



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Transforming Child Welfare: Safe Babies Court Teams

Matthew Melmed, Executive Director, ZERO TO THREE



**Our mission is to ensure that ALL babies and toddlers
have a strong start in life.**

At ZERO TO THREE, we envision a society that has the knowledge and will to support all infants and toddlers in **reaching their full potential.**



Membership Turns 2!



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We believe that
HOW we do our
work is as important
as **WHAT** we do



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The Critical Need



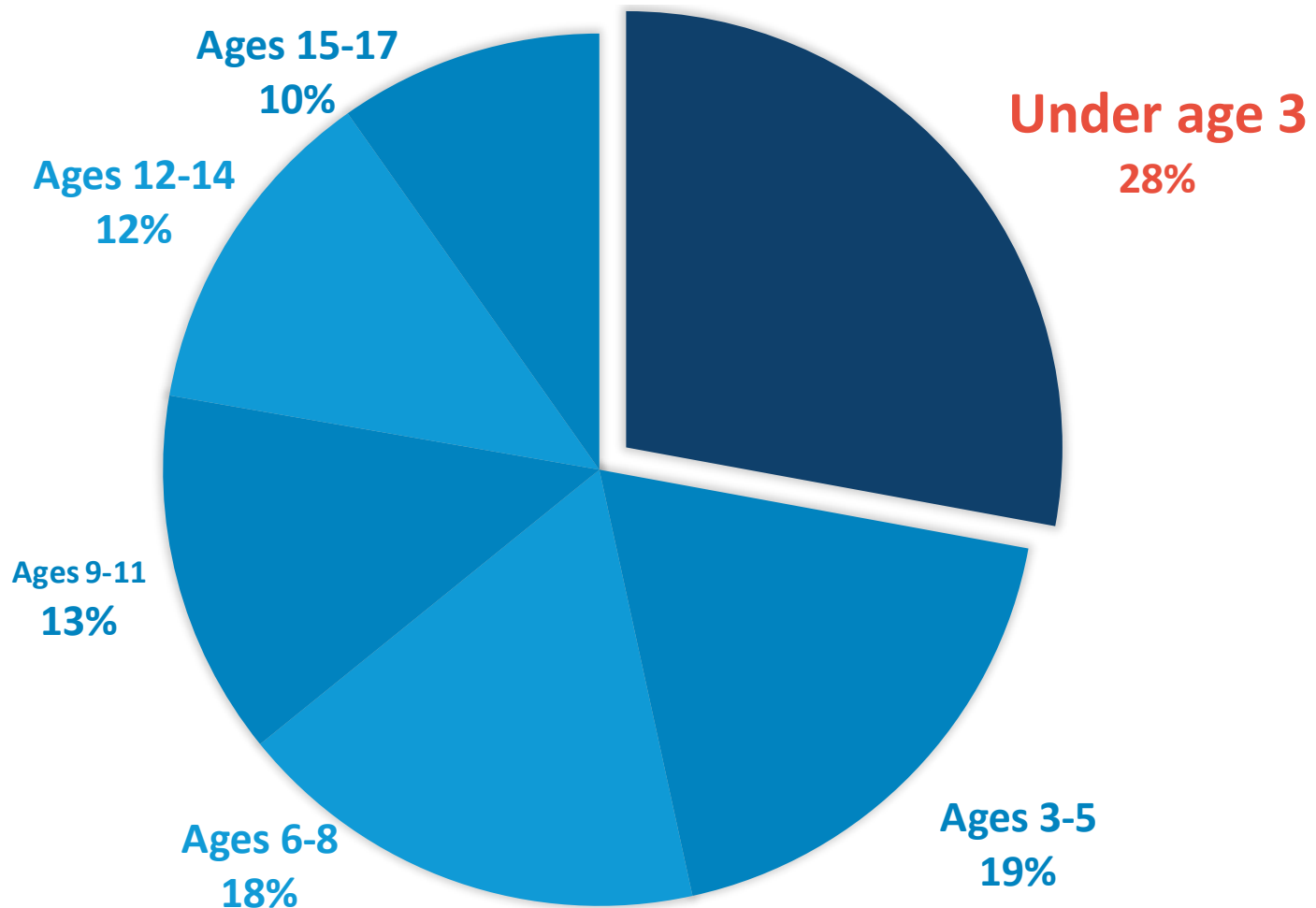
Every 6 minutes in the U.S., an infant or toddler is removed from their parents' care due to abuse or neglect and sent to live in a new home.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services,
AFCARS, 2016

Infants and toddlers make up the largest group of children who have been maltreated



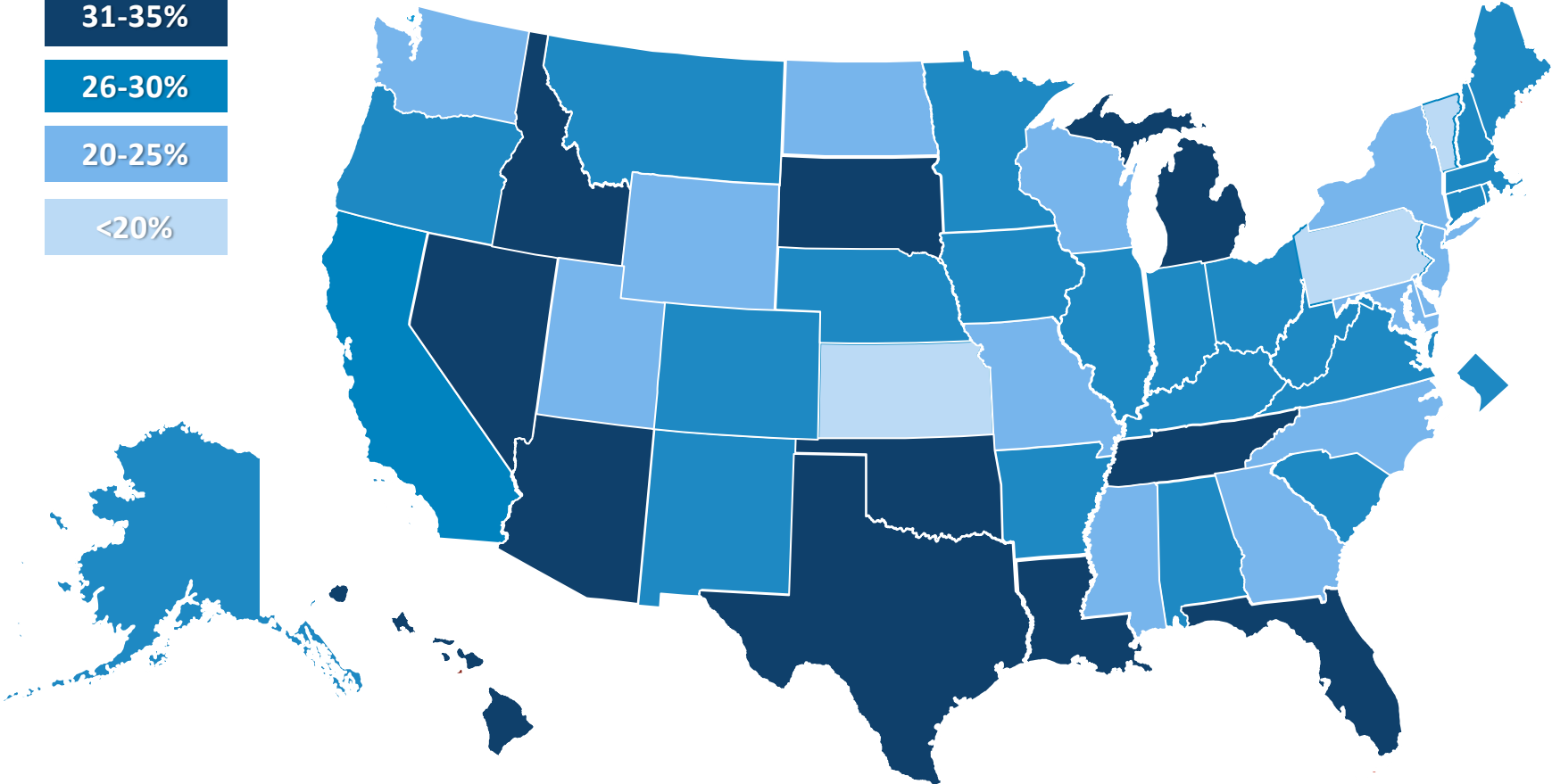
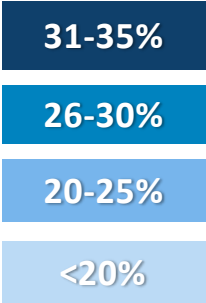
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Percentage of Maltreated Children Under Age 3



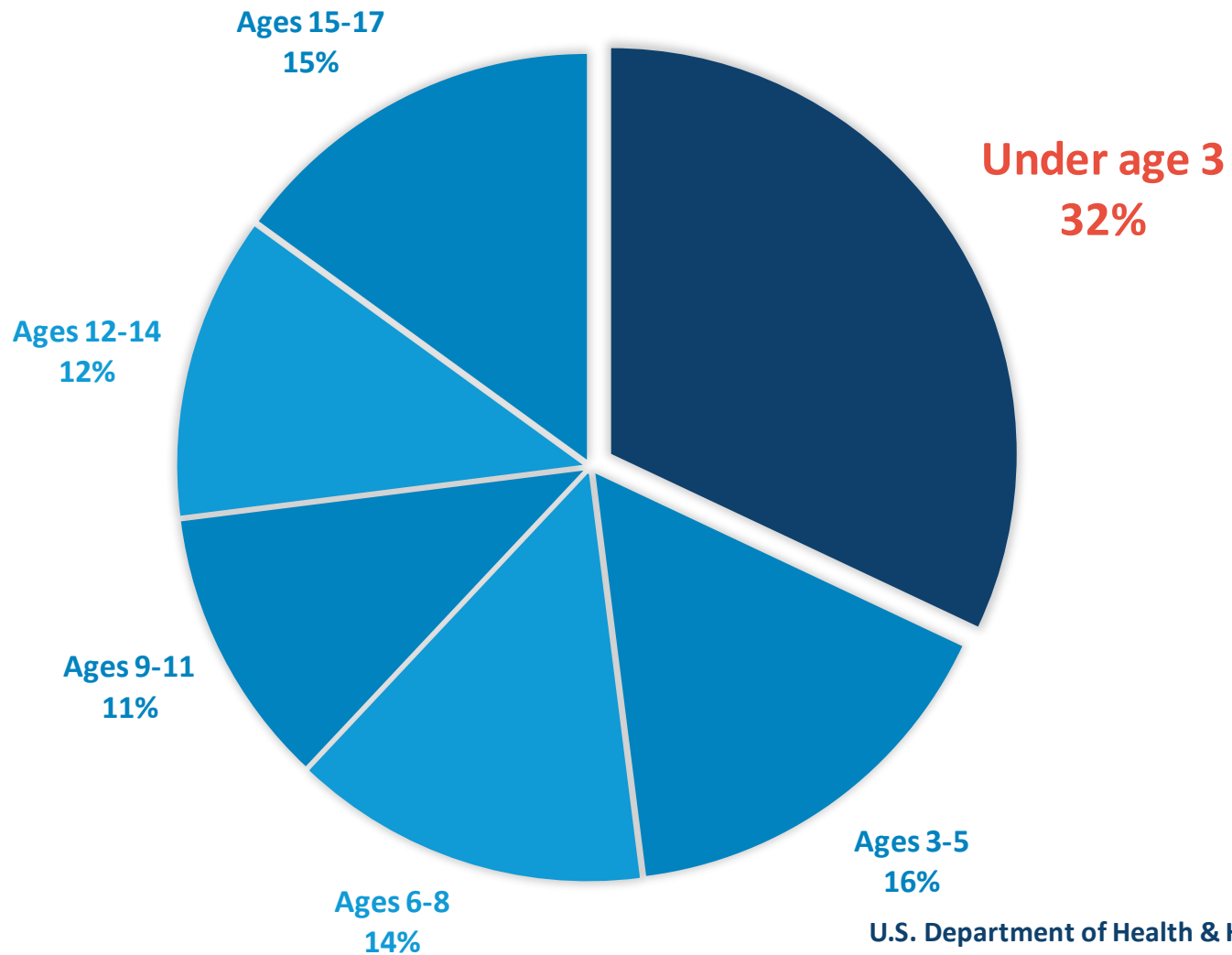
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Infants and toddlers are the largest group of children entering foster care



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U.S. Department of Health & Human Services,
AFCARS Report #23 (July 2016)



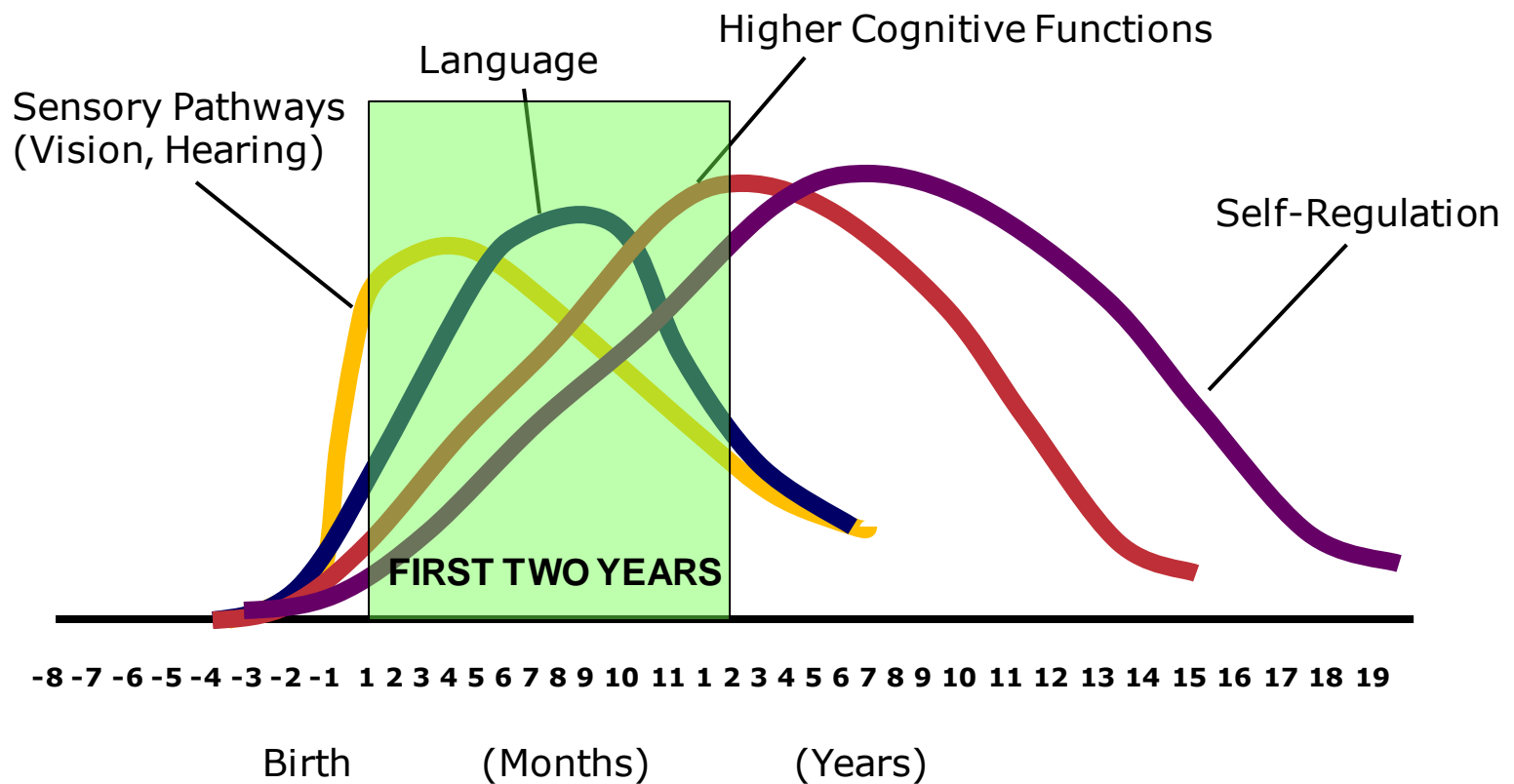
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The Early Years

Why the early years matter: Key neural connections peak, laying critical foundations for later success in school and life



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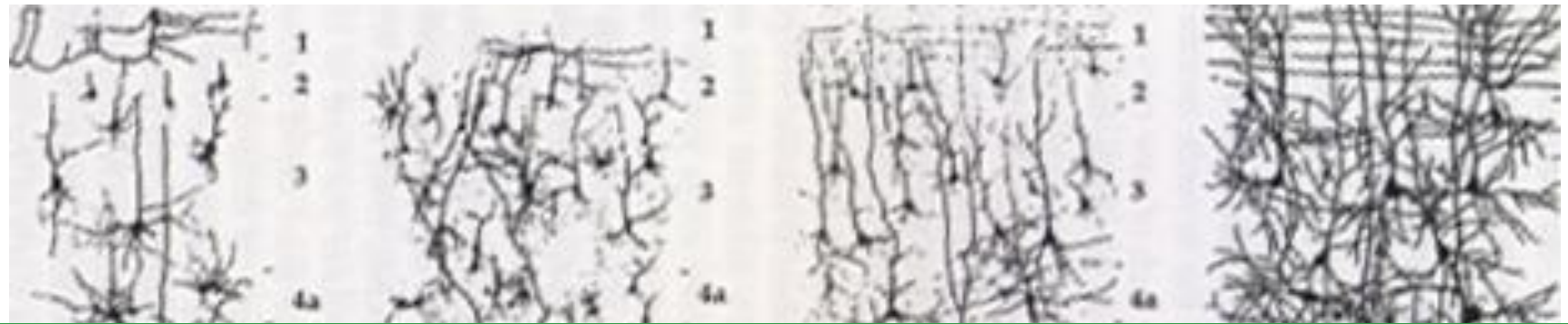


Slide courtesy of Ross A. Thompson
Source: C. Nelson (2000)

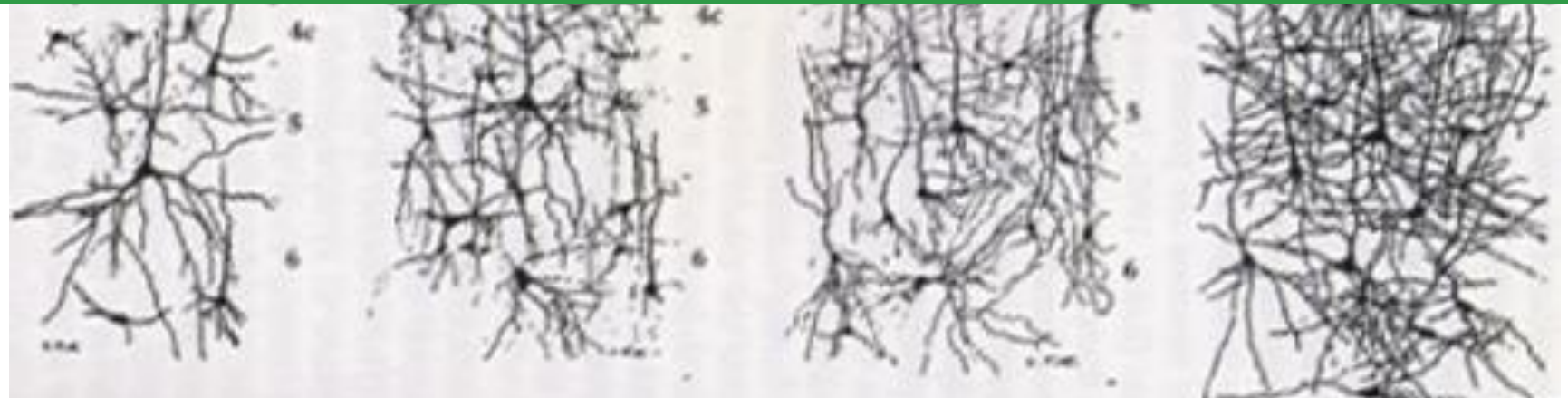
Rapid Pace of Brain Development in Earliest Years: Proliferation of Neural Connections in the First 6 Months



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1 million *new* connections every second



Newborn

1 month

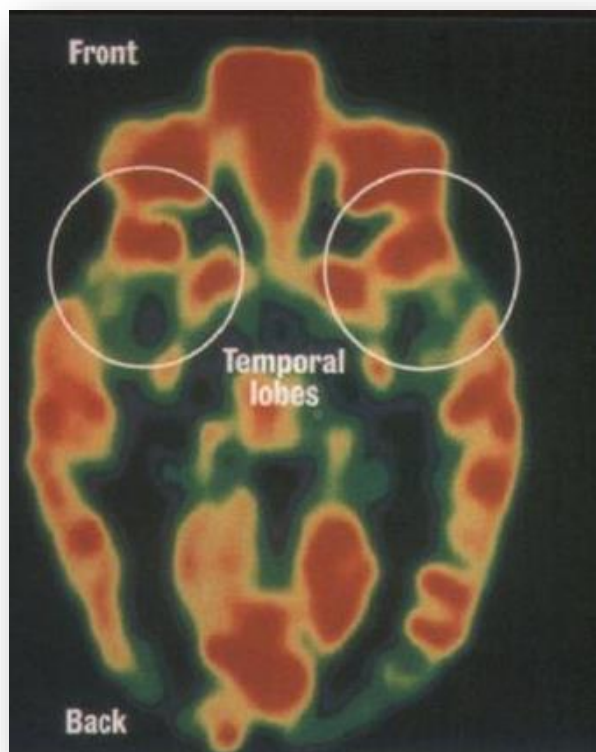
3 months

6 months

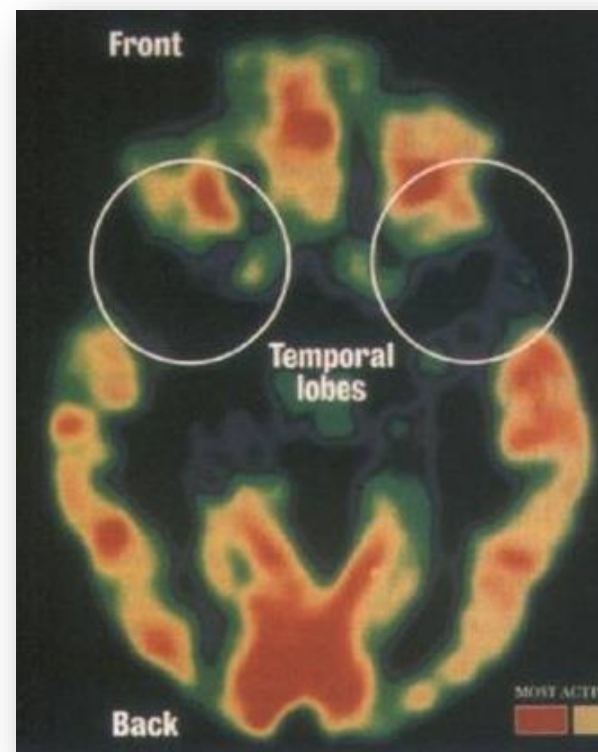
Early Human Connections Shape Brain Connections



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Healthy Developing Brain
Significant brain activity,
indicated by red areas.



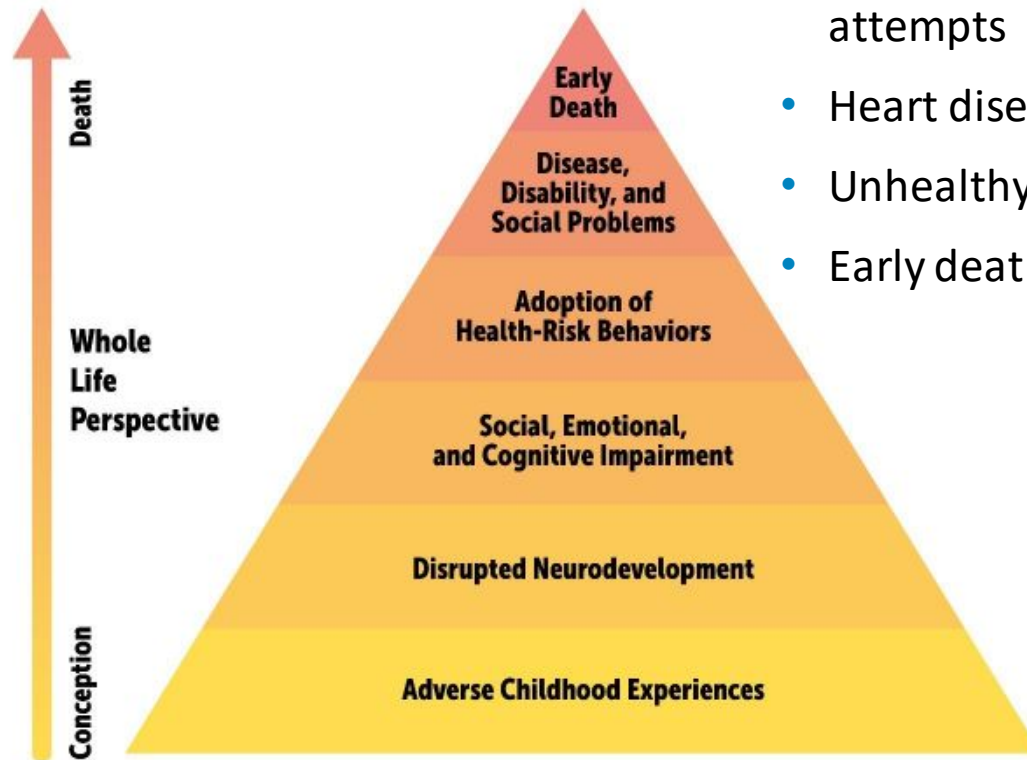
Brain of a Young Orphan
Has experienced severe emotional
neglect resulting in lack of connections
in temporal lobe.



Early Childhood Adversity Has Lifelong Health & Social Consequences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's):

- Emotional, physical or sexual abuse
- Emotional or physical neglect
- Household Dysfunctions
 - Mother treated violently
 - Household substance abuse
 - Household mental illness
 - Parental separation or divorce
 - Incarcerated household member



Increase Risk as Adults of:

- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Depression/suicide attempts
- Heart disease
- Unhealthy behaviors
- Early death

Healthy brain connections depend on healthy human connections and positive early learning experiences



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Early Human Connections Shape Brain Connections



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**The "Still Face"
Experiment**

Early Human Connections Shape Brain Connections



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Secure attachment:
Trusts that parents
are consistently
available



**Anxious-ambivalent
attachment**
Can't count on
parents to respond

**Anxious-avoidant
insecure attachment**
Learned that the
parent is not there



**Disorganized
attachment**
No strategy for
dealing with parents'
failure to protect and
nurture

Trauma and Executive Functioning: Meeting Parents Where They Are



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- A set of thinking skills that allow us to control impulses (self-regulate), focus and plan
- **Not** innate; roots begin in infancy
- Children and adults who experience early adversity are more likely to have deficits in EF skills as a result





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Safe Babies Court Teams

Safe Babies Court Teams



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Transforming child welfare into the practice of child “well-being” by using the science of early childhood development to ensure maltreated infants and toddlers reach safe, loving, permanent homes as quickly as possible.



Early Human Connections Shape Brain Connections



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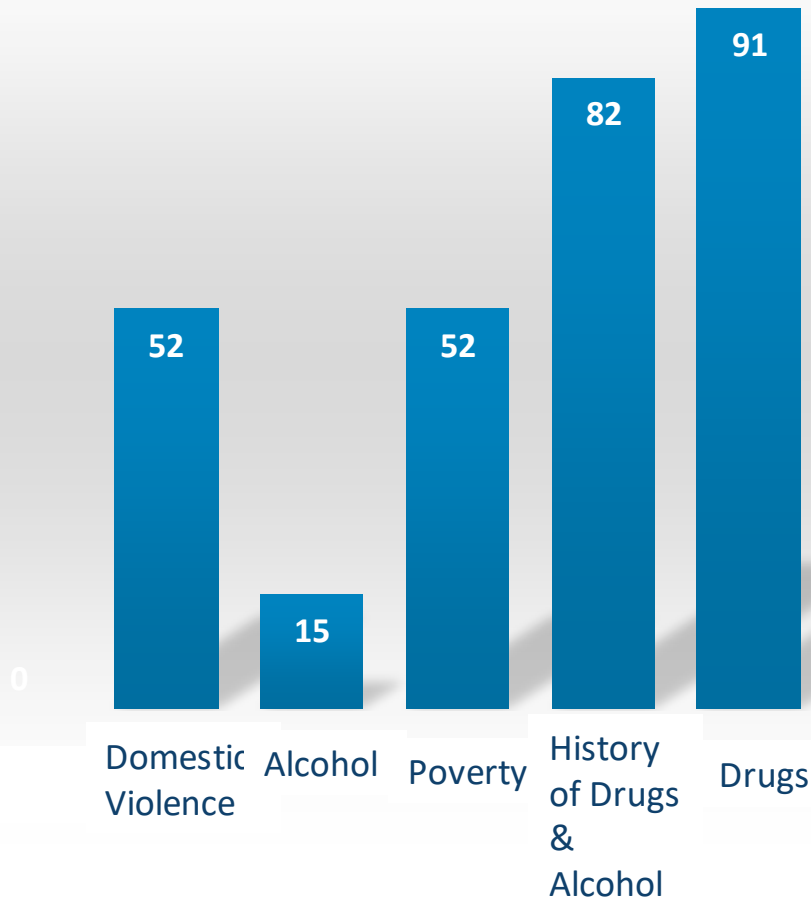


Family Risk Factors and Parental Substance Use



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Family



Child



The Safe Babies Court Team Core Components



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1. Judicial Leadership
2. Local Community Coordinator
3. Active Court Team focused on the Big Picture
4. Targeting Infants and Toddlers in Out-of-Home Care
5. Valuing Birth Parents
6. Placement and Concurrent Planning
7. The Foster Parent Intervention, Mentors and Extended Family
8. Post-Removal Conferences & Family Team Meetings
9. Parent-Child Contact (Visitation)
10. Continuum of Mental Health Services
11. Training and Technical Assistance
12. Understanding the Impact of Our Work



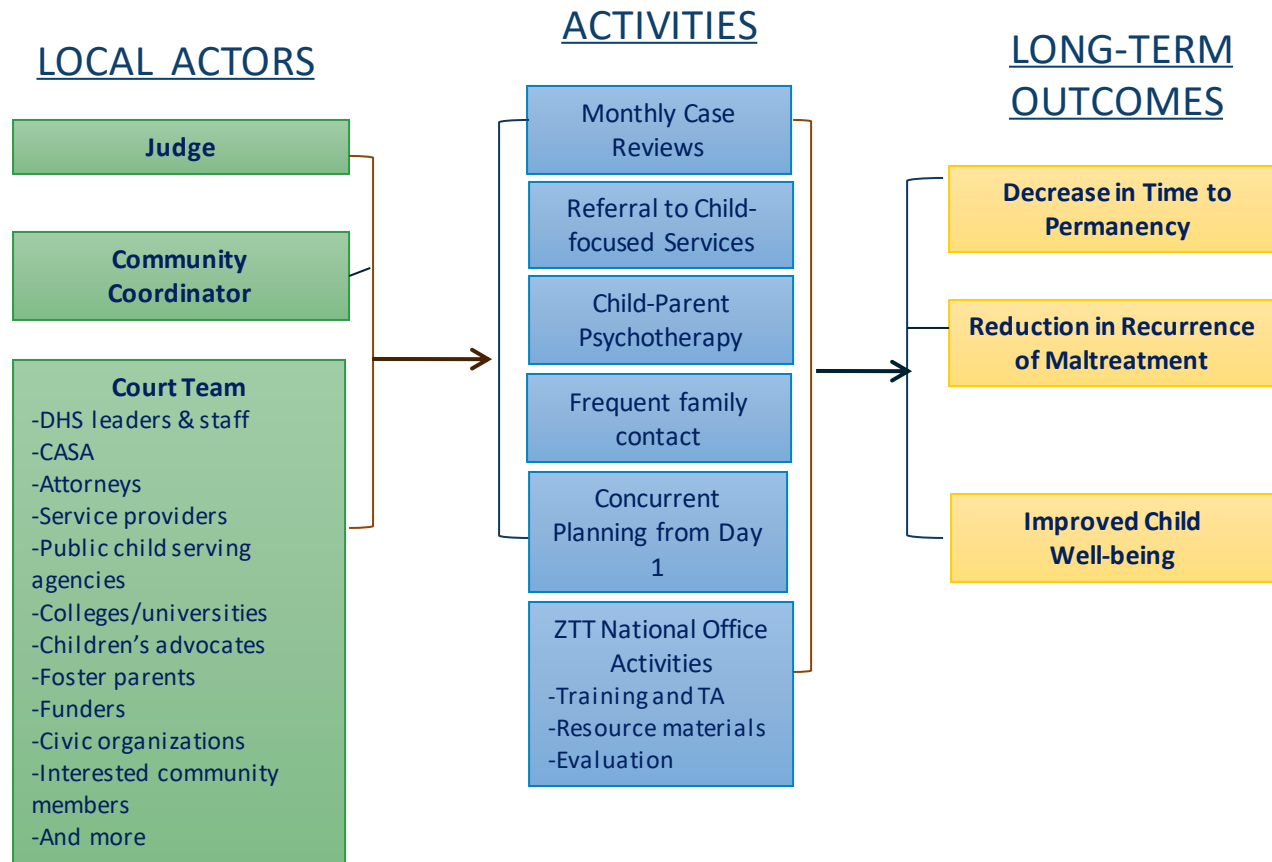


Goal: Timely and nurturing permanent placement of infants and toddlers in foster care

- 1. Implement concurrent planning from the START of the case
- 2. Use evidence-based and evidence informed programs and services
- 3. Prevent multiple placements
- 4. Ensure access to early intervention services
- 5. Address mental health needs of infants and toddlers and their parents .
- 6. Ensure comprehensive and consistent health care (dental, vision and hearing exams) for children and their parents
- 7. Ensure ongoing post-permanency services and supports



Target Group: Children Entering Foster Care Before Age 3





“Babies are the most important population we deal with. They are at the heart of best practice and reasonable efforts.”
– *Honorable Paul T. Murakami*

Court Team Community Stakeholders



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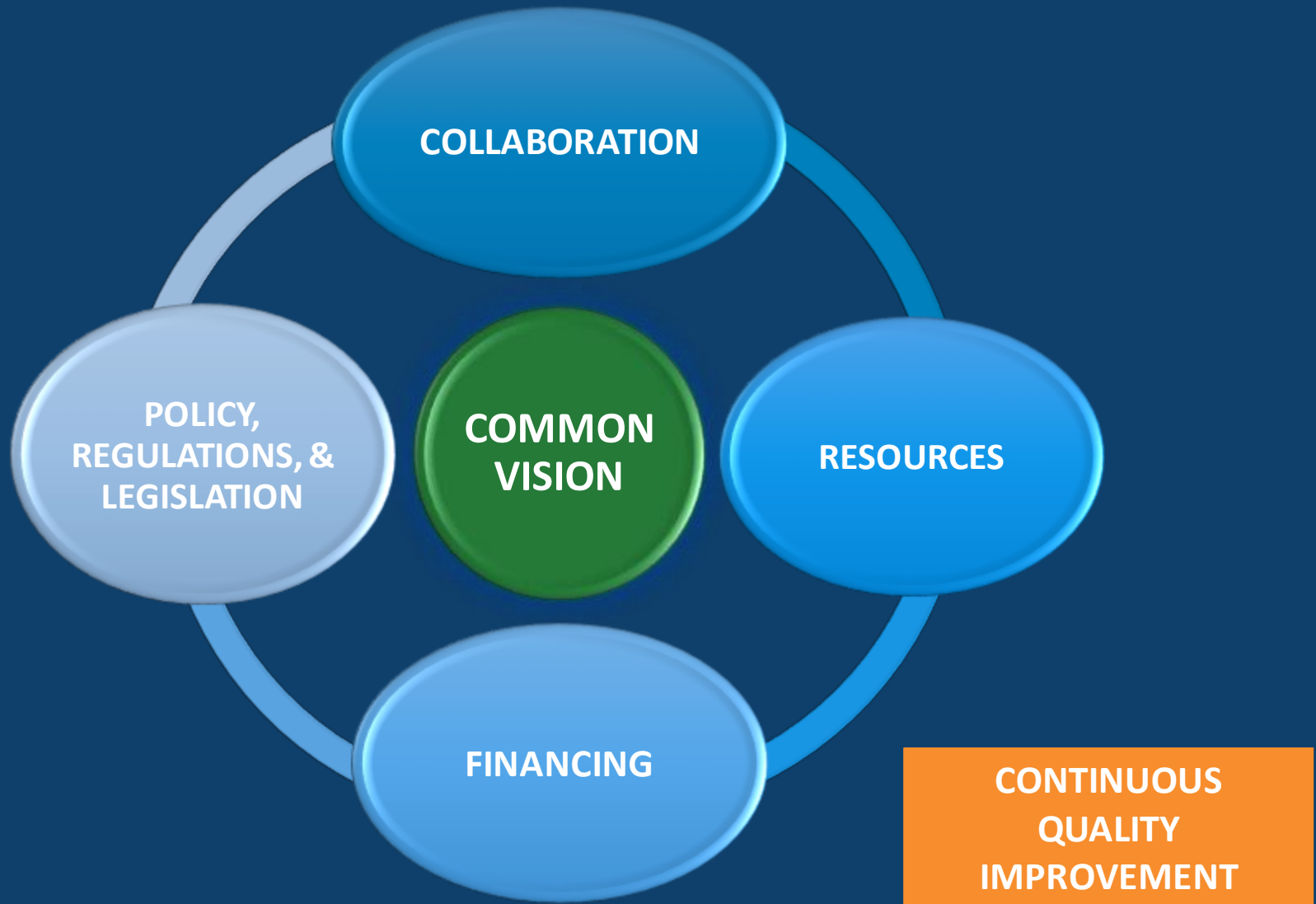
- Child Welfare agency staff
- Local government leaders and agencies
- Primary health care providers
- Attorneys
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Guardian ad Litem (GALs)
- Court Improvement program staff
- Mental Health Professionals
- Foster Parents and Foster Parent Associations
- Law enforcement
- Substance abuse treatment providers
- Early intervention specialists
- Early Head Start and child care` professionals
- Dentists
- Domestic violence service providers
- Representatives from colleges and universities
- Faith-based & volunteer groups
- Child and Family advocates
- Court Improvement program staff





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Framework for Sustainability





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Research and Evaluations

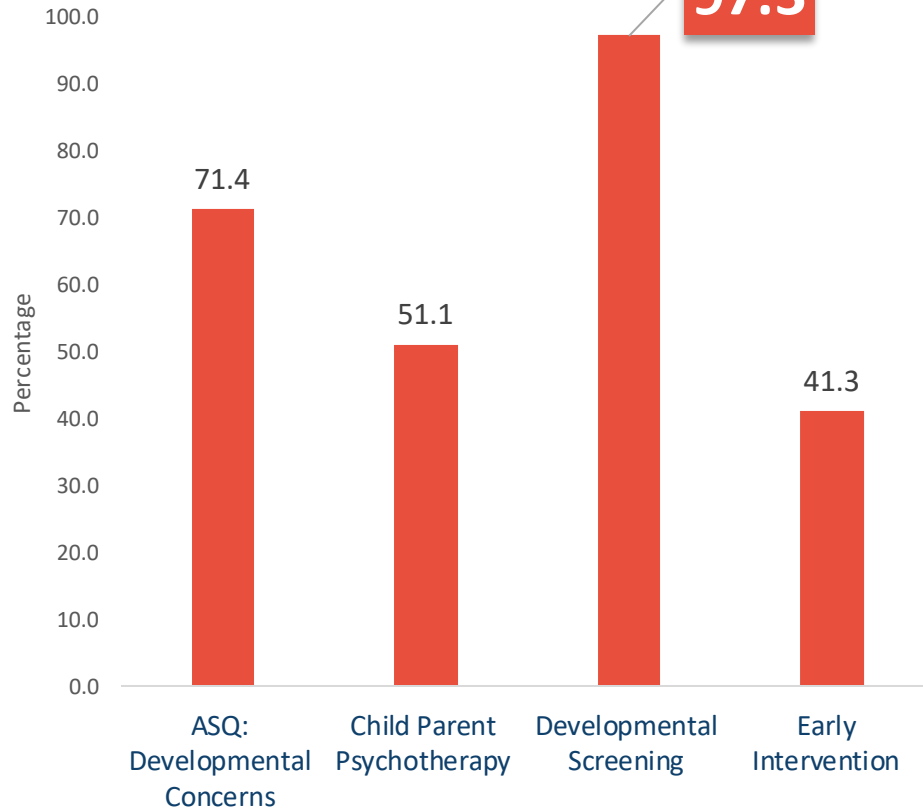
Access to Screenings & Early Intervention Services



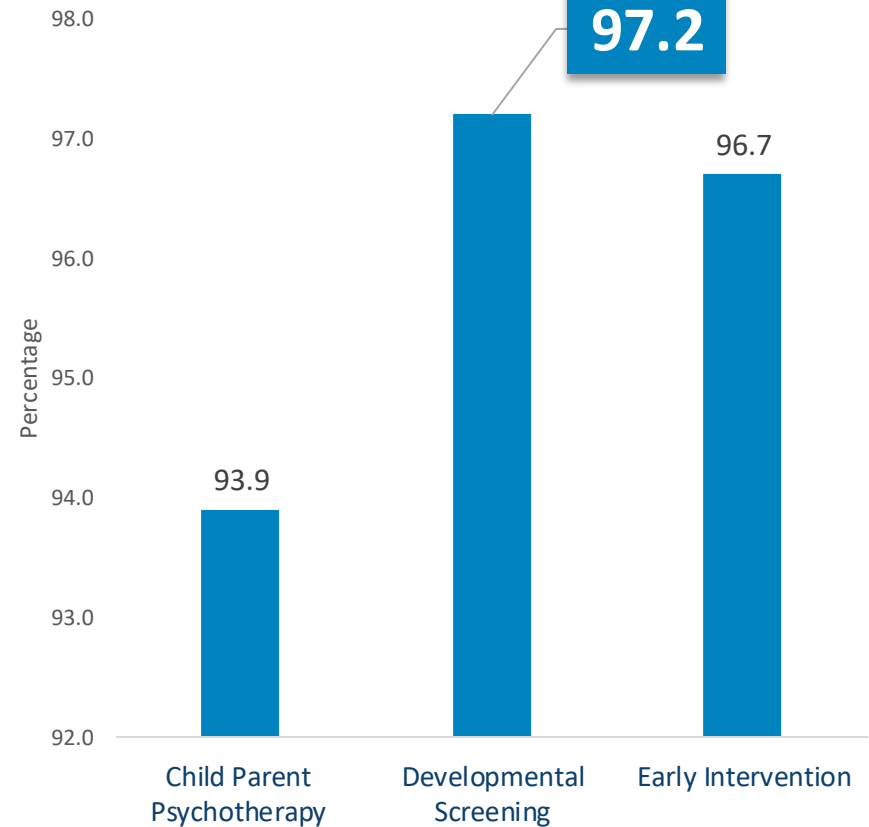
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Service Need Assessed

(n=251)



Services Received



Safety: Recurrence of Maltreatment within a 12-Month Period



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**Safe Babies Court
Teams Approach: 0.7%**

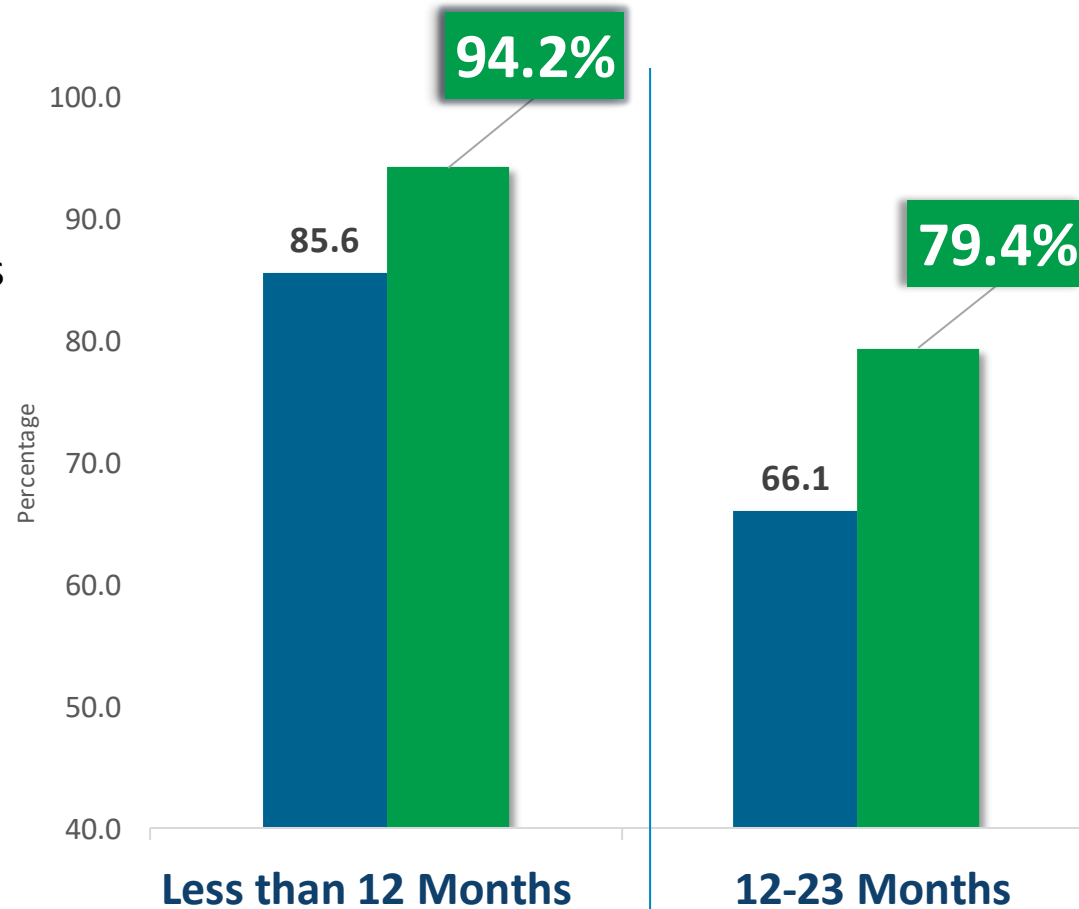
**National
Standard: 9.1%**





Children with Two or Fewer Placements

-  National Median
-  Safe Babies Court Teams





- Among 231 children with closed cases between April 2015 -May 2018, **83.7% reached permanency within 12 months.**
 - **48.6%:** Reunified with parents
 - **32.2%:** Adopted
 - **14.0%:** Placed a fit and willing relative
- No significant differences for permanency within 12 months by child's race/ethnicity.



Court Team children exit foster care FASTER



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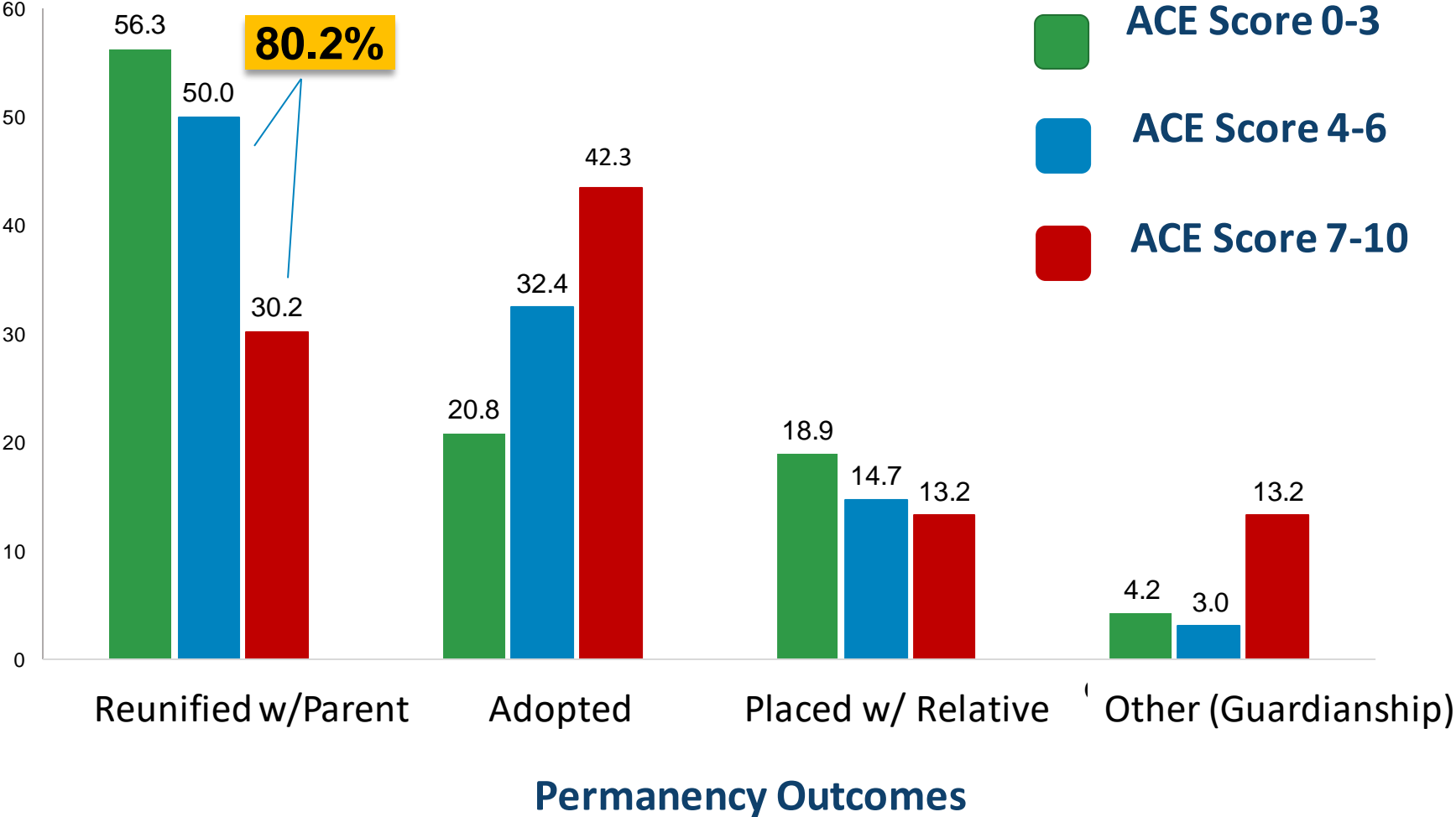
Type of Exit from Foster Care		ZTT (n=298)	NSCAW (n=511)	
Reunification	Median	309	547	<i>8 months faster on average</i>
	Mean	340	587	
Adoption	Median	464	764	<i>10 months faster on average</i>
	Mean	496	800	
Relative custodian	Median	351	450	<i>3-4 months faster on average</i>
	Mean	363	487	
Non-relative guardian	Median	481	878	<i>10-13 months faster on average</i>
	Mean	467	780	

Patterns hold using propensity scores in a competing risks analysis.

Parents' Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) & Permanency Outcomes



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The Path Ahead



Our Efforts to Continue Moving Forward



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- ✓ How is will the project be financed?
- ✓ What other state and local public agencies have commitments to advance this work?
- ✓ What federal grants are currently addressing this population?
- ✓ What private partners are seeking to invest or could be engaged to provide financial support?
- ✓ What state or local policies, regulations and legislation support the common vision?





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Safe Babies Court Team Work in Action!

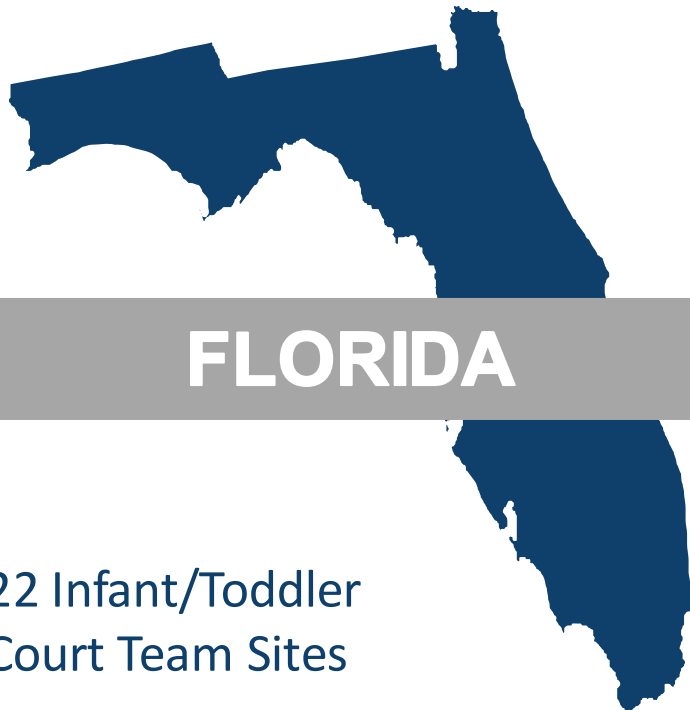


Infant/Toddler Courts developed with the Safe Babies Court Team Approach



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State Policy shaping continued growth of Infant/Toddler Courts



FLORIDA

- 22 Infant/Toddler Court Team Sites
- 1 additional site in early stages



TENNESSEE

- 7 Infant/Toddler Court Team Sites developed 2017-2018
- 5 additional Infant/Toddler Court Team Sites added by 2019

How We Can Help



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- Technical Assistance Strategy Assessments
- Customized 3-year Stand Up to Sustainability Implementation Support Plans
- Ongoing Training and Technical Assistance offered under a unique registry
- Consultations, focus groups and strategic planning to promote Continuous Quality Improvement
- Access to the National ZERO TO THREE database with support for evaluation and site management





“ Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has. – *Margaret Mead* ”



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Mahalo

