stress Busters are self-care. Self-care is not selfish!

Stress Busters are important tools for the health and well-being of clients and also for you, your family, and your organization's staff. As you use this toolkit, you will find recommendations for how to incorporate Stress Busters into your own life, the ways your teams work together, and even into your office's physical space (see the *Promoting Stress Busters at the organizational level* chapter of the toolkit). Everyone deserves to live and work in an environment that fosters supportive relationships and engenders safety, trust, and autonomy.

For more information on how to address stress before it becomes burnout, take the ACEs Aware training, [Prevention of Burnout for Health Care Teams](#). Although the course was developed for clinicians in health care settings, the topics such as work-life balance, organizational culture, and organizational strategies to prevent burnout can apply to community-based organizations, too.

References

1. Bhushan D, Kotz K, McCall J, et al. The Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General's Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health. Office of the California Surgeon General; 2020. doi:10.48019/PEAM8812