

The Science of Early Childhood Development

Harvard University Center on the Developing Child -- Policy Brief

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Key Findings

The foundations of learning, behaviour, and health are established in the first years of life. Adversity in early childhood -- including exposure to violence, neglect, and instability -- can disrupt the architecture of the developing brain with long-lasting consequences.

The Biology of Stress

Toxic stress -- severe, prolonged adversity without adequate adult support -- impairs the development of brain circuits. These effects can persist into adult life.

Policy Implications

- * Investing in high-quality early childhood programmes yields the highest public returns
- * Home visiting programmes for at-risk families are among the most effective interventions
- * Parenting support reduces child maltreatment and improves developmental outcomes
- * Early intervention is more effective and less costly than later remediation