



# Early Experiences Matter

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Executive Director*

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Honolulu Court Team and Hawaii Court Improvement Project  
Honolulu, Hawaii January 13, 2011

# Translating What We Know Into What We Do



## EARLY EXPERIENCES MATTER



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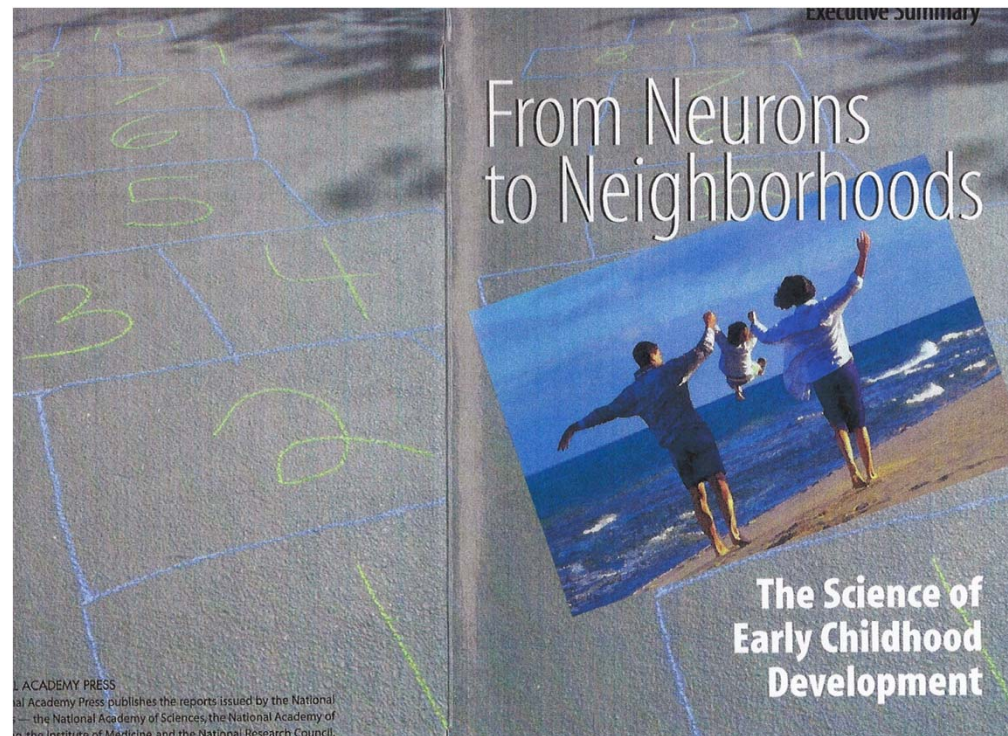
- We are a national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains and supports professionals, policy makers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.
- We train professionals and build networks of leaders
- We influence policies and practices
- We raise public understanding of early childhood issues
- All our work is:
  - Grounded in research and experience
  - Multi-disciplinary
  - Culturally responsive

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# Why Babies?



Because early experiences matter  
...and science proves it



# The Importance of the First Three Years

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**Period of extraordinary growth**

**By age 3, roughly 85% of the brain's core structure is formed**

**Babies are born “wired” to learn**

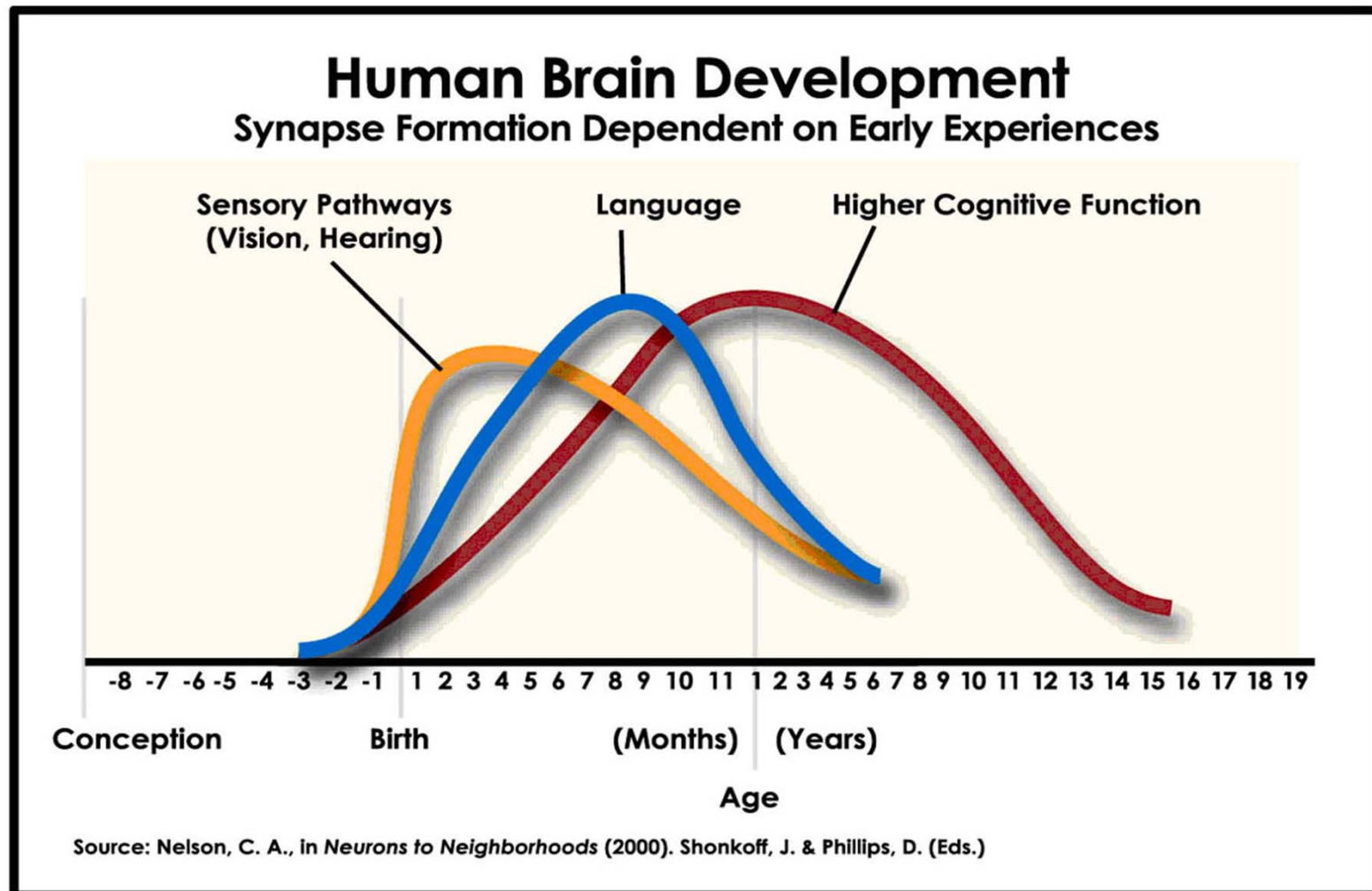
**Babies learn in the context of relationships**

**For very young children, physical, cognitive, language and social/emotional development are “inextricably linked”**

**Emotions drive learning**

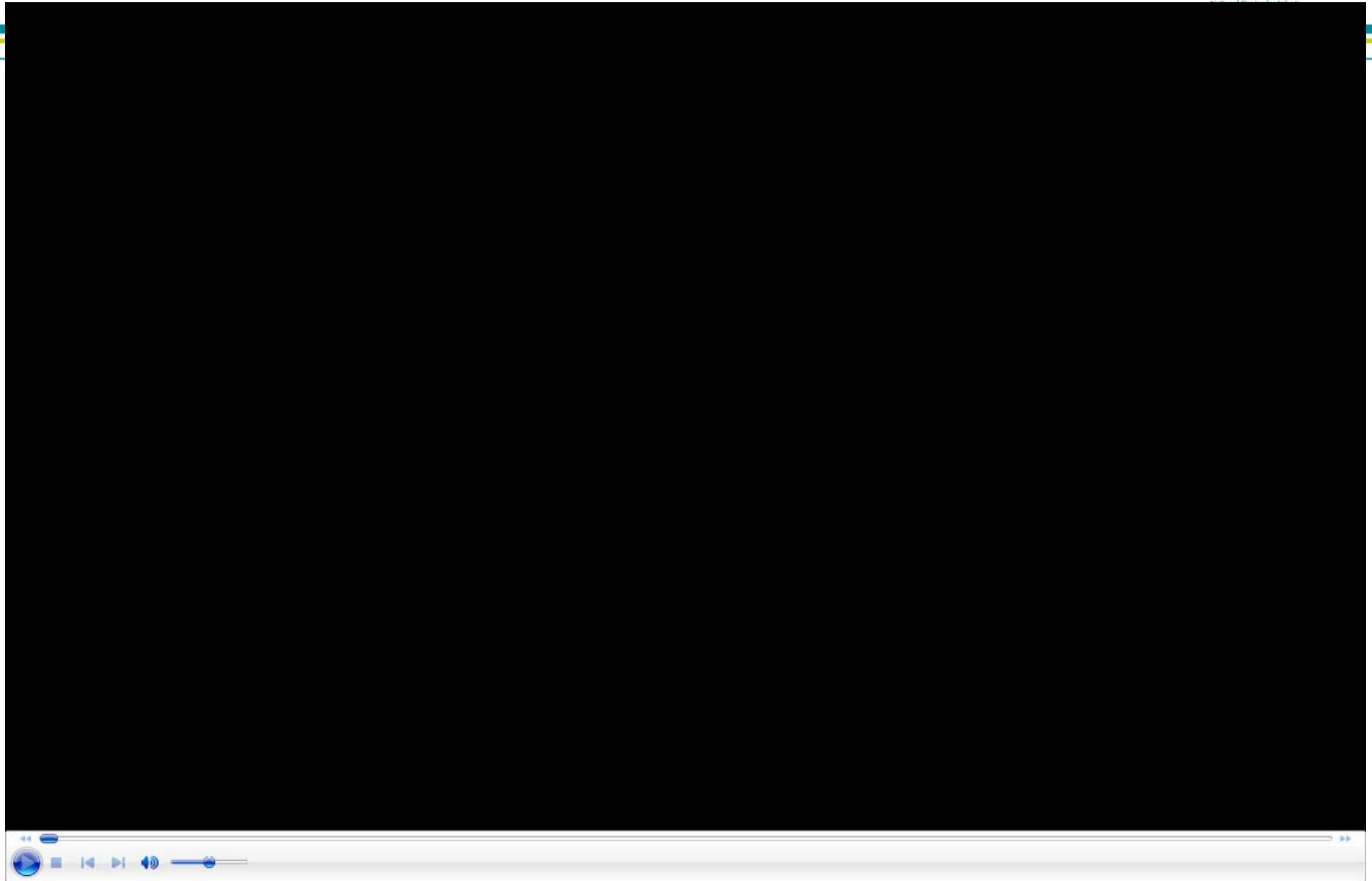
**EARLY EXPERIENCES MATTER!**

# Brain Development



Source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). *A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children*. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

# Still Face Experiment



# Impact of Stress

**Normative,  
Developmentally  
Appropriate Stress**

**Emotionally Costly  
Stress**

**Traumatic Stress**



# Babies, Stress and Child Welfare



**Normative,  
Developmentally  
Appropriate Stress**

**Emotionally Costly  
Stress**

**Traumatic Stress**



***Abused and Neglected Babies***



# Adverse Experiences that Undermine Emotional Health & Wellness in the Very Young



**Persistent fear and stress**

**Child abuse and neglect**

**Poverty and its associated factors**

**Parental depression**

**Substance abuse**

**Complicated military deployments**



# Impacts of Adverse Early Experiences

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Extensive Scientific Evidence Indicates Adversity  
Can Literally “Get Under Our Skin”

Excessive Elevations in:

- Heart Rate
- Blood Pressure
- Stress Hormones

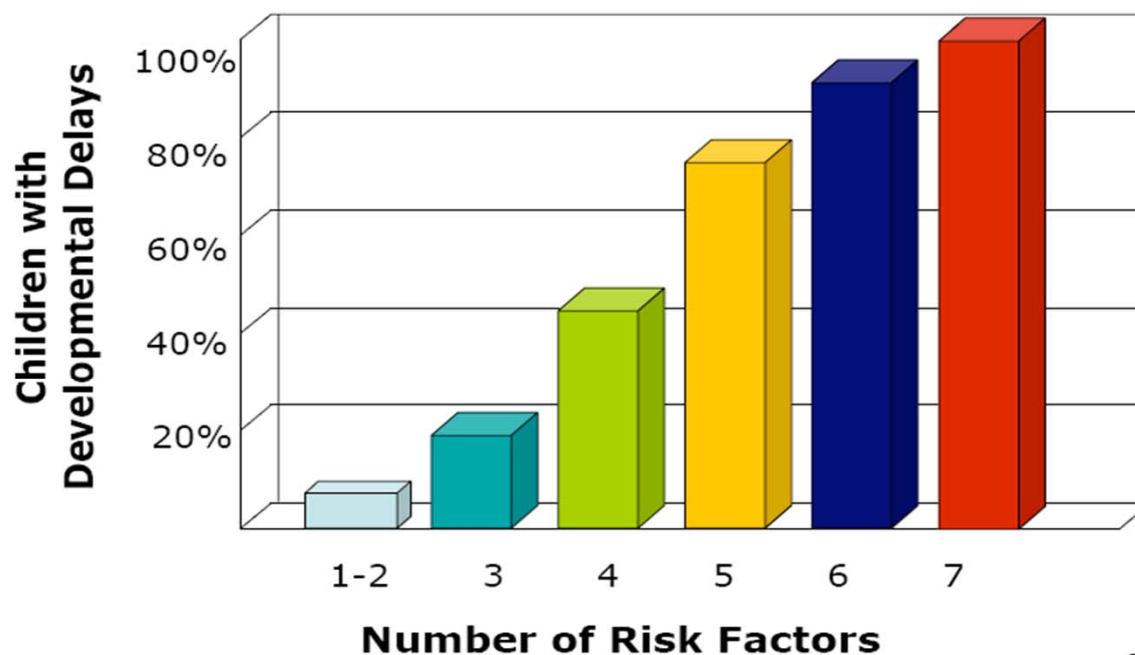
Can Impair:

- Brain Architecture
- Immune Status
- Metabolic Systems
- Cardiovascular Function

# Developmental Risks

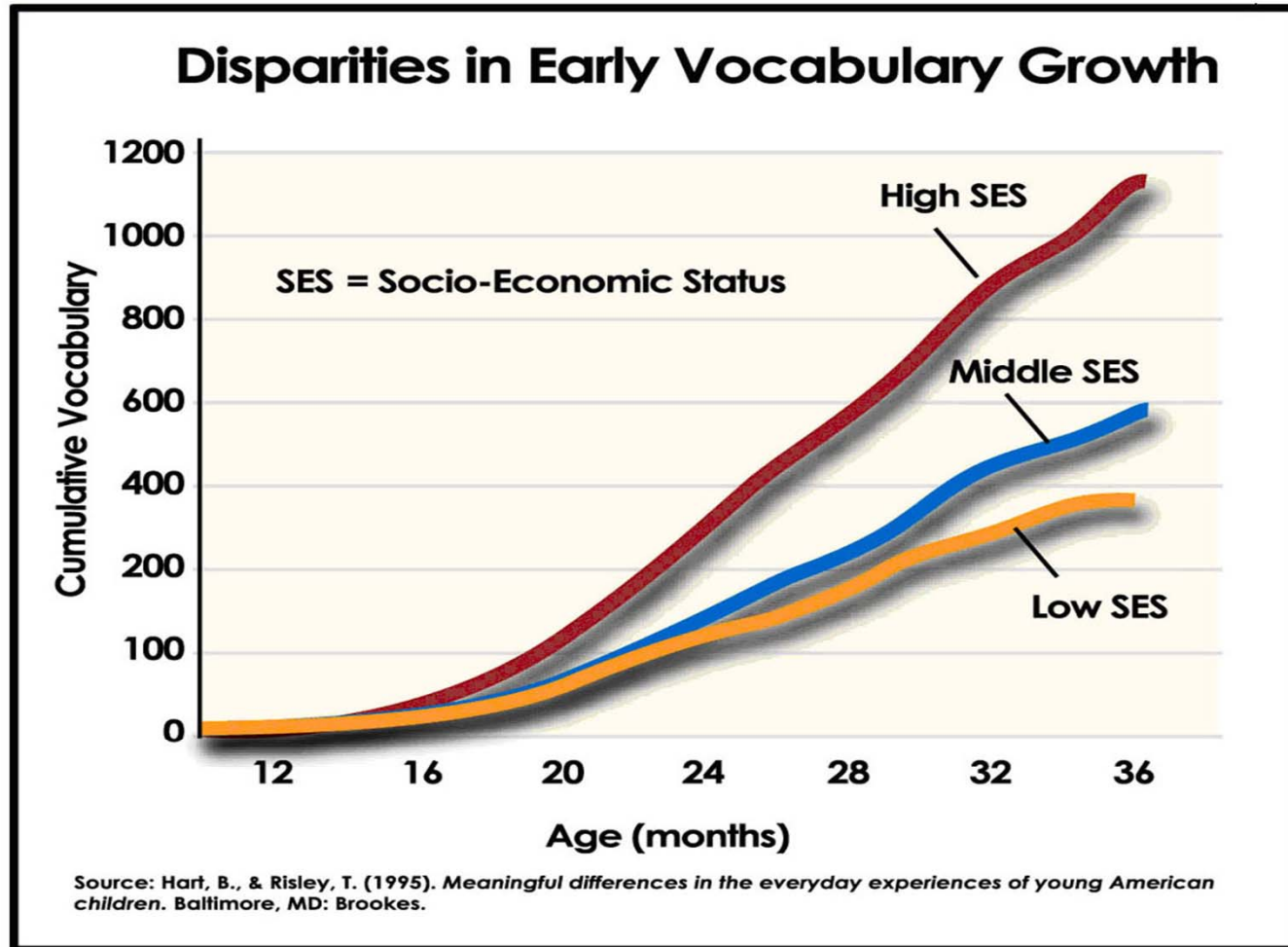


## Significant Adversity Impairs Development in the First Three Years



Source: Barth et al. (2008)

# Educational Barriers Emerge Early

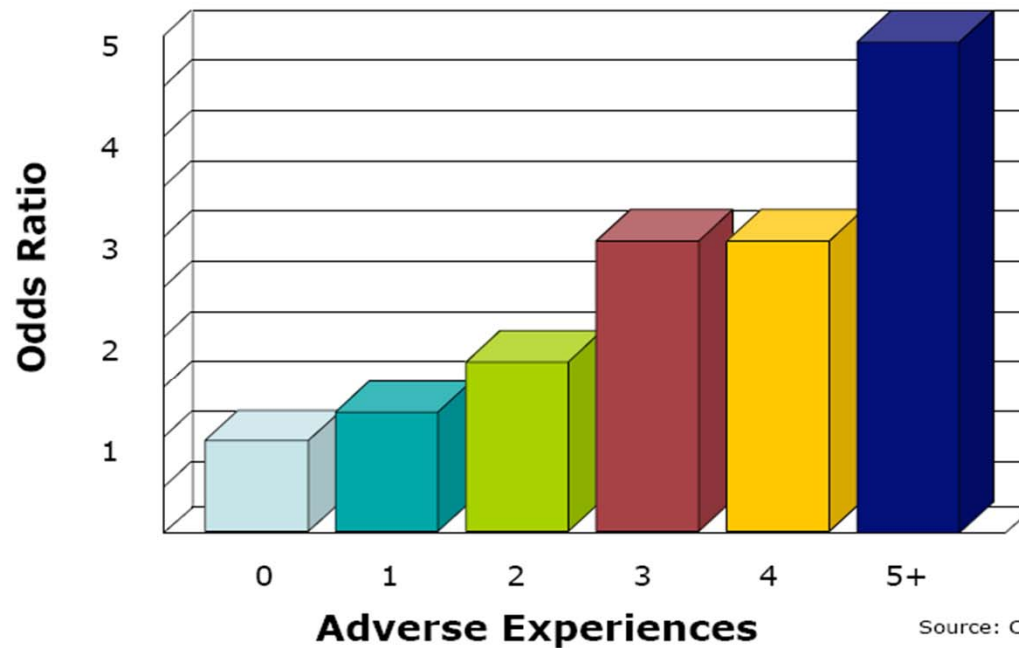


Source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). *A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children*. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

# Adult Mental Health Risks



## Risk Factors for Adult Depression are Embedded in Adverse Childhood Experiences

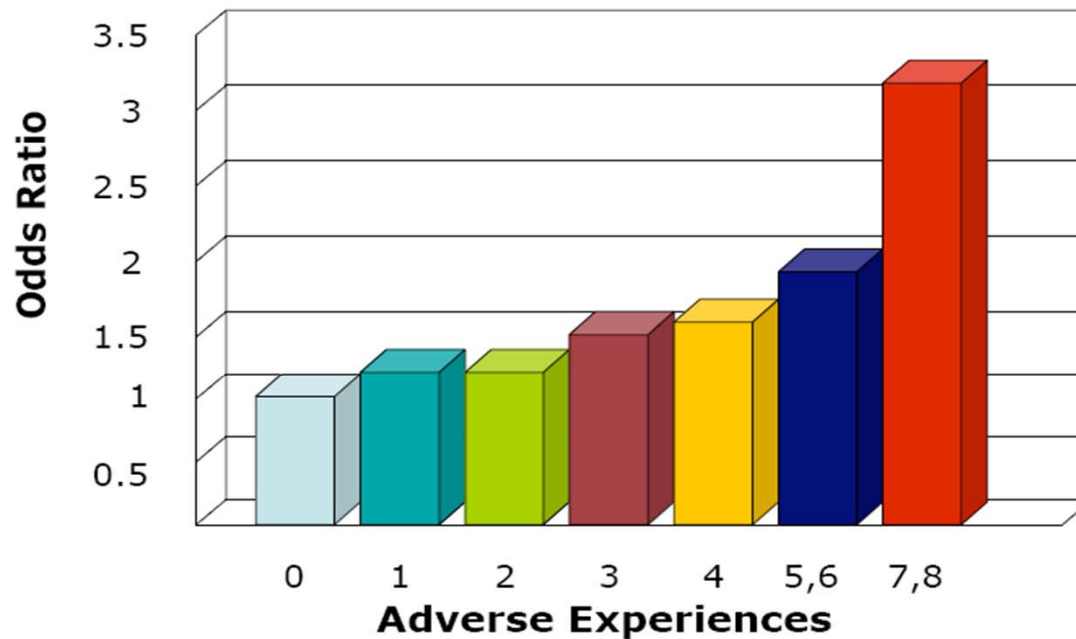


Source: Chapman et al, 2004

# Adult Health Risks



## Risk Factors for Adult Heart Disease are Embedded in Adverse Childhood Experiences



Source: Dong et al, (2004)

# Maltreated Infants and Toddlers

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- **1 in 3 maltreated children are babies**
- **Largest single group entering foster care**
- **Once in care more likely to be abused/neglected**
- **Stay in foster care longer**
- **Have multiple placements**
- **40% have fragile health**

# Maltreated Infants and Toddlers



**Put Science Into  
Action by:  
Helping  
maltreated infants  
and toddlers  
reach safe,  
loving, permanent  
homes quickly**



Photo: Debbie Rappaport



# Court Teams For Maltreated Infants & Toddlers



**Judicial Leadership + Community Partners =**



Enhanced and better coordinated services

## Court Teams Sites

- Des Moines, IA
- Hattiesburg, MS
- New Orleans, LA
- San Francisco, CA
- Honolulu, HI
- Omaha, NE
- Douglasville, GA
- New Haven, CT
- Little Rock, AR
- Qualla Boundary, NC



# Court Teams Evaluation Results



- **97% of the identified service needs of I/T served by the CTs had either been fully met or were in process with progress being made**
- **Timely permanency was achieved in 95% of closed CT cases, with more than 50% achieving permanency within 12 months**
- **CT sites are managing daily parent-child contact in nearly 32% of the cases, from 3-6 times per week in 13% of the cases, and twice weekly in 11% of the cases**
- **More than two-thirds (73%) of children remained in 1 or 2 placements**
- **99.05% of I/T served were protected from further maltreatment**

(Hafford, McDonnell, Kass, DeSantis, & Dong, 2009)

# Increasing Placement Stability

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**Des Moines Court Team pre-removal conferences:**

**Child welfare agency facilitator**

**Parents**

**Friends and family members who parents invite**

**Investigative worker**

**Parent mentor (someone who has experienced the system and “graduated”)**

**Visiting nurse**

**Income maintenance worker**

# It's All About Relationships

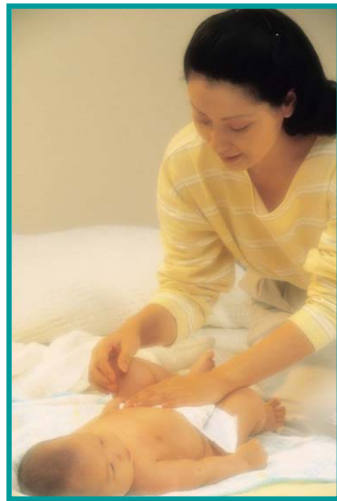
**Respectful relationships are the key to helping families**

**What guides our work?**

- **Respect for individuals, culture and context**
- **High professional standards**
- **Continual learning and growth**
- **Mutual and reciprocal relationships among adults**
- **Open communication**



# Early Experiences Matter



***Change happens one child at a time. Help us to make a difference—right from the beginning.***

Photos: Comstock

# Why Is Public Policy Important?

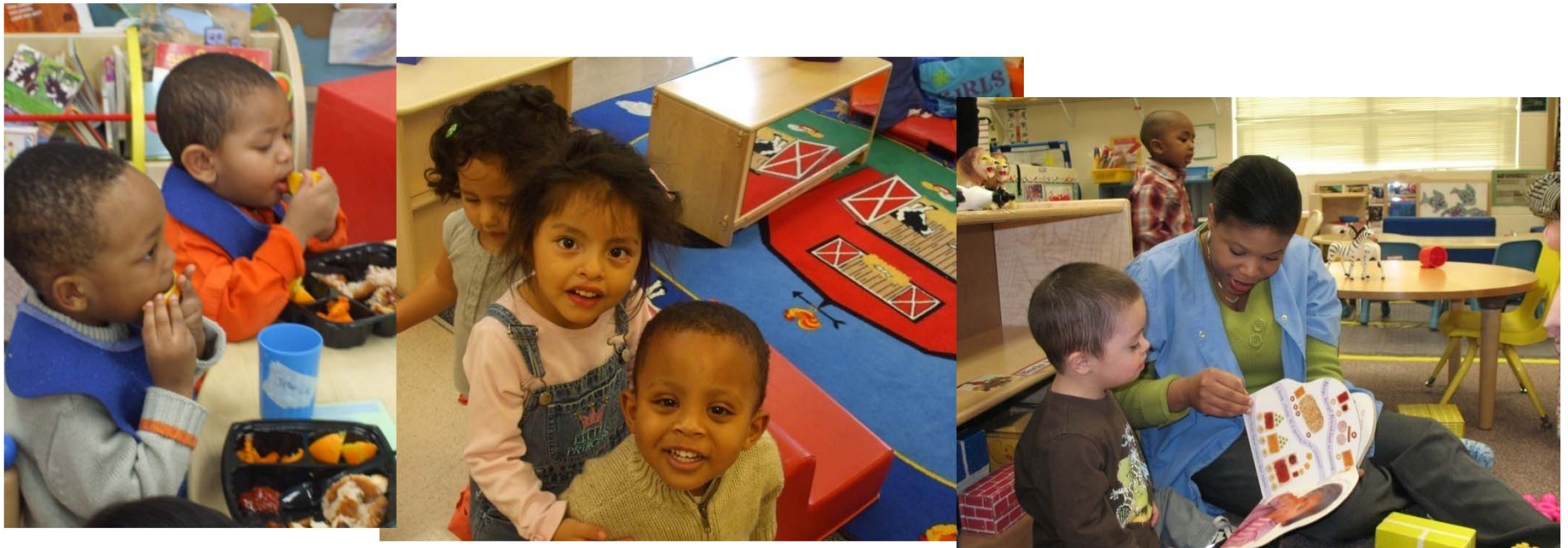
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- **Public Policy Impacts Us All**
- **Decisions made by policymakers influence everything we do**
- **Babies don't have a voice in how those decisions are made, but you do!**

# Infant/Toddler Policy Framework

- Good Health
- Strong Families
- Positive Early Learning Experiences





# Where We Are Now: State of Federal Policy



## ARRA (Stimulus)

- Head Start \$1 billion and Early Head Start \$1.1 billion
- OHS received 1800 applications for EHS expansion.
- Funded approximately 600 programs
- Some ARRA funds used for services, to fill funding gaps



# The Clock is Ticking for Early Childhood Funding



- **U.S. Congress Finishing Federal Fiscal Year 2011 Budget (which began October 1<sup>st</sup>)**

- **In Jeopardy -- Child care, Head Start, Early Head Start**

- 300,000 low-income children could lose services
- Including 50,000 babies receiving EHS services



Summer Harrington

## Congressional Baby Caucus



# Partnership Opportunities Present and Future

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**(Early Learning Challenge Fund)**  
**Home Visiting**  
**Early Head Start Expansion**  
**Child Care Development Block Grant  
Expansion**  
**State Early Childhood Advisory  
Councils**

# Benefits of Early Investment in Supporting Healthy Relationships



## Reductions in:

- juvenile and adult crimes
- cases of abuse and neglect
- domestic violence
- welfare dependency
- special education, grade retention, and remediation services

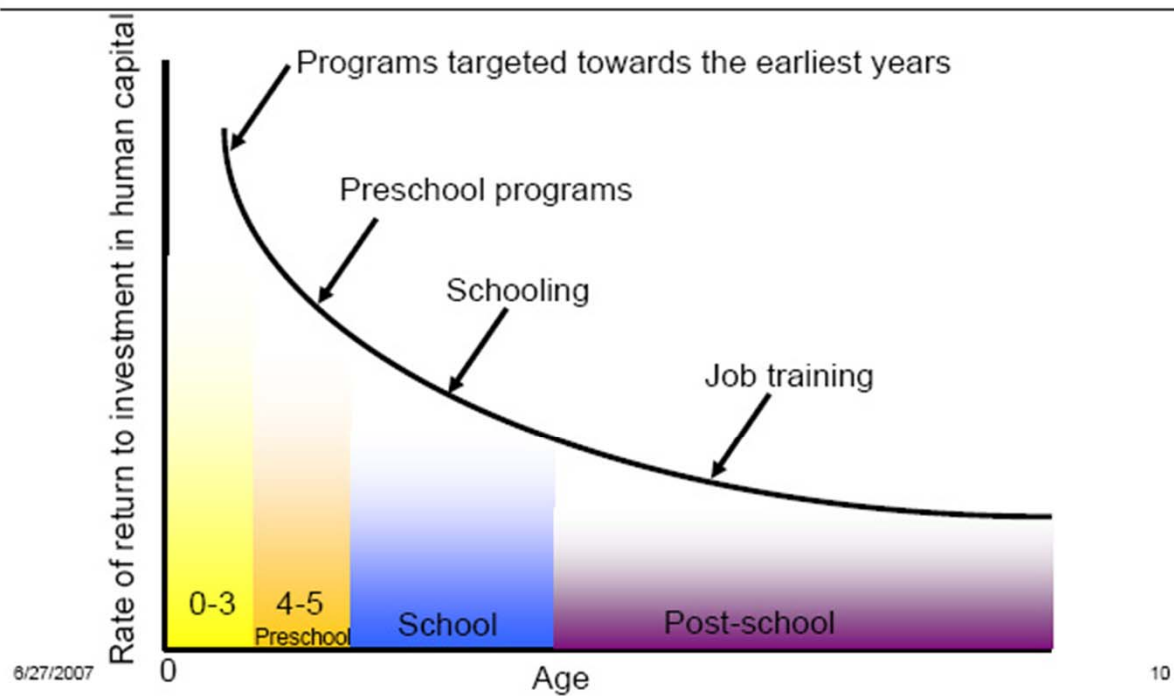
## Increases in:

- children's cognitive and social-emotional development
- educational performance and graduation rates
- parental involvement
- job training and earnings



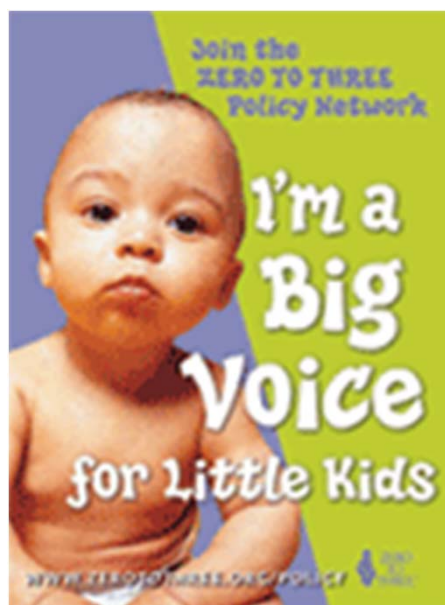
# Benefits of Early Investment

Figure 9: Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment at Different Ages: Return to an Extra Dollar at Various Ages



Heckman, J. "Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children Is Good Economics and Good Public Policy"  
 Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee  
 Washington D.C., June 27, 2007

# Cultivating Leadership



# New ZERO TO THREE Policy Pocket Card



## The Future Starts Now

### Help All Babies Realize Their Full Potential

Experiences in the first three years shape the architecture of a baby's brain and build the foundation for **lifelong learning, good health, and success in the workforce.**



Too many infants and toddlers are born into, and grow up in, environments that narrow the opportunities for realizing their potential. This comes at a great cost to all of us. Our nation's prosperity is jeopardized when the future of so many children is compromised.

Our state and federal policies should support families with young children – beginning at birth – so they have **good health** and **positive early learning experiences** that unfold within **strong family** relationships. All three are essential to healthy growth and development.

[www.zerotothree.org/policy](http://www.zerotothree.org/policy)



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- Our newest tool is the Policy Pocket Card. It's small, but it packs a lot of power!
- Help you communicate effectively with policymakers and leave this as your “calling card!”
- Share what we know from science, research, and professional experience.



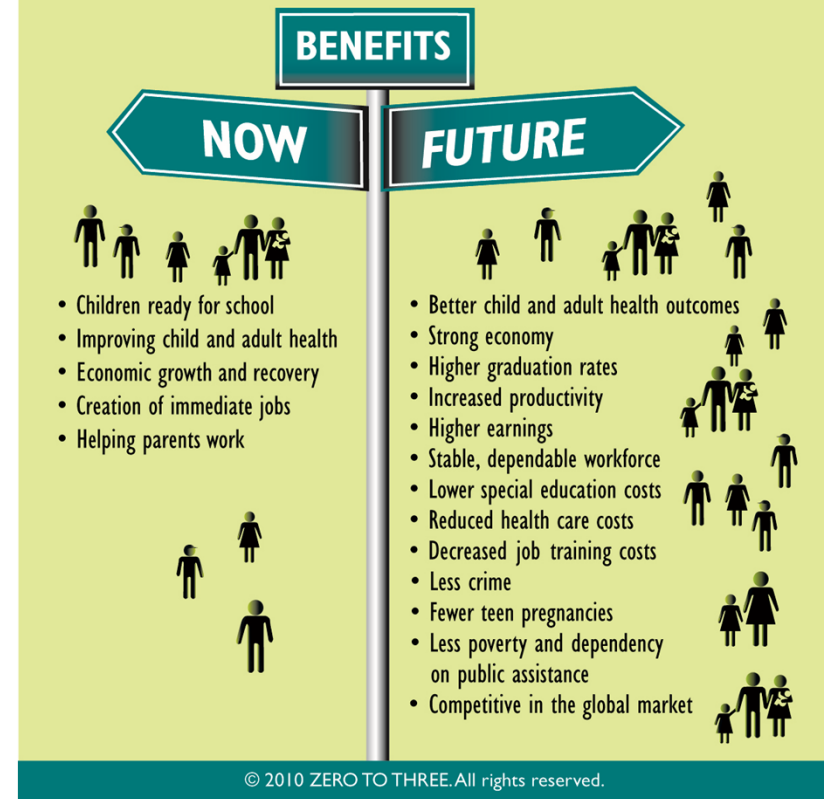
# Be a Big Voice for Little Kids



- **Make the case for greater investments in babies, toddlers and their families**
- **Give policymakers what they need to make sound public policy decisions**
- **Show the benefits of early childhood programs, both now and in the future**

## We All Benefit From Quality Early Childhood Experiences

We all benefit now and in the future when children get a good start in life – with a talented workforce, stronger economy, a healthier society, and a responsible citizenry.



# Be a Big Voice for Little Kids!

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- **Join the ZERO TO THREE Policy Network at [www.zerotothree.org/policynetwork](http://www.zerotothree.org/policynetwork)**
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