



Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Building the Skills of Parents Experiencing Adversity

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Evidence from Multiple Sources Points to the Importance of the Early Years...

...and Knowledge from Multiple Sources Can Feed the Co-Creation, Testing, and Scaling of More Effective Strategies to Promote Healthy Development



- Advances in scientific investigation
- Rigorous program evaluation
- Practical, “on the ground” expertise
- Cultural context for raising children

The Opportunity: Greater Understanding About the Impact of Early Experience on Brain Development



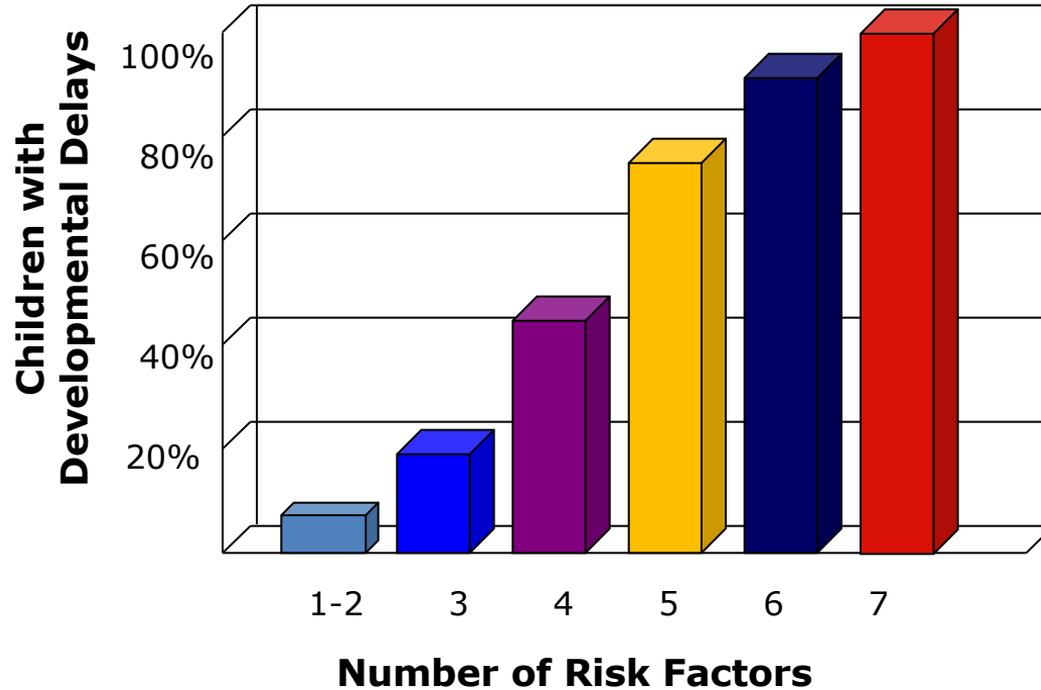
Watch this video:

<https://youtu.be/VNNsN9IJKws>

Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships that Begins in the Home and Extends to Family, Friends, Caregivers, Teachers, and the Community



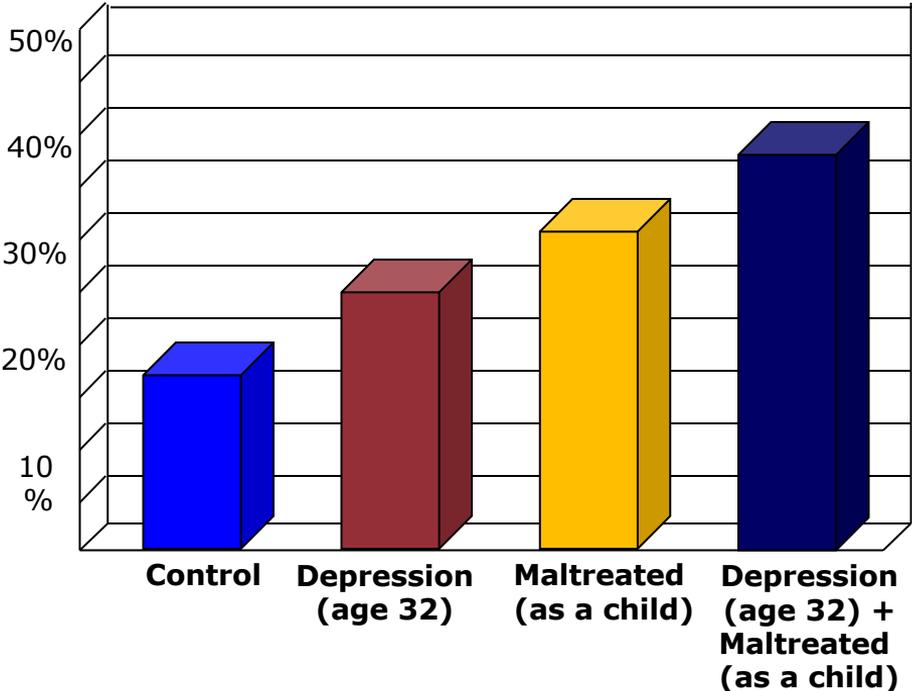
Significant Adversity Impairs Development in the First Three Years



Source: Barth, et al. (2008)

Biological “Memories” Link Maltreatment in Childhood to Greater Risk of Adult Heart Disease

Percent of adults with elevated C-reactive protein



Source: Danese, et al. (2008)

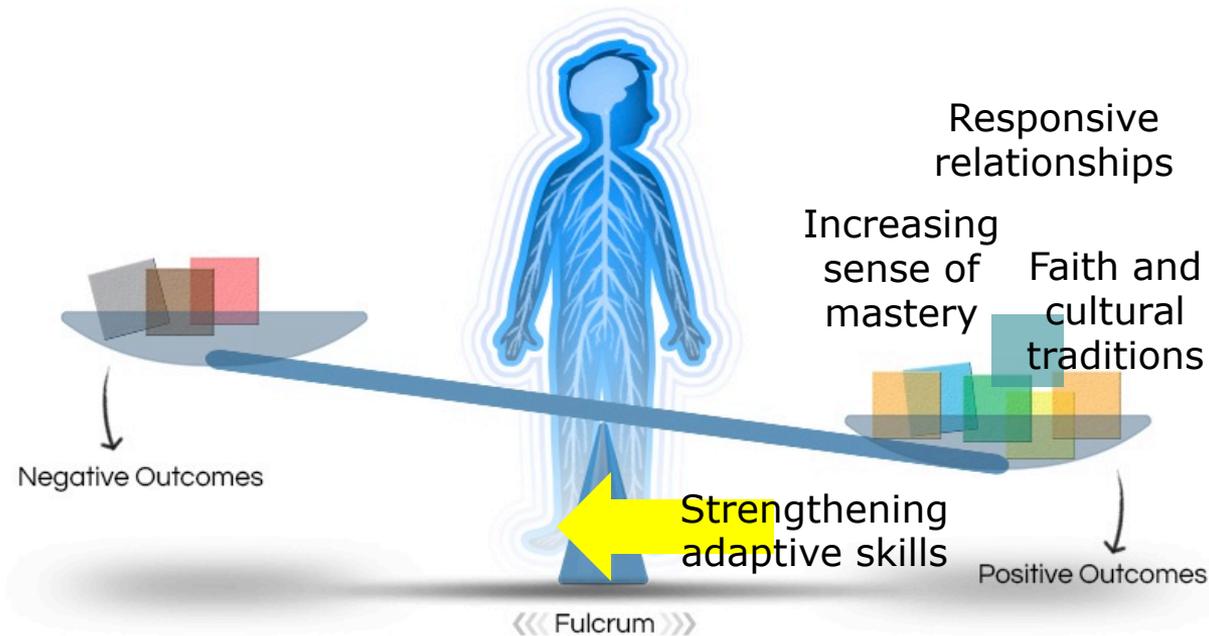
The Threat: Toxic Stress Disrupts Brain Architecture and Other Biological Systems



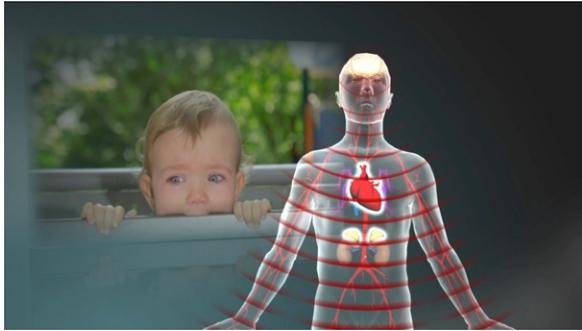
Watch this video:

<https://youtu.be/rVwFkcOZHJw>

Resilience Can Be Strengthened by Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building



21st-Century Science Suggests New Ways of Thinking About Intervention in the Early Years

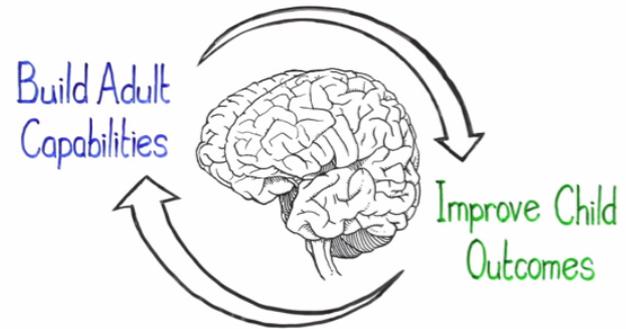


Attention to development should begin at birth (or even prenatally), not at age 4 or 5.

Early experiences affect lifelong health, not just learning.

Healthy development requires protection, not just enrichment.

Achieving far better outcomes for young children facing adversity requires that we: (1) support the adults who care for them to build their own capabilities; and (2) strengthen the capacity of communities to support families raising children under difficult circumstances.



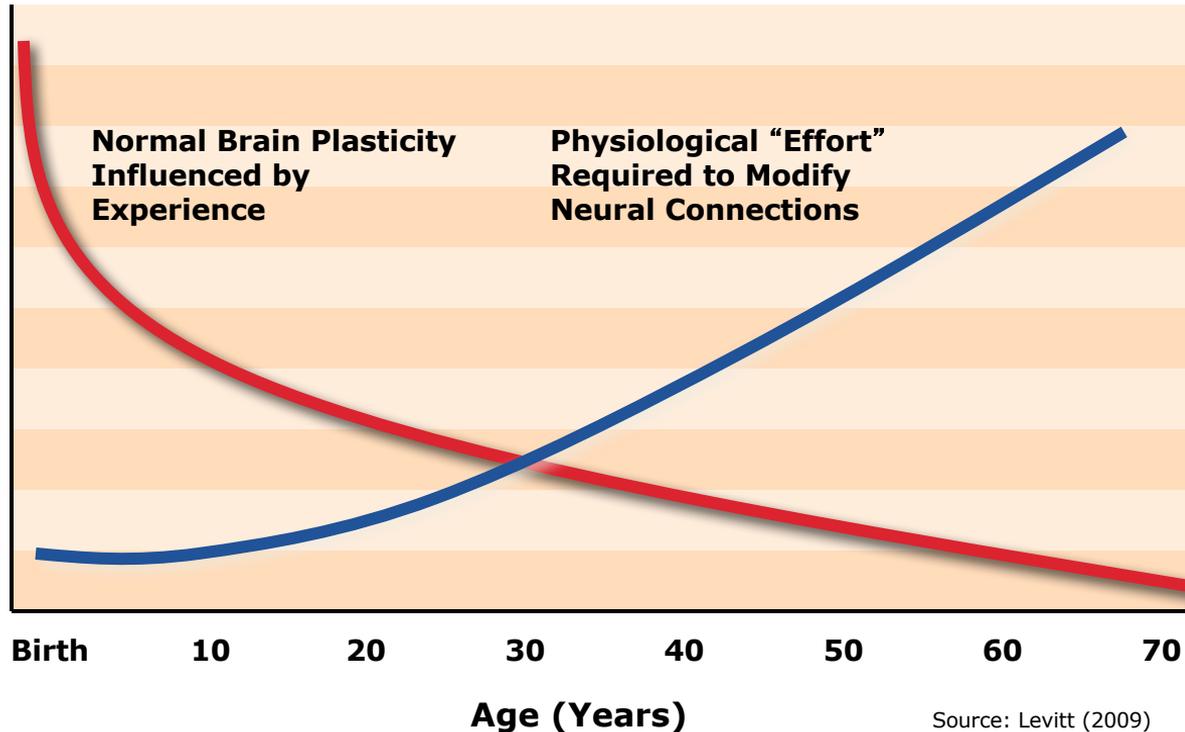
Capabilities that Promote Effective Parenting and Other Aspects of Successful Adult Functioning are Built on Foundational Skills in Executive Function and Self-Regulation



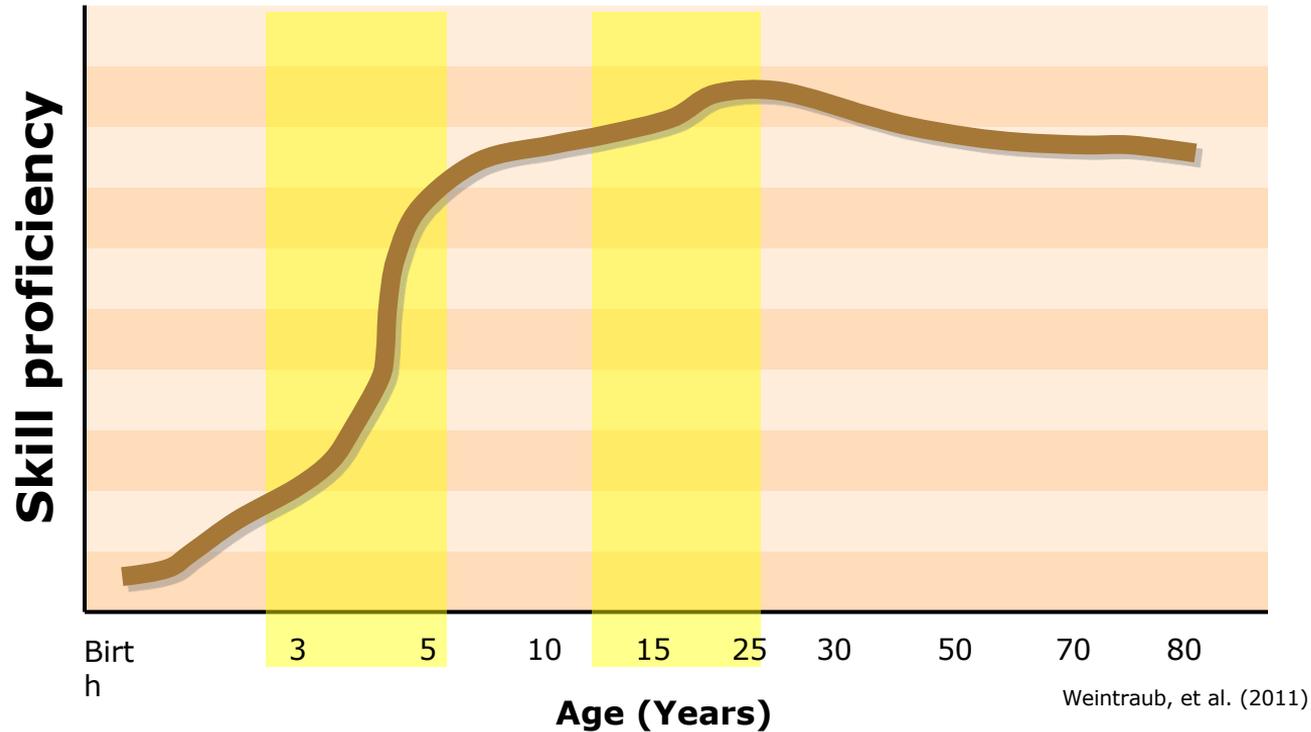
These core dimensions of adult competence include the ability to:

- focus and sustain attention
- set goals, make plans, and monitor actions
- make decisions and solve problems
- follow rules, control impulses, and delay gratification

The Challenge: The Ability to Change Brains and Behavior Decreases Over Time



Two Windows for Intervention: The Development of Executive Function Skills Begins in Early Childhood and Extends Into the Early Adult Years





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About Science Innovation & Application

Tipping the Scales: The Game

Learn how the choices we make for our children and the communities they live in can become more resilient.

View Game >

Reaching for Breakthroughs with Science

Science Innovation & Application

Science tells us that early childhood is a time of both great promise and considerable risk. Assuring the availability of responsive relationships, growth-promoting experiences, and healthy environments for all young children helps build sturdy brain architecture and the foundations of resilience.

Science

The frontiers of 21st-century science are a relatively unexplored territory that could be used to address such threats by catalyzing research and services focused on the early years of life.

Science tells us that early childhood is a time of both great promise and considerable risk. Having responsive relationships with adults, growth-promoting experiences, and healthy environments for all young children helps build sturdy brain architecture and the foundations of resilience. Meanwhile, significant disadvantages can disrupt the process, leading to limited economic and social mobility that threatens the vitality of our society.

Key Concepts

Deep Dives

Key Concepts

Innovation in Action

These key concepts are the building blocks of the science of child development. Each page within this section provides a concise overview of the concept and its implications for research, practice, and policy.

“Deep dives” are longer pieces of content that are more detailed and useful for researchers, practitioners, and the public.

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