Kids who have faced strong, frequent and/or prolonged adversity, as well as collective traumas like racism and community violence without supportive adults in their lives, can experience toxic stress.

What does this look like for a kid playing sports?

- A minor foul escalates into a fight with teammates
- A lack of focus
- The inability to handle competitive pressure

This excessive activation of the stress-response system can lead to long-lasting wear and tear on the body and brain. As a result, kids often exhibit effects of serious trauma exposure, such as the inability to control impulses, aggression and a heightened sense of fear.

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While these behaviors can be frustrating from a coaching perspective, we encourage you to remember two essential components in supporting kids:

- Always assume kids' disruptive behavior is the symptom of a deeper harm and are outside of their control
- For kids to manage their behaviors and emotions, they need support from a regulated adult

Coaches Can:

- Identify their own triggers and have strategies to regulate themselves when anger or frustration develops
- Listen deeply to understand players' perspectives
- Ask "looking back" questions to help kids name previous emotions
- Help kids identify new responses to behavior and emotions

3. The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog Bruce Perry, ME, PHD and Maia Szalavitz (2017)