Chronic Maladaptive Pathways as a Result of Toxic Stress Exposure

The ways in which each individual copes with exposure to trauma, adversity and toxic stress varies and is determined by multiple factors in the person’s lifespace.

The chart on the next page shows the worst case pathways beginning when the person experiences overwhelming and toxic stress that then changes multiple developmental pathways.

This drawing is mapped out as if one response immediately follows the other for the sake of clarity, but in people’s real lives, things are never this straightforward and direct. There also could be many branchings in each individual’s life that leads to positive, not negative outcomes.

It is not unusual, however, to see this sequence of events occur almost exactly as we have mapped it out, particularly among those people who have the most exposure to traumatic events beginning in childhood and who have developed complex problems as a result.