



## Tipping the Scale

Wisconsin's future success relies on the health and well-being of our children. To ensure new generations of productive, conscientious citizens, we must counter any negative experiences that cause toxic stress with protective factors.

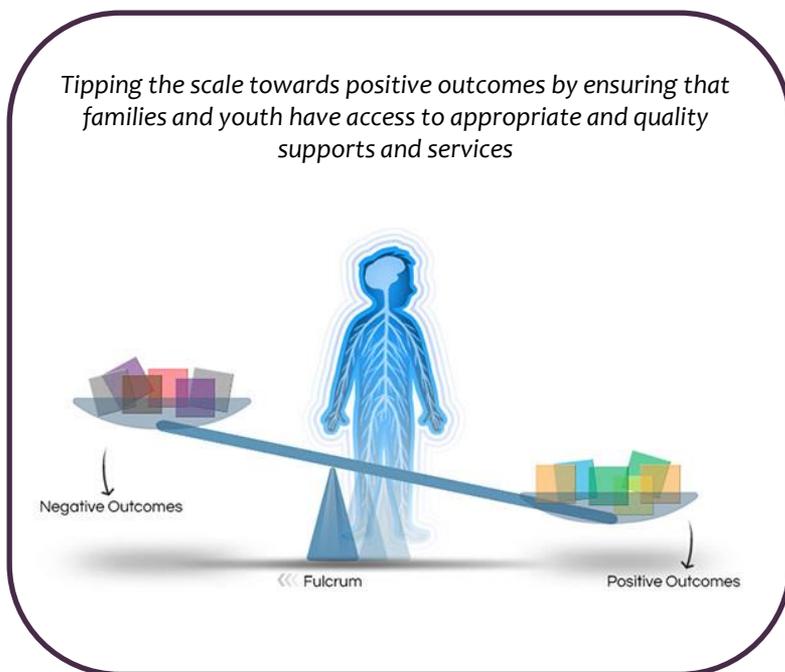
The Office of Children's Mental Health is using the metaphor of a scale<sup>2</sup> to think of the course of a child's development. A scale has two ways to tip the balance, the counterbalance and the fulcrum or balancing point. In the metaphor, the positive experiences or protective factors, are loaded on to one side of the scale while the challenges or risk factors are on the other side. If the scale is loaded with positive experiences (not all experiences hold the same weight) the scale tips in a positive direction. A person with a scale tipped toward the negative side has increased risk of negative health outcomes.

## The Role of Genes

The second way to tip the scale is to move the fulcrum. Besides experiences, genes also play a role. In this metaphor the fulcrum represents the genetic inheritance of a person. Some people are born more susceptible to toxic stress and others are less affected. Research into epigenetics has found that the fulcrum is not permanently set. There are pivotal times in a child's development when experiences can modify how genes are expressed. These times, such as the first five years of a child's life, the passage to adolescence and the transition to adulthood, are critical periods where intervention has a greater impact on long-term well-being. Leveraging resources to enhance supports at these critical times is a wise investment in our children's future.

## The Community's Role

A child's community plays an important role. The network of community relationships, environments and opportunities all lay the groundwork for the next generation. Parents play key roles in a child's life, and other adults can as well. An attentive child care provider, teacher, coach or neighbor can bolster a child's resilience against toxic stress. We can change the trajectory of the next generation by increasing broad-based understanding in communities around the importance of a child's social and emotional development, and bolstering resources for children and families.



## Access in Action

Below are a few examples of Wisconsin activities underway to improve access to services and supports:

- School districts are better at identifying children's needs and connecting them to providers. Recent Wisconsin legislation will make it possible to expand school-based mental health services.
- Mental health providers are supported with learning opportunities including training on [Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#), [Parent Child Interaction therapy](#) and [Child Parent Psychotherapy](#).
- Students are developing stigma reduction campaigns and peer support groups in their schools.
- Adults across the state are being trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid to help adolescents who are experiencing a mental health or addictions challenge.
- The Child Psychiatry Consultation Program is available in areas of the state to assist primary care clinicians in delivering better informed mental health care.

1. Funded by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Service Administration.
2. Kendall-Taylor, Nathaniel. (2012). *The Resilience Scale: Using Metaphor to Communicate a Developmental Perspective on Resilience*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.