



Children's Mental Health Toolkit: Talking Points

The following are talking points to use as a reminder during media interviews or when writing. Specific policy proposals can be introduced after using these talking points.

The future prosperity of our community/state/nation depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. When a society invests wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. [Value of Future Prosperity]

We now know that the basic architecture of a human brain is constructed through a process that begins before birth, and continues into adulthood. Like the construction of a home, the building process begins with laying the foundation, framing the rooms and wiring the electrical system, and these processes have to happen in the right order. Early experiences literally shape how the brain gets built. A strong foundation in the very early years increases the probability of positive mental health outcomes. A weak foundation increases the odds of later difficulties. [Brain Architecture Simplifying Model]

Neuroscientists are now reporting that certain kinds of stress in a child's environment can lead to mental health problems. Toxic stress in early childhood is caused by experiences such as extreme poverty, abuse, and chronic or severe maternal depression, all of which can disrupt the developing brain, particularly when children lack supports to protect against these harmful experiences. So just like we need to limit the negative substances in our environments to avoid harm, we need to eliminate the stressors in children's environments to avoid the toxic stress that will affect their mental health. [Toxic Stress Simplifying Model]

One way to think about mental health for children is that it's like the levelness of a piece of furniture, such as a table. And that levelness can depend on the table, the floor it's on, or both. Just as levelness allows a table to function properly, the mental health of a child enables them to function in many different areas. When children's brain architecture develops in an environment of toxic stress, it's like a table on an uneven floor. And tables can't make themselves level; they need attention from experts who understand levelness and stability and who can work on the table, the floor, or even both. [Leveling Simplifying Model]

As a society, our job is to work toward the levelness necessary for our children to be mentally healthy, by developing environments for children that shore up the brain's architecture, reduce exposure to toxic stress, and create buffers of support to make stress more tolerable. Innovative states and communities have been able to design high-quality programs to support these environments. These programs have solved problems in early childhood development and shown significant long-term improvements for children. [Value of Ingenuity]