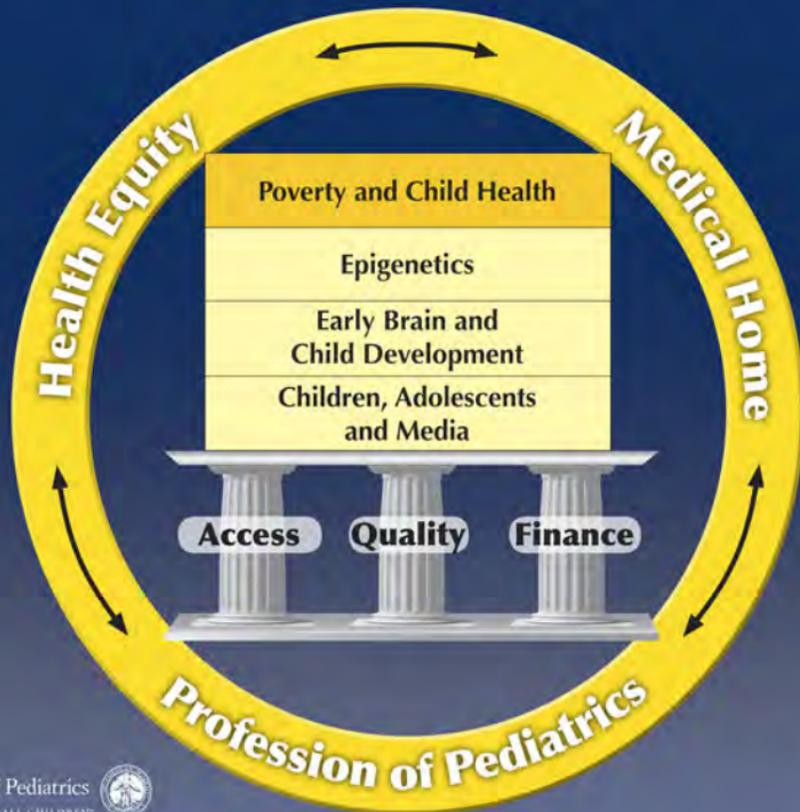


AAP Agenda for Children 2013-2014

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™





Building “Piece” of Mind

Initial Visit: “Face” Time and Caregiver Mental Health

Infants are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others interact with your infant influences the many new connections that are forming within the infant’s brain. These early brain connections are the basis for more complicated skills and behaviors, and they will affect the learning, behavior and health of your infant for many years to come. Early, supportive relationships build your infant’s brain and prepare it for the future.

Supportive relationships initially focus on meeting a newborn’s bodily needs. By regularly feeding your infant, soothing your infant to sleep, and changing dirty diapers, you are meeting your newborn’s most basic needs. This calm and consistent care helps your infant to feel safe. With time, the infant will begin to link your voice, touch and face with this soothing sense of safety. This early bond with you is the start of important social, emotional and language skills.

You know this early bond is growing when your infant begins to have “social” smiles. By the time your infant is 6-8 weeks old, they will smile back when they see a face. At this point, making time for “face time” is critical. “Face time” means sharing your smiling face whenever your infant is smiling. As your infant grows, this social smiling will lead to other “conversations.” For example, when you smile, your infant will smile back. Then when you coo, your infant coos. Then when you giggle, your infant giggles, and so on. This “dance” between you and your infant is fun for both you and your infant. It is also a great way to encourage more advanced social, emotional and language skills as they appear.

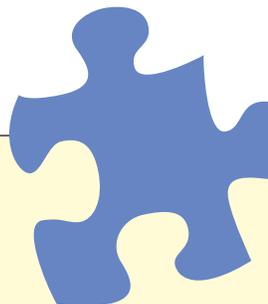
However, you need to calmly and consistently meet your infant’s basic needs for this very important dance to work. If you are too busy with your own life, your infant may not develop the basic sense of safety. If you are anxious, depressed or dealing with substance abuse issues, you may not notice your infant’s attempts to bond and smile with you. You should always encourage your infant’s social smile

by smiling in return. If you don’t, they will become more and more upset and eventually give-up on smiling all together!

The first few weeks of your infant’s life can be very stressful for you. You have to adjust to a new role with less sleep and more work. You need to be sure your own needs are met in order to meet your child’s needs. Family and community support are very important. If you are struggling or if you have added stress from anxiety, depression or substance abuse, local resources can help. These resources include the pediatrician, the family physician, the obstetrician, the mental health counselor, or the new mother’s support group. Reducing your stress helps both you and your infant.

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An Introduction to Purposeful Parenting

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Recent research says that bodily needs, the need to feel safe, the need to be loved, the need to feel competent, and the need to be self-directed, are universal. Meeting these needs allows more children to be healthy and successful in school, no matter what their socio-economic or racial/ethnic background is. Unmet needs, though, can cause stress. If brief, stress can be positive and provide a source of motivation. However, too much stress can be toxic, messing up the basic growth and functioning of the brain. The six elements of Purposeful Parenting build on this research. By being Purposeful, Protective, Personal, Progressive, Positive and Playful, parents and caregivers will lessen toxic stress and encourage developing children to be all that they can be.

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- Think about the long-term goals of parenting and try to nurture the basic skills that children need to be successful. These include language, social skills, and self-control (also known as emotional regulation).
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- Assist children in learning new, more desirable behaviors or skills to meet their needs and goals.

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- Be sure that infants and children have their bodily needs met. These include food, water, shelter and sleep.
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- But avoid being overly protective or “hovering,” so children will eventually feel capable and safe on their own.

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- Help children in learning more helpful or adaptive behaviors instead of just saying “stop it” or “no!”
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Progressive

- Understand that infant and child development is always changing. Discipline and parenting skills need to change, too.
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- In regard. Love your child, not the behavior. Avoid corporal punishments like spanking. They are less effective with time, increase stress, and teach children that adults respond to conflict or strong emotions with violence.
- In outlook. Optimism decreases stress and anxiety. Use affirmations like “I know you can do better the next time.”
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Playful

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The 9mo Visit: Emotions are the First Language

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By the time infants are 9 months old, they are able to read facial expressions. A healthy fear of strangers is common at this age. It is called "stranger anxiety." Social referencing is also common. When a stranger approaches, your infant will often look to you for clues. "Is this new face a friend or an enemy?" If you seem comfortable with the stranger, your child will often relax as well. If you look uncomfortable, your child will make it very clear that this new person is not welcome!

This social referencing behavior shows that your infant is very sensitive to your emotions. This can be very reassuring for your infant. If you knowingly smile at your infant and use soothing language, you are giving your infant clear signals that everything is fine. Giving these clear signals helps to soothe and calm your infant. On the other hand, if you frequently forget that your infant is watching your emotions, it can be confusing and stressful for your infant. If you are too stressed or depressed to smile at your infant, or too upset to use soothing language, your infant may also become stressed, depressed or upset.

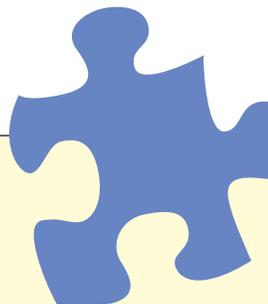
Because your child is so sensitive to your moods, you should not try to hide your emotions. Attempts to hide your emotions may be only partly successful and end up confusing your infant. That said, you should always try to soften strong emotions. Think about how your emotions affect your child's emotions and actions. Are you showing unhealthy ways of dealing with strong emotions? Examples of these are yelling, withdrawing, or becoming angry or violent. Or, are you

showing healthy, flexible ways of dealing with strong emotions? Examples of these are choosing your words carefully, calming yourself by walking away, or agreeing to talk with others about a conflict at another time—after you have had a chance to think about it and the child is not listening into your discussion.

Emotions are the first language your infant knows. You need to be aware of what you are "saying" every day. Infants and children believe that the world revolves around them (egocentrism). If you are angry at your boss or your spouse, your infant or child will likely sense that you are angry. However, they may think that you are angry with them instead!

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Building “Piece” of Mind

The 18mo Visit: Tantrums, Time Out, and Time In

Toddlers are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others interact with your toddler influences the many new connections that are forming within the toddler's brain. These early brain connections are the basis for more complicated skills and behaviors, and they will affect the learning, behavior and health of your toddler for many years to come. Early, supportive relationships build your infant's brain and prepare it for the future.

By the time toddlers are 18 months old, they are often starting to have tantrums. Many times, these tantrums happen when your child can't explain their ideas and wishes (“I want you to read to me NOW!”). As they begin to communicate better with words, this type of tantrum may stop. You should always give your children attention whenever they try to communicate with words. You should do this especially when they make happy sounds instead of whining. You can do this by smiling, looking their way or responding promptly. When you do this, you are teaching your children that using happy sounds and words is the best way to get what you want. You want to catch your child being good.

Other tantrums happen when you set limits. An example is when you say, “No, you cannot play with an electrical outlet.” In this case, the best solution is often to distract them. If you show them another fun game, the tantrum might be prevented. An example is to say, “How about we

pound on these noisy pots and pans instead?” If your child persists, ignore the tantrum as much as possible. If your child learns that having tantrums changes rules or results in more attention, the tantrums will likely continue.

If your child becomes violent, it may be time to teach “time out.” Being violent includes hitting, kicking or spitting. More than anything else, time out needs to mean “quiet and still.” If your child isn't quiet and still, it isn't time out. Very few 18 month olds know how to be quiet and still. This is a skill that needs to be taught, learned, and practiced. The first step is gently restraining the child in your lap. Have the child looking away from you so the child doesn't confuse it with a hug. Sit there until they are quiet and still. Time out is over as soon as they are quiet and still. The skill of being quiet and still is strengthened and rewarded by ending the time out. With time, they will learn that time out is shorter if they are quiet and still. Once they are able to calm themselves quickly and consistently in your lap, it is time for step two. Step two is to have them sit by themselves in the chair. You can put your hand on their lap but look away from them. Have them sit there until they are quiet and still. Once they are, time out is over. Only when they are able to put themselves in the chair and quickly calm themselves is it advisable to increase the time spent in time out with a timer. Usually a minute per year of age is good rule of thumb. Only do this if they understand that time out is quiet and still.

Time out is most effective when two things happen. One is when only one or two troublesome behaviors are addressed at a time. These are usually issues with being violent or unsafe. The second is when there is a lot of time in. Time out works because, while your child is actually in time out, your child is being ignored. No child likes that! This is particularly true if your child knows what “time-in” feels like. Time in is when your child is the center of attention! If your child is looking for attention and knows that hitting results in time out, but picking up a book results in snuggles and reading (time in), your child will stop hitting and will learn to pick up a book instead. In essence, time out is teaching and strengthening your child's ability to calm down and to remain in control despite strong emotions.

Most importantly, time out is a healthier and safer alternative to spanking or other forms of corporal punishment. Corporal forms of punishment teach children that “adults hit when they are angry.” Instead, punishment should teach children “this is how I calm myself.” Corporal forms of punishment become less effective over time. They require more and more levels of pain and fear to work. This can be damaging to the relationship and eventually turn into child abuse.

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Building “Piece” of Mind

The 36mo Visit: Building Emotional Intelligence

Children are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others interact with your child influences the many new connections that are forming within the child’s brain. These early brain connections are the basis for more complicated skills and behaviors, and they will affect the learning, behavior and health of your child for many years to come. Early, supportive relationships build your child’s brain and prepare it for the future.

By the time children are 36 months old, many are learning to use their words to express their needs and desires. Even these very young children are able to make good decisions and to get along well with others when they are calm, cool and collected. But, at times, your child may have too many strong emotions all at once. If tired, hungry, scared, frustrated or angry, your child may start to feel overwhelmed. The stress of being overwhelmed may make your child feel even more scared and frustrated! This emotional stress may also keep your child from behaving well. This same process of emotional overload happens with adolescents, too. They can make good

decisions when they are calm, cool and collected. But when they are emotional, they can be very impulsive, rash and risky. This shows that emotional intelligence is a very important life skill, whether you are 3, 13, or 30 years old!

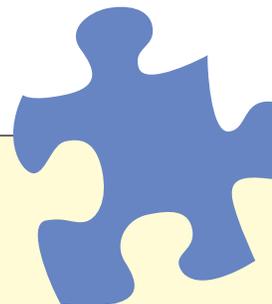
Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand your emotions and the emotions of others. It is also the ability to learn new and healthier ways to handle strong emotions. For a young child, this process begins with naming emotions. Examples are “you look angry,” “you look tired” or “you look scared.” By putting a word on a feeling you are helping your child in many ways. First, you are making the feeling real and normal. You are saying “I get angry, tired and scared too.” This tells your child that he is not the only 3 year old who’s thought about hitting that mean neighbor kid! Secondly, by naming the emotion your child knows how to communicate that emotion. This helps them ask for help in the future. Your child will now know how to say “I’m getting angry!” Most importantly, naming the emotion allows you to teach your child how they should act instead. You can then

say, “The next time you are angry, let’s try using our words instead of hitting. Maybe if we use our words that will make the anger go away without hurting your friend.”

Naming strong emotions, making them real, and teaching healthy coping behaviors is the beginning of emotional intelligence. Even young children need to learn how to manage strong emotions in a healthy manner. They can do this by using words, walking away, drawing a picture, exercising, taking a nap, listening to music, making music, looking at books, etc. If your child learns that these healthy ways of dealing with emotional stress actually work, your child will be less likely to adopt unhealthy coping behaviors as a teenager or young adult. Examples of these unhealthy coping behaviors are addictions to food, gaming, sex, tobacco or alcohol.

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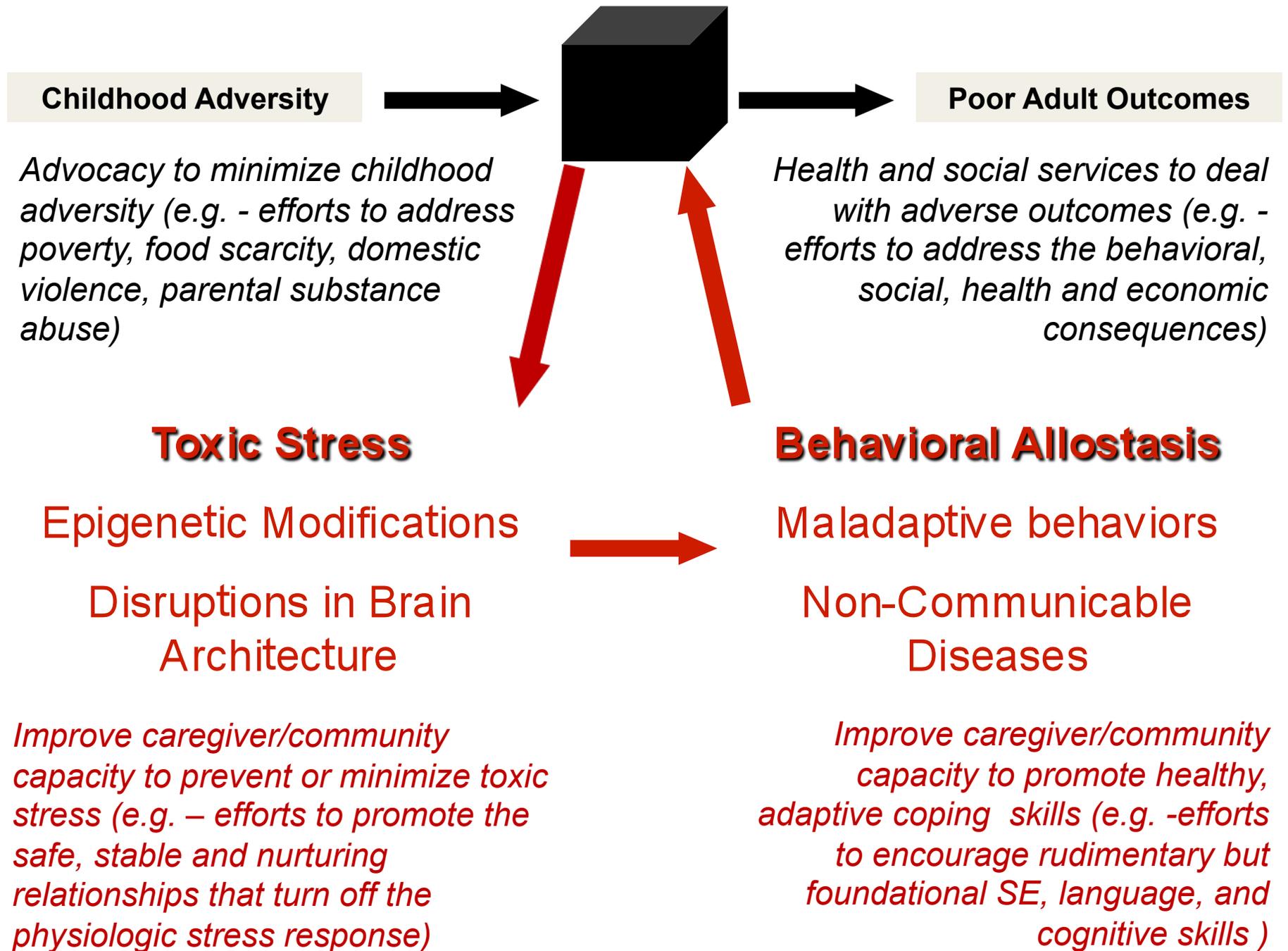
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▪



Questions for Group Discussion on “Toxic Stress, Parenting, and the Pediatrician”

- 1) What are the “essential elements” of parenting/caregiving for young children?
- 2) Are these essential elements of parenting young children “biology-informed” and “universal,” or are they subject to “cultural norms” and “personal values?”
- 3) Is a different approach needed to initially build healthy, early relationships, as opposed to repairing strained, established relationships?
- 4) Can the essential elements of parenting young children be taught or “learned?”
- 5) Can pediatricians promote these essential elements in a practice-friendly, non-judgmental, and culturally-competent manner?
- 6) If pediatricians promote early parenting skills, will that intervention/prevention improve developmental outcomes/life-course trajectories?