

CORTISOL OVERLOAD

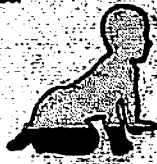
Babies' brains are on fire in Kansas, overloaded with toxic levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

PANIC

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BABIES AND TODDLERS FACE ADVERSE FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES?
 A growing body of research on brain development connects adversity to toxic levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Unlike children with normal cortisol patterns that peak early in the day and decrease steadily until bedtime, children in families facing adversity have cortisol levels that are constantly elevated.



A CONSTANT HIGH LEVEL OF CORTISOL CAN HAVE DEVASTATING EFFECTS ON A YOUNG CHILD'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT—including cycles of behavior challenges, school struggles, and troubled adulthood. For example, a study at Stanford University showed that toxic levels of cortisol can shrink the size of the hippocampus, a brain structure important in memory processing and emotion. Other research links elevated cortisol levels to depression, PTSD, anxiety, antisocial behavior, and increased risk of alcohol abuse.



► POSITIVE
 Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels.



► TOLERABLE
 Serious temporary stress responses, buffered by supportive relationships.



► TOXIC
 Prolonged, intense stress responses, leading to long-term health and behavioral problems.