

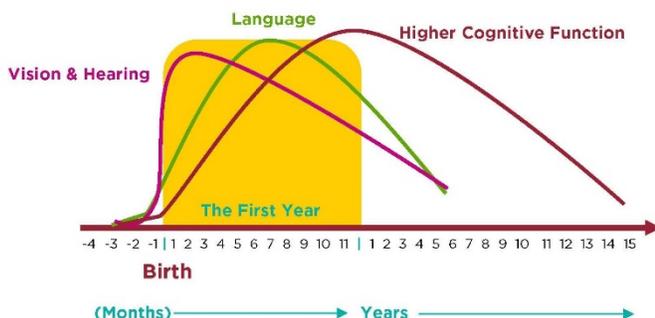
The Story of Early Childhood



Development Begins Before Day One

Healthy brains begin with healthy pregnancies and healthy moms. Regular health care during pregnancy can help prevent complications to maternal and child health, including premature birth, which can affect the baby's brain. During pregnancy, the growing brain can be affected by many types of risks, including infectious diseases, exposure to toxins including smoking or alcohol, or when pregnant mothers experience stress, trauma, or mental health conditions like depression. By ensuring access to care, supportive environments, and healthy moms, we can give every baby the best birth day.

The Sequential & Overlapping Development of a Child's Brain



Early Life Experiences Are Critical In Building a Solid Foundation For Life



Brains Aren't Just Born, They're Built

Children are born with an amazing capacity to learn and grow. Seven hundred to 1,000 new neural connections are created per second in the infant brain. However, development does not happen in isolation. It is dependent upon responsive relationships and engagement with a stimulating environment. Like building a house, early experiences will create a strong or unsteady foundation for everything that comes later. Development happens from the ground up and what happens in the early years lasts a lifetime.

Experiences Create the Building Blocks for Early Brain Development

Brain architecture is dependent upon the experiences a child has or does not have. Of primary importance is a consistent and reliable serve and return adult-child interaction. This is the *how* of ECBD. A child learns about the world and how to engage one interaction at a time. When a baby reaches out and does not get a response or gets a negative response, they are learning which skills are important to strengthen and which are not. They may learn that they cannot depend on their caregiver and environment or that they are not safe.

Alternatively, when a baby reaches out and is met with a healthy response, they access the safety, security, and connection that is needed to enable higher-level cognitive skills as well as social-emotional development.

Caregivers who use **serve and return** interactions by being responsive to a child's signals of distress and pleasure facilitate healthy brain architecture.

Child signals:

- Gestures
- Babbles
- Cries

Caregiver responses:

- Hugs
- Words



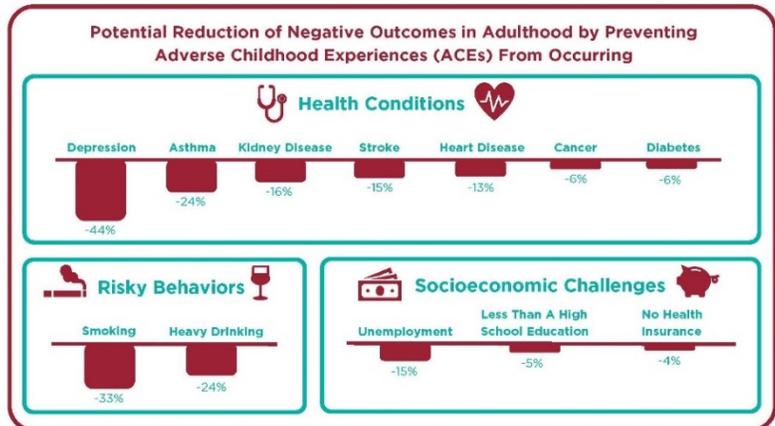
When a child does not have a connection to supportive adults they may experience **toxic stress**, which can lead to developing weakened brain architecture.

Toxic stressors include:

- Chronic neglect
- Witnessing violence
- Physical or verbal abuse
- Caregiver mental illness or substance use
- Lack of basic needs

Chronic and Uncontrolled Stress Can Disrupt Development

Stress is a natural part of life, but chronic and uncontrollable stress is toxic. The biology of stress is intended to be short term and can be calmed in safe environments and dependable relationships. When children experience chronic adversity and trauma, the neurological and hormonal impacts can alter brain development and biology in ways that have outcomes across the lifespan including mental and physical health. The prevention of ACEs holds incredible potential for ensuring healthy development and impacting societal challenges in multiple domains.



Early Childhood Development Is a Smart Investment

The earlier the investment, the greater the return.



Investing Early Works Now and Saves Money Later

To create the most effective and efficient change, interventions should occur in early childhood. Model programs offer a return between \$3 and \$9 per dollar invested and are much cheaper than interventions that work to address problems in our educational, criminal justice, and healthcare systems. Early childhood intervention does not only positively impact the child but also the parents, the taxpayers, and the next generation.

Alternately, each case of child abuse or neglect causes \$830,000 dollars in costs across the lifetime. We can continue to pay for the effects of childhood adversity, or we can work to prevent it.

Adversity and Trauma Do Not Dictate a Child's Future

Research suggests that children can increase their resilience so that even amidst adversity they can develop in a healthy way. Resilience can be increased by supporting families. Although all parents want the best for their children, many families are isolated and are trying to navigate challenges without being plugged into the support present in their community.

Policymakers at the federal, state, county, and local levels can support policies and programs to help build protective factors in families (e.g. healthy attachment to parents, access to community resources, and supportive school and home environments).

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References available upon request.

