

The Impact of Immigration Policy on the Health & Well-being of Immigrant Children

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Fleeing Violence in Central America



Current Immigration Policy & Laws

- A shift from “Catch and Release” to “Zero Tolerance”
- Undocumented adult immigrants to be prosecuted in federal court
- Children of parents awaiting prosecution placed with Department of Health & Human Services



U.S. Customs and
Border Protection



Potential for Trauma

“undermine the protection of detainees’ rights, their humane treatment, and the provision of a safe and healthy environment”

Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, 2017



NY Times



SF Chronicle

Mental Health of Asylum Seekers

	Detained (n=35)		Released (n=26)	
	Number (%) above recommended cut-off*	Symptom scores, mean (SD)	Number (%) above recommended cut-off*	Symptom scores, mean (SD)
Baseline				
Anxiety	28 (80%)	2.40 (0.71)	19 (73%)	2.33 (0.72)
Depression	30 (86%)	2.52 (0.69)	22 (85%)	2.45 (0.65)
PTSD	19 (54%)	2.52 (0.62)	10 (39%)	2.45 (0.62)
Follow-up				
Anxiety	30 (86%)	2.58 (0.80)	9 (35%)	1.59 (0.56)
Depression	31 (89%)	2.73 (0.70)	10 (39%)	1.65 (0.59)
PTSD	21 (60%)	2.63 (0.71)	3 (12%)	1.80 (0.56)
Change in symptom scores†				
Anxiety	..	0.17 (0.61)	..	-0.75 (0.84)
Depression	..	0.21 (0.42)	..	-0.80 (0.81)
PTSD	..	0.12 (0.51)	..	-0.64 (0.64)

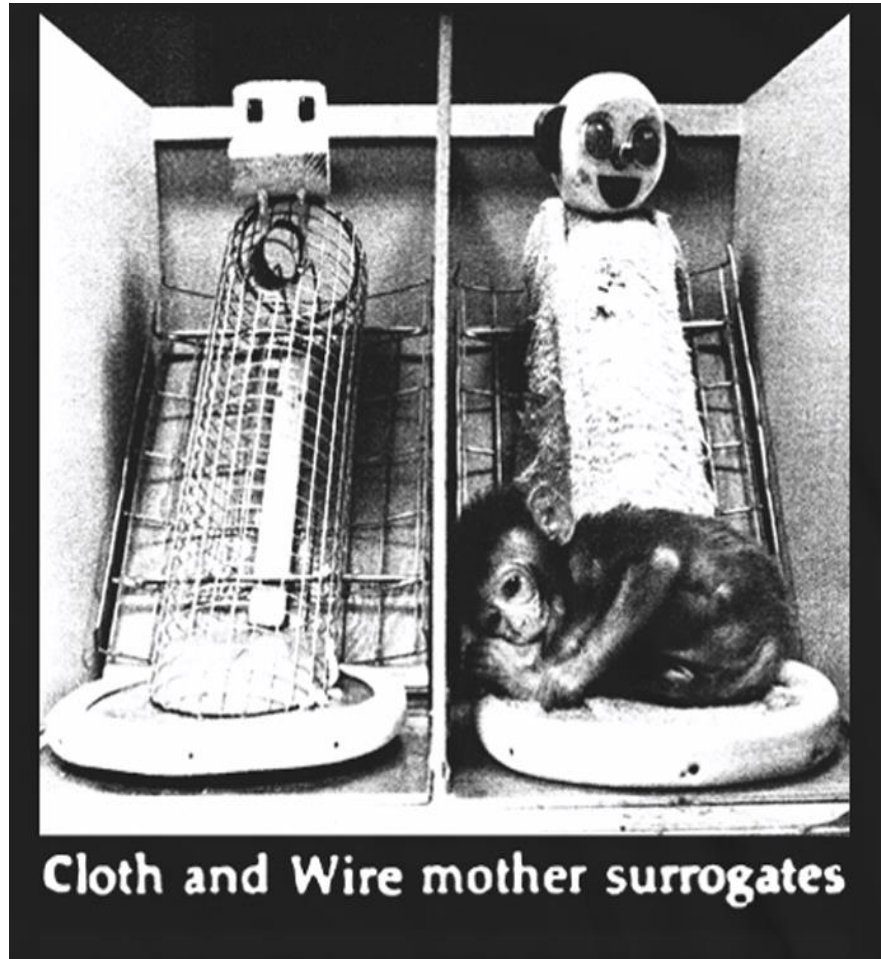
PTSD=post-traumatic stress disorder. *Cut-offs: 1.75 for HSCL-25 depression and anxiety subscales, 2.5 for HTQ. †p not significant for changes in any symptom score in detained group. p=0.0001 for all three symptom score changes in released group. Mean (SD) values are group mean at each assessment. Change=change in mean score from baseline assessment.

Early Life Stress & Maternal Deprivation: Over 70 Years of Study



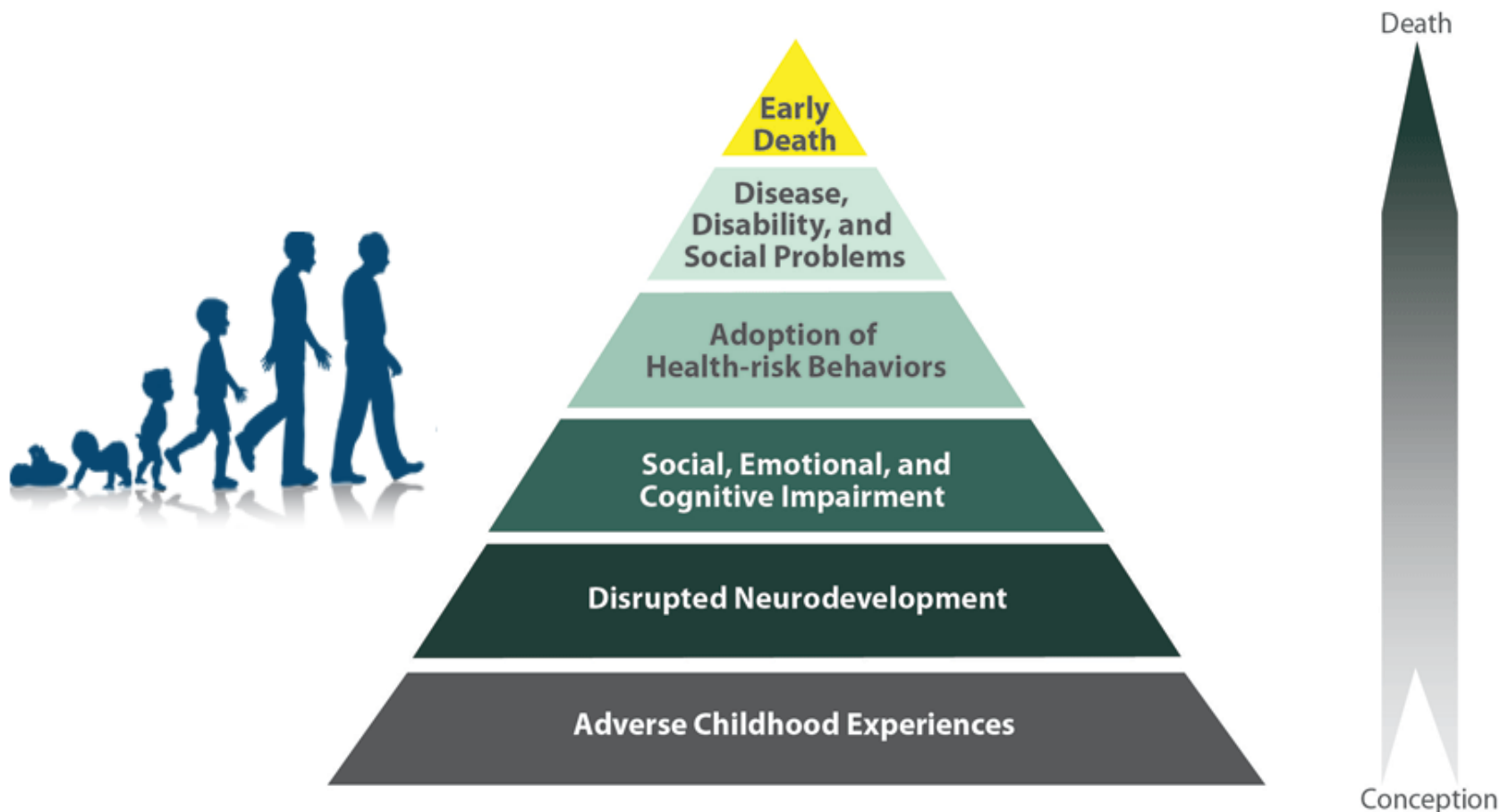
- High death rates in orphanages in 1940s
- Renè Spitz, 1946: developmental delays in institutionalized infants
- John Bowlby, 1961: separation from parents early in life lead to later psychiatric illnesses

Early Life Stress & Maternal Deprivation: Over 70 Years of Study



- Harry Harlow, 1958: monkeys spent their time with soft mother despite nutrition from wire mother
- Failed to develop proper social behaviors and had abnormal fear responses

Early Life Stress & Maternal Deprivation: Current Research

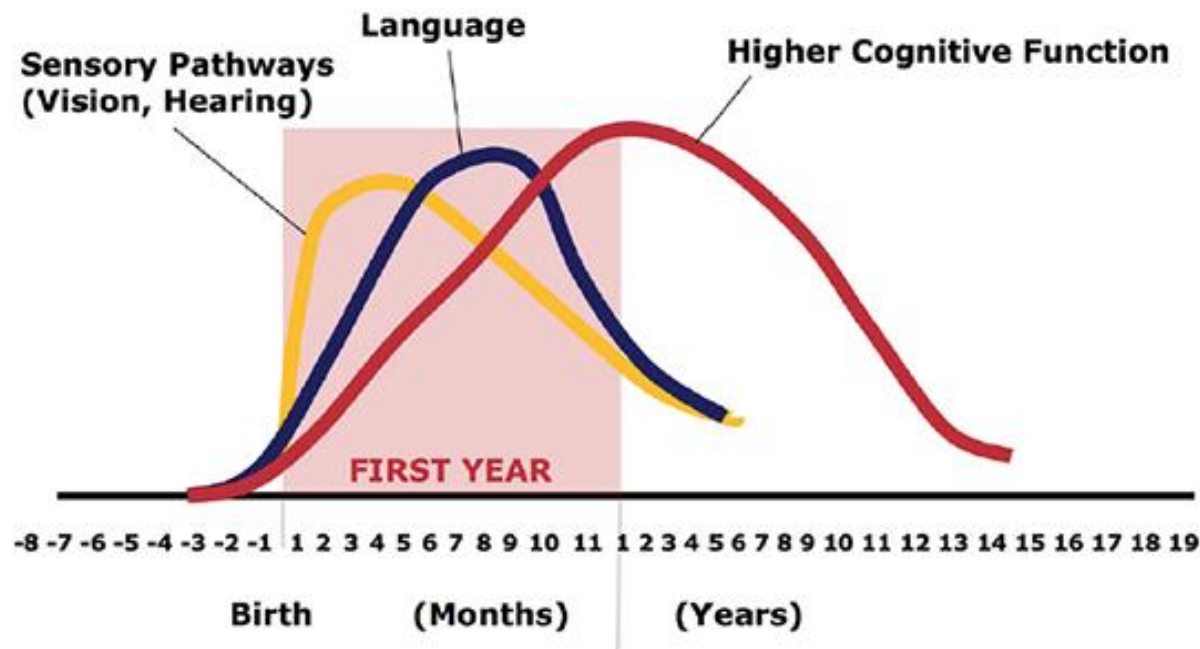


Mechanism by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

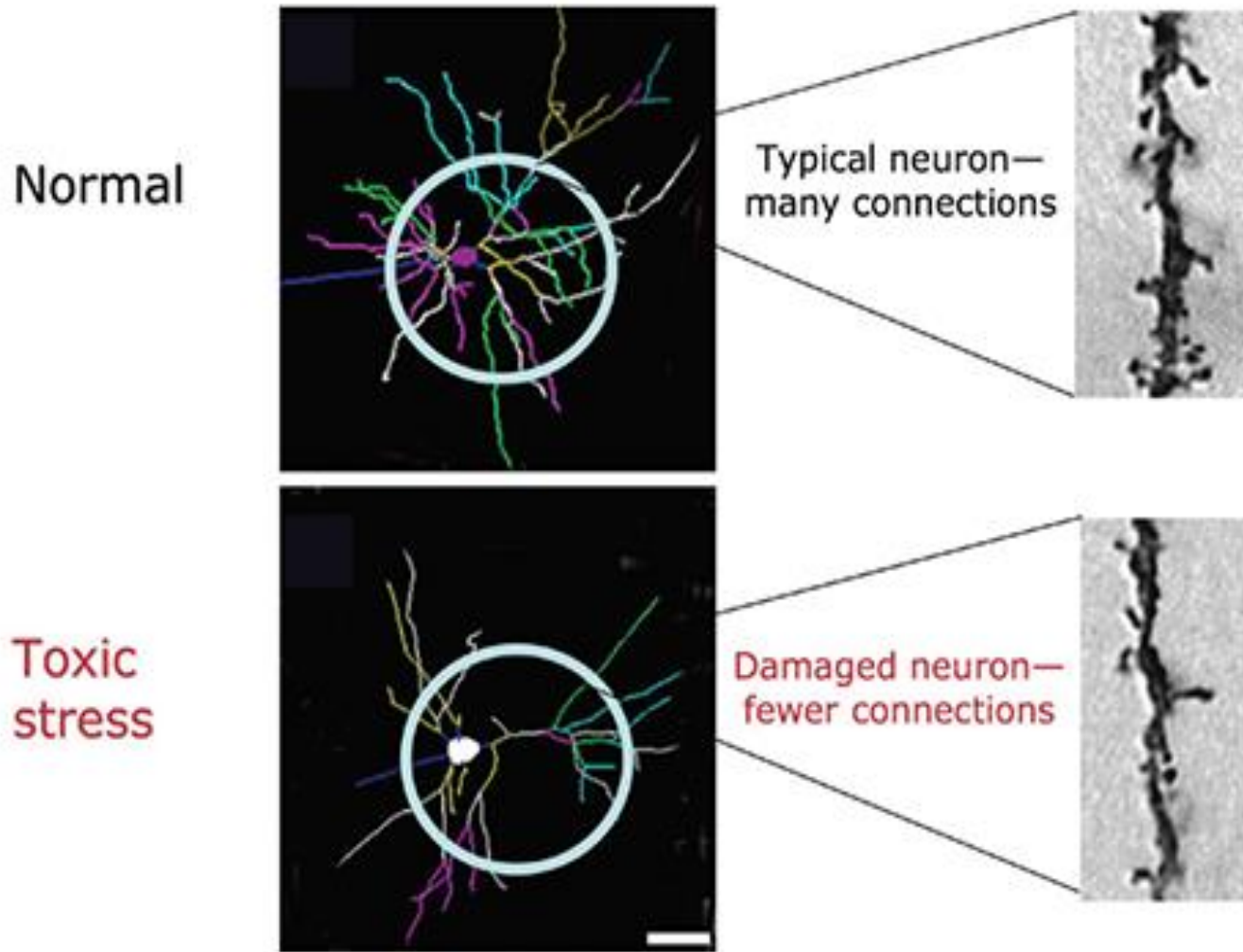
Early Life Stress & Disrupted Neurodevelopment

Human Brain Development

Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially



Early Life Stress Affects Brain Structure



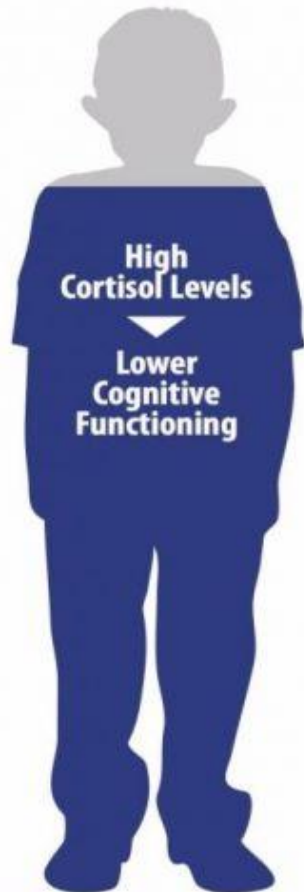
Prefrontal Cortex and
Hippocampus

Radley, et al., 2004

Early Life Stress Affects Stress Response & Cognition

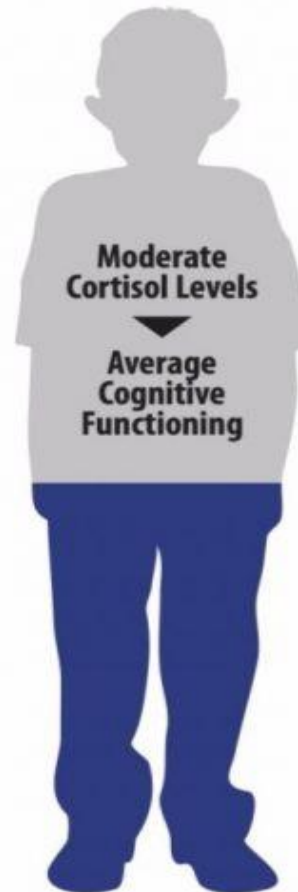
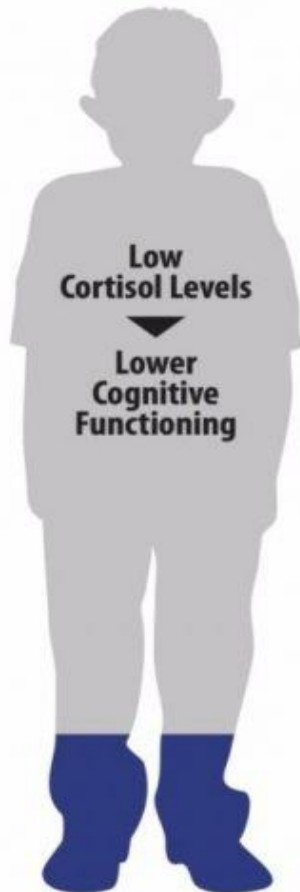
At Risk Environment:

Family Instability and
Parental Emotional
Unavailability



At Risk Environment:

Parental
Emotional
Unavailability



Dysregulated
stress response,
over or under
active

Future Consequences

ACES can have lasting effects on....



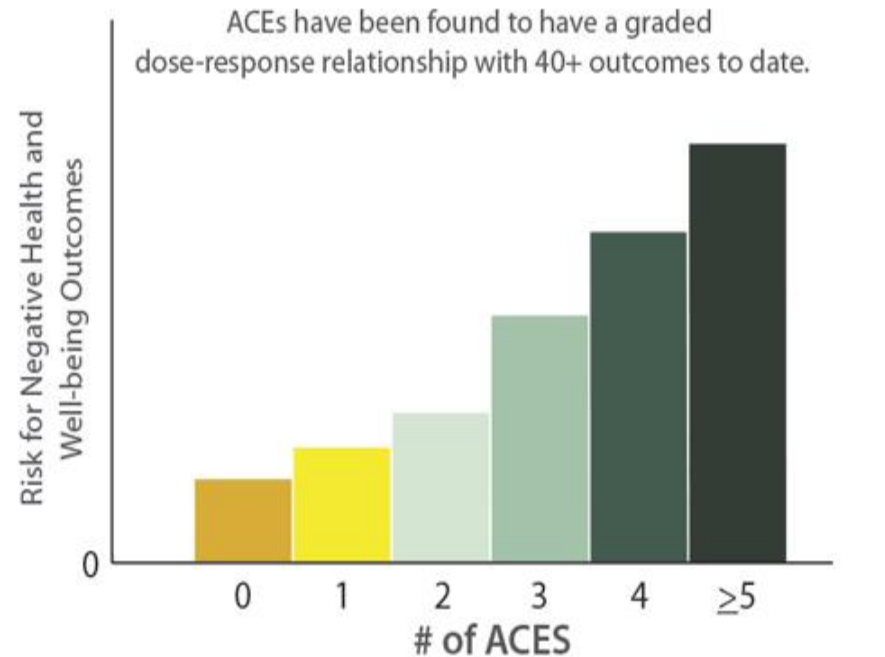
Health (obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones)



Behaviors (smoking, alcoholism, drug use)



Life Potential (graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time from work)



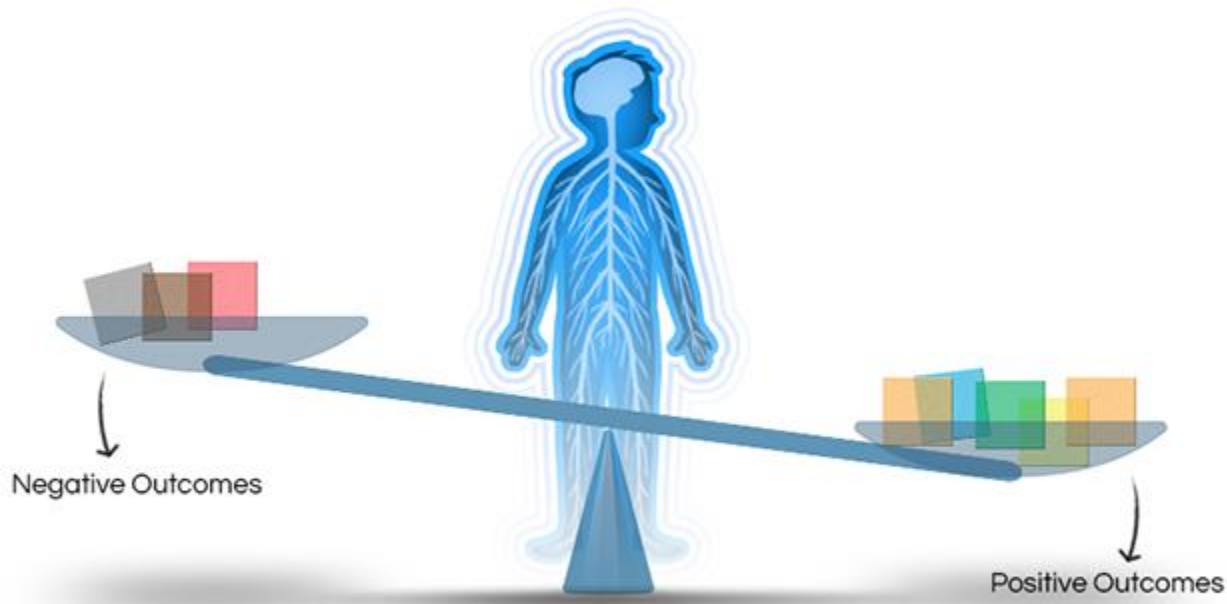
4-12-fold increased risk for alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempt (Felitti, 1998)

Economic Impact

- Direct costs of mental health services:
 - \$121B in 2003, projected to be \$280.5B in 2020
(Dept of Health & Human Services)
- Indirect costs of mental illness:
 - Earn \$16,306 less than those without illness
(Kessler, 2008)
 - Unable to work
 - Imprisoned from crimes, victims of crimes
- Indirect costs approx. \$193.2B in 2002
(Kessler, 2008)

What can we do to help children?

- Resilience: social support can protect children from adverse effects of early life stress



What can we do to help children?

- Stable social relationships are essential to health development
- How to frame recommendations?