

# Your presence helps kids turn stress into growth opportunity

## DR. TONY GIAQUINTA

There's a well-known study, conducted by Harvard's Center on the Developing Child, on which child abuse specialists rely.

It goes like this: Every child who winds up doing well has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.

As a child abuse specialist, this means a lot to me. It means that while our child abuse statistics are tragic (Indiana ranks 15th in the nation for abuse and neglect, with 18,267 reported victims in 2023), we don't have to despair.



**Dr. Tony Giaquinta** is a Fort Wayne pediatrician.

The kids I see in clinic have experienced serious trauma and have tough roads ahead. But, fortunately, we know the key to rescuing a child from their traumas: a caring, consistent adult in their lives.

Most often, parents provide this role. As parents, our job is not to protect children from all pain and stress.

Indeed, stressful situations for children abound: an unfair call during a baseball game, a bully at school or a fall off the playset. These are all painful experiences that we certainly wouldn't wish for.

But these are all versions of what we call tolerable stress. If buffered by a stable, secure adult in their lives, a child's confidence will be strengthened by such incidents so that they can experience stress and still be OK.

We call this resilience, and it is a crucial life skill for every successful adult.

Unfortunately, children who don't have these secure attachments in the home will experience stress in a different way.

Unbuffered, repetitive, sustained trauma and stress causes something called toxic stress. Children experiencing toxic stress are not doing well, displaying maladaptive behaviors and emotional insecurities that, without rescue, can irreparably hinder a child's development.

But, as I mentioned in the beginning, I do my job with hope and optimism, knowing these children can be rescued and become the most amazing, successful young adults.

Here's where you come in, and guess what? Making a difference is easier than you

## RESOURCES



[literacyalliance.org](http://literacyalliance.org)

Go to these sites to get involved:  
[opportunities.volunteerfortwayne.org](http://opportunities.volunteerfortwayne.org)  
[www.bbbsnei.org](http://www.bbbsnei.org)  
[literacyalliance.org](http://literacyalliance.org)  
[allencountycasa.org](http://allencountycasa.org)

think.

You see, children spell trust and connection with one simple, four-letter word: T-I-M-E. You don't have to be an expert in child development to make a difference. Giving your kindness, energy, patience and, most of all, time, is the secret sauce.

You just need to show up.

Examples include volunteering as a Little League coach, as a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor, a court-appointed special advocate or a Project Reads tutor with the Literacy Alliance. These are wonderful volunteer opportunities to engage, support and protect a child from their stress. Many of these take just an hour of your time a week.

So, once again, during this Child Abuse Awareness Month, let's remember that every child who winds up doing well has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.

Or, put another way, every child is just one stable relationship away from being successful. Maybe that adult is you!