

Infant Mental Health

What is it and why is it important?

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Infant Mental Health



"Lahwaah, buwha buwhaah, gullygah abawaa mey ayeeyaah. Is that normal?"

What is Mental Health in an Infant?

- The developing capacity of the child from birth to 3 to *experience, regulate, and express* emotions
- The ability form *close* and *secure* interpersonal relationships
- To *explore* and *master the environment* and *learn*
- All in the *context* of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children.

Seeing through an IMH Lens

1. The foundations of life-long mental and physical health are laid in infancy & early childhood
2. Relationships shape development
3. Adversities happen & impact young children
4. Prevention and repair are possible and happen within relationships

1. The foundations of life-long mental and physical health are laid in infancy & early childhood

- The most significant advances in brain architecture occur prenatally, then continue in the 3 three years of life
- The brain incorporates experience into its architecture. *Early experiences (both positive and negative) have a decisive impact on how the brain is wired.*

(Thompson, 2008)

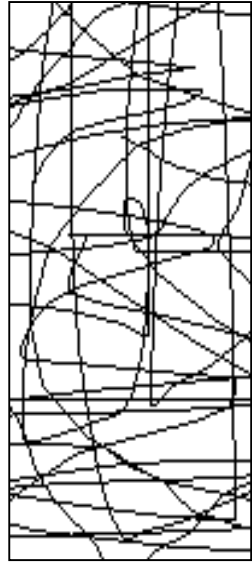
Baby brain development

- A newborn's brain consists of **100 billion** brain cells (*neurons*)
- During the first 3 years of life, **700 to 1,000** new neural connections (*synapses*) are formed each second
- The **rate of synaptic growth** during this period exceeds any other period in the lifespan

Nowakowski (2006)



Neuronal Growth in Infancy



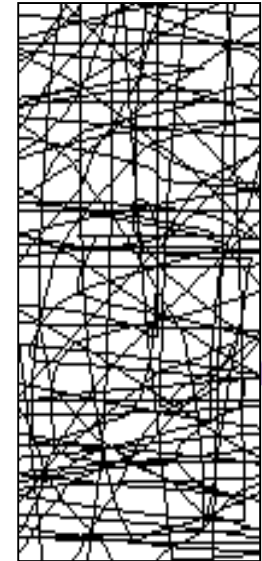
Newborn



Overgrowth



**Early
Childhood**



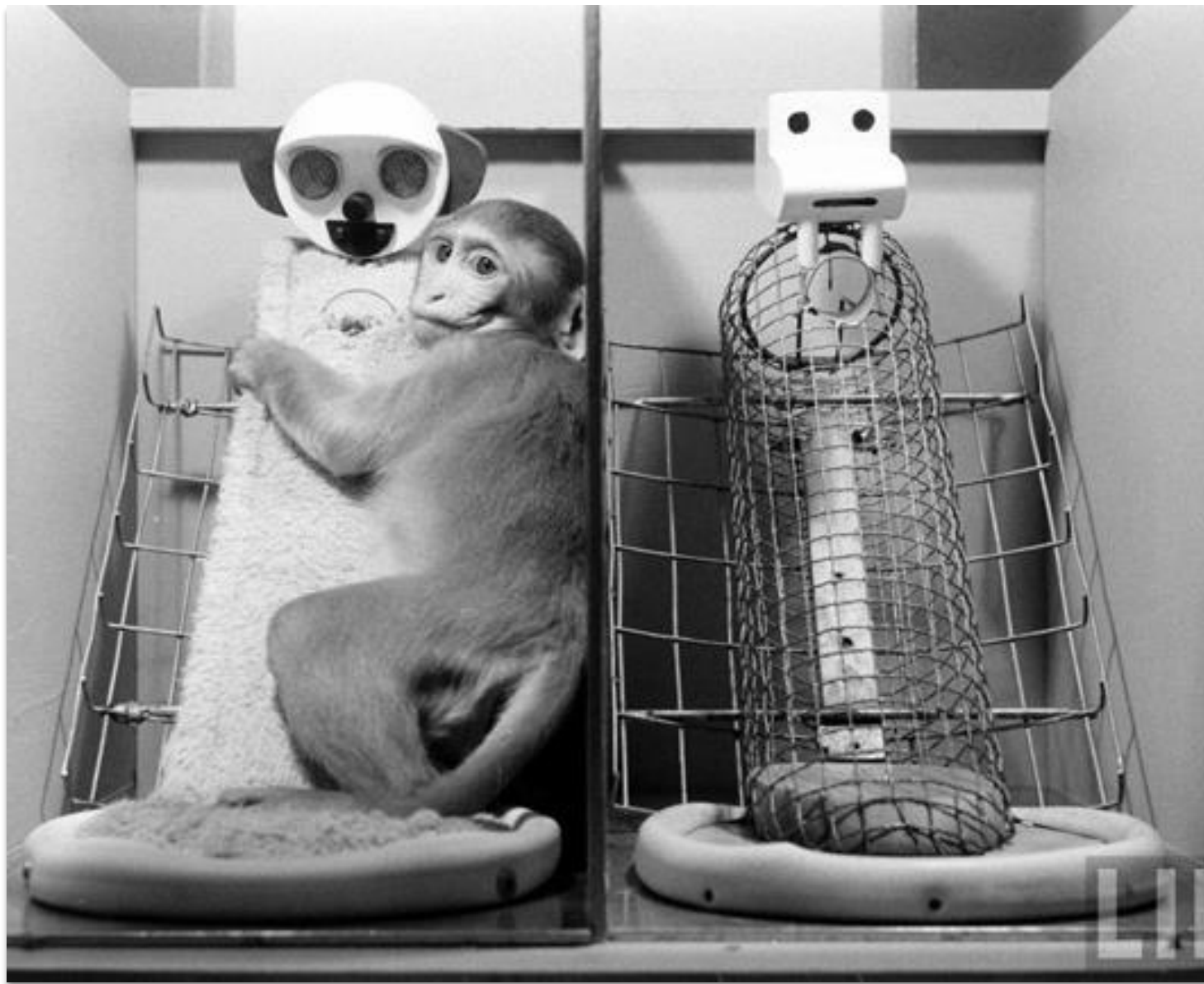
**Later
Childhood**

2. Relationships Shape Physical, Cognitive and emotional Development

“There is no such thing as a baby”

- DW Winnicott





Harry Harlow
1950s

Monkey Love

The propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals is a basic component of human nature. (John Bowlby)



John Bowlby
1960s

Attachment=
The foundation
of healthy
development



Mary Ainsworth
1970s

The Strange
Situation

Attachment styles	% of sample (also generalized to represent U.S. population)	The child's general state of being	Mother's responsiveness to her child's signals and needs	Fulfillment of the child's needs (why the child acts the way it does)
Secure Attachment	65%	Secure, explorative, happy	Quick, sensitive, consistent	Believes and trusts that his/her needs will be met
Avoidant Attachment	20%	Not very explorative, emotionally distant	Distant, disengaged	Subconsciously believes that his/her needs probably won't be met
Ambivalent Attachment	10-15%	Anxious, insecure, angry	Inconsistent; sometimes sensitive, sometimes neglectful	Cannot rely on his/her needs being met
Disorganized Attachment	10-15%	Depressed, angry, completely passive, nonresponsive	Extreme, erratic: Frightened or frightening, passive or intrusive	Severely confused with no strategy to have his/her needs met

Attachment Styles

Sensitive, responsive and consistent caregiving is associated with:

Physical
Weight for age
Length for age
Weight for Length for age
Sleep Patterns
Eating Behavior

Sensitive, responsive and consistent caregiving is associated with:

Cognitive
Language Development
Adaptive Skills
School Readiness
Executive Functioning
IQ Scores

Sensitive, responsive and consistent caregiving is associated with:

Social/Emotional
Emotion Regulation
Self Esteem
Social and Relationship Skills
Mental Health Concerns
Resilience

3. Adversities happen

ACES-Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

- Decade-long study designed to examine the childhood origins of our Nation's leading health and social problems.
- The Study was a collaboration between the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC) and the *Kaiser Health Plan's Department of Preventive Medicine* in San Diego, CA
- Studied 17,337 men and women. Their average age was 56 years. 75% were white, 39% were college graduates

The three types of ACEs include

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Mother treated violently



Divorce



Incarcerated Relative



Substance Abuse

HOW PREVALENT ARE ACEs?

The ACE study revealed the following estimates:*

ABUSE

Physical Abuse 28.3%

Sexual Abuse 20.7%

Emotional Abuse 10.6%

percentage of study participants
that experienced a specific ACE

NEGLECT

Emotional Neglect 14.8%

Physical Neglect 9.9%

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

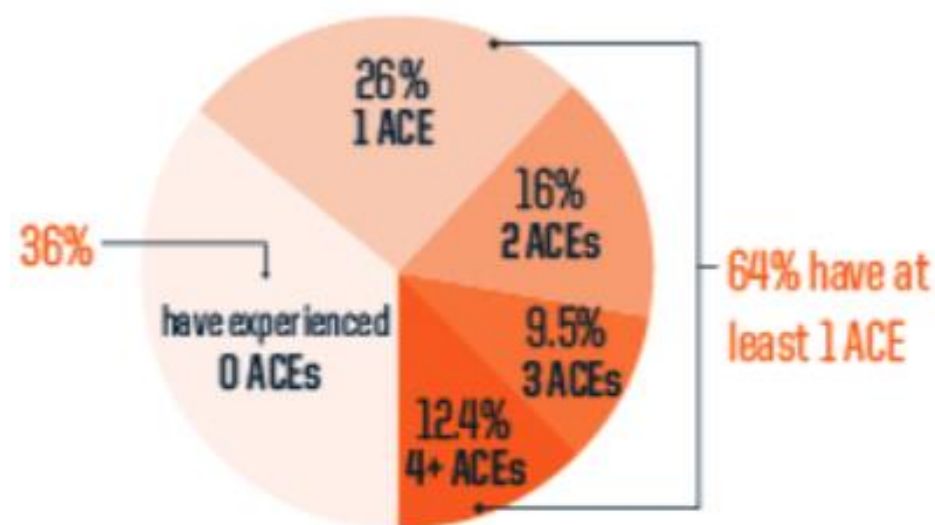
Household Substance Abuse 26.9%

Parental Divorce 23.3%

Household Mental Illness 19.4%

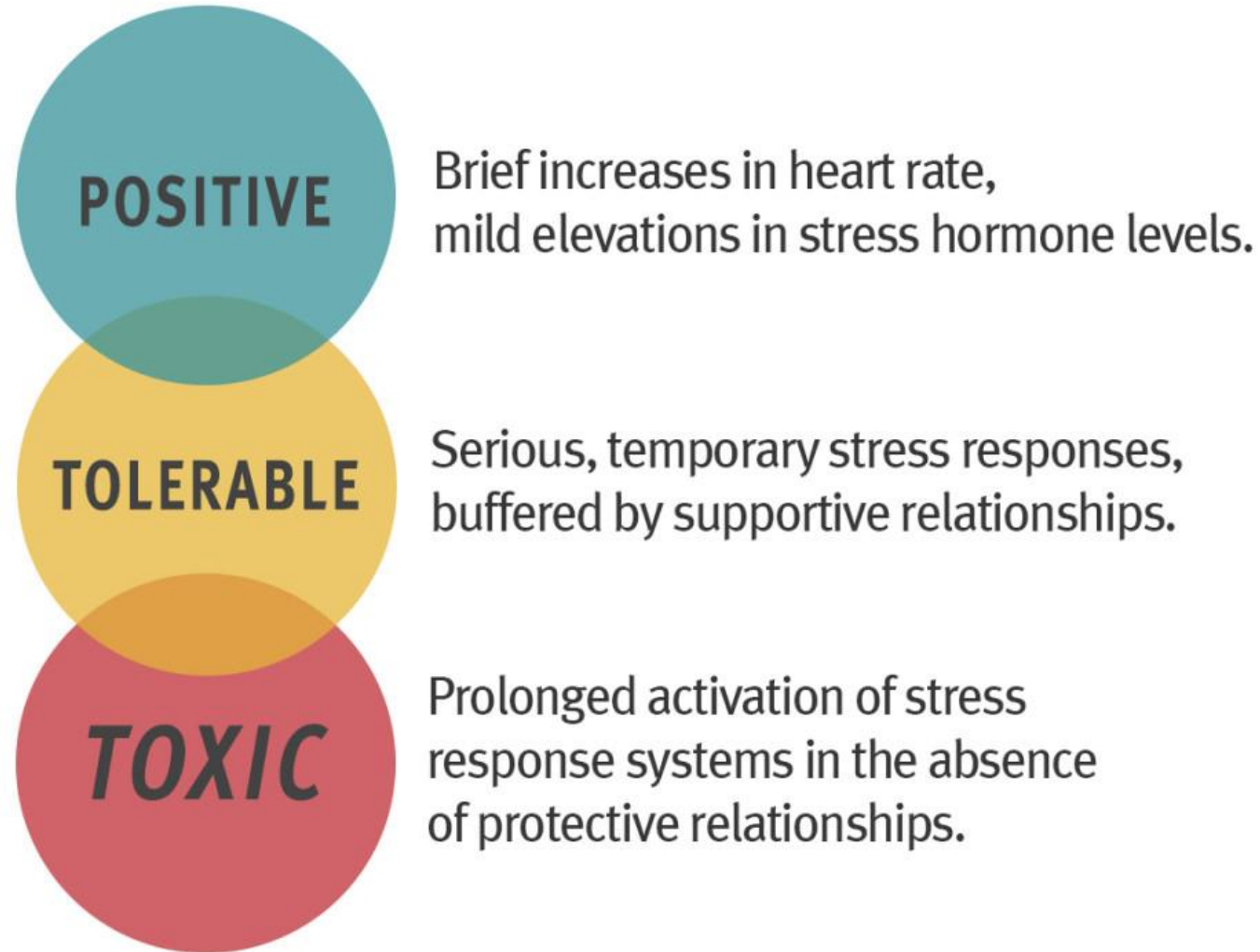
Mother Treated Violently 12.7%

Incarcerated Household Member 4.7%



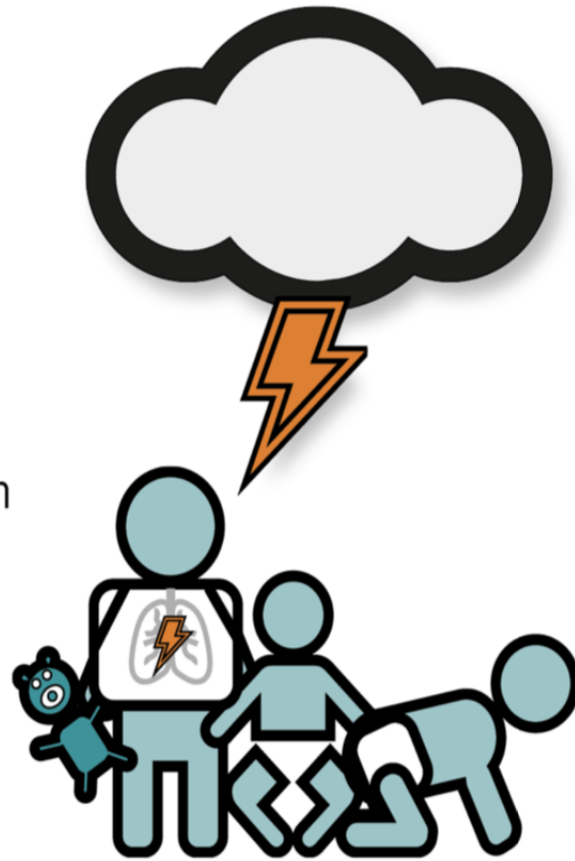
*Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/ace/prevalence.htm>

Toxic stress



Aces and Toxic stress

Experiencing many ACEs, as well as things like racism and community violence, without supportive adults, can cause what's known as **toxic stress**. This excessive activation of the stress-response system can lead to long-lasting wear-and-tear on the body and brain.



The effect would be similar to revving a car engine for days or weeks at a time.

3. Adversities Happen and Impact Young Children

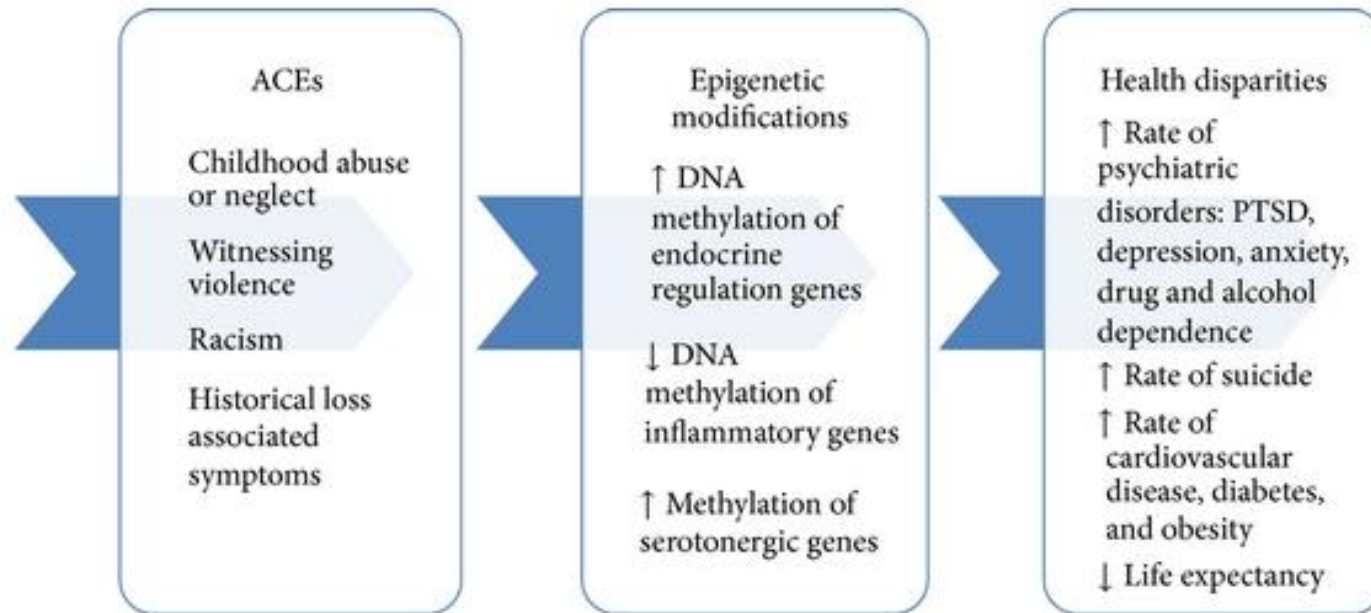
Directly
and
Indirectly

Directly

- Trauma – in child and in caregiver
- Parental mental health concerns
- Neglect, Abuse
- Separation

Through the relationship!





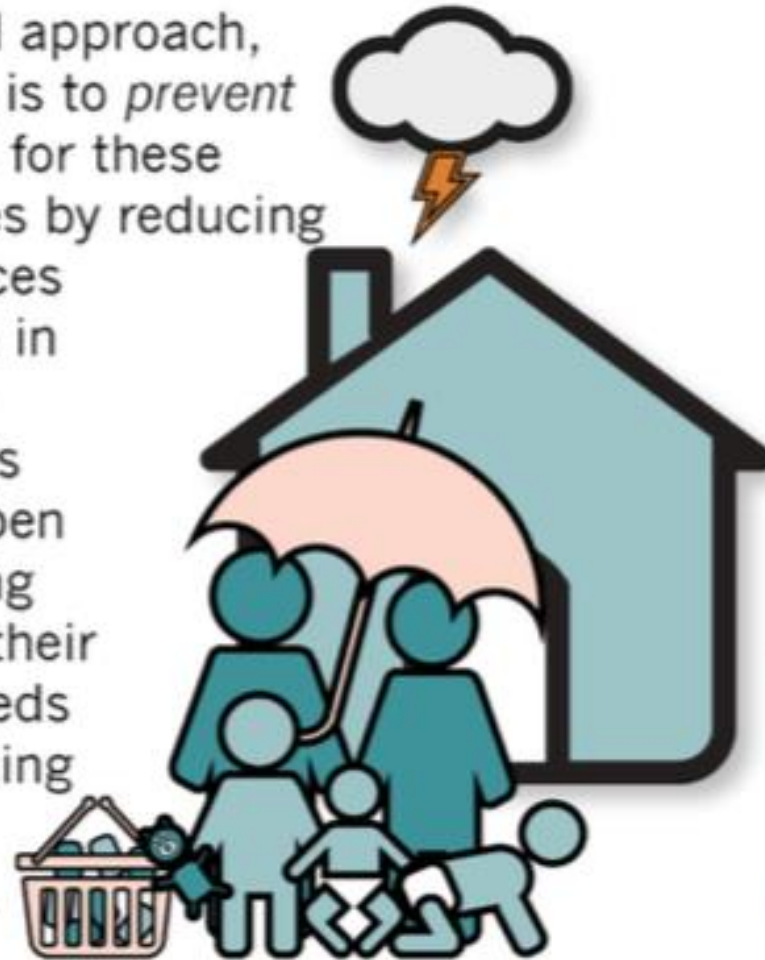
Prevention and repair are possible; the earlier the better; all within relationships

- There are evidence-based treatments for young children and their caregivers
- Because relationships shape development repair must happen *through* relationships – *TWO GENERATION* approach
- The earlier the intervention begins, the better the prognosis while PREVENTION provides best possible outcomes!

Two Generation Approach



The ideal approach, however, is to *prevent* the need for these responses by reducing the sources of stress in people's lives. This can happen by helping to meet their basic needs or providing other services.



Likewise, fostering strong, responsive relationships between children and their caregivers, and helping children and adults build core life skills, can help to buffer a child from the effects of toxic stress.

Questions? Comments?

