

North Bay Parry Sound District

Health Unit



Bureau de santé

du district de North Bay-Parry Sound

The Importance of Early Relational Health

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Learning Objectives

- To understand the significance of safe, stable, nurturing relationships in early childhood
- To define early relational health
- To identify opportunities to integrate early relational health into practice

Child Development: Concepts

- Early experiences in life build “brain architecture”
- Genes and environments together interact to shape the architecture of the brain
- “Toxic stress” and adverse experiences derail healthy child development
- Brain plasticity and the ability to change behaviour decrease over time



Human Brain Development

Synapse Formation Dependent on Early Experiences

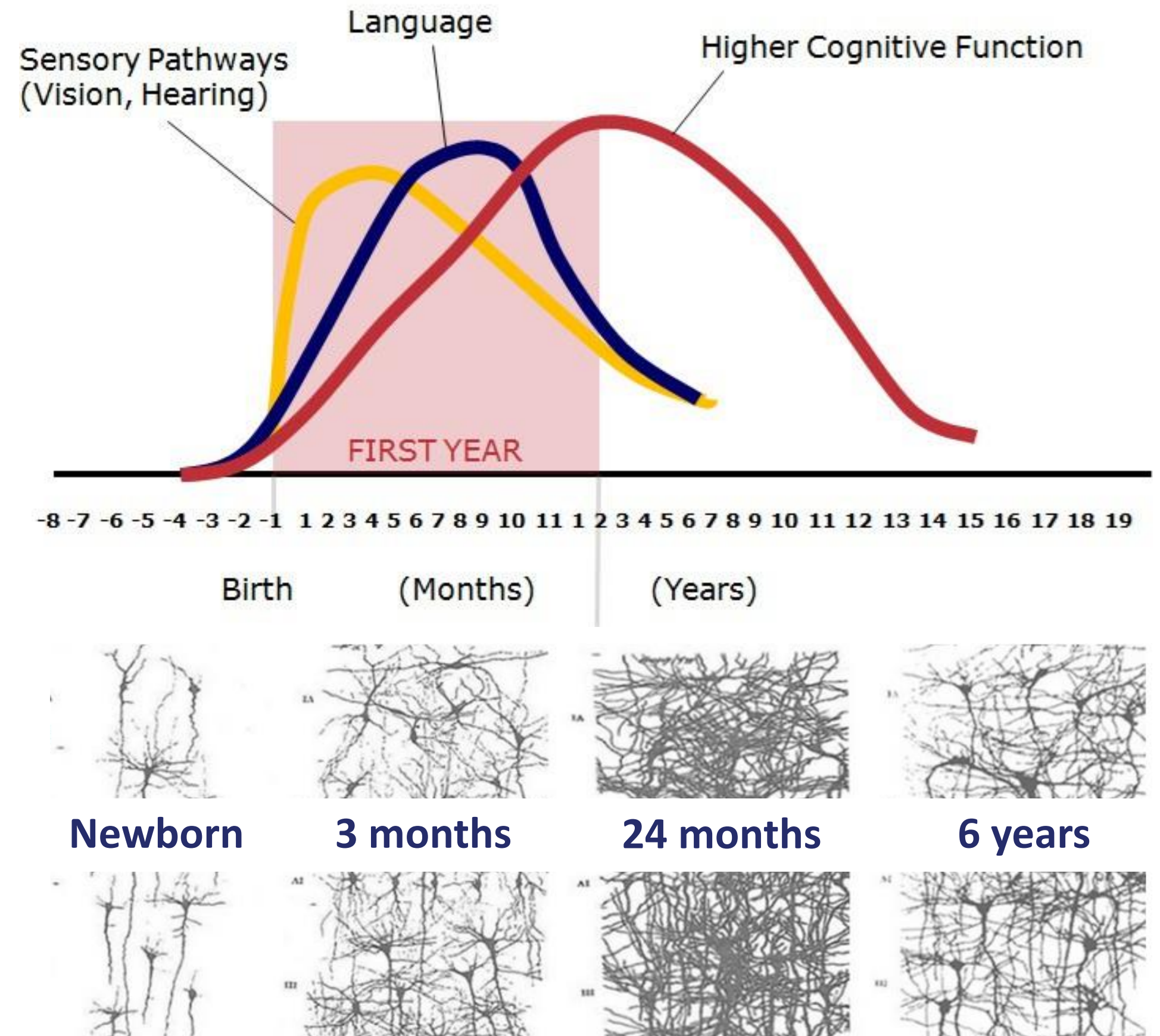
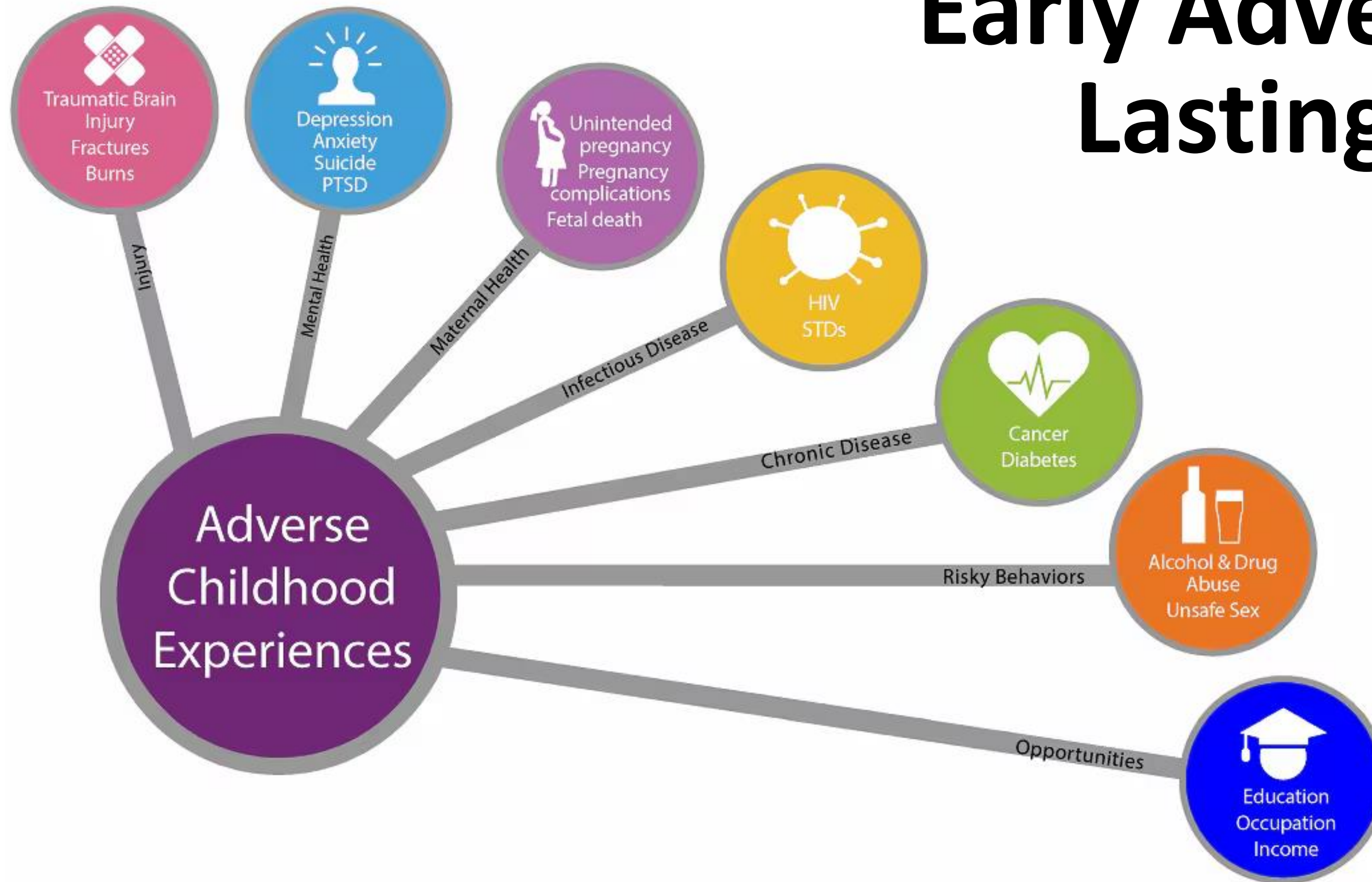


Image source: National Research Council (2000)

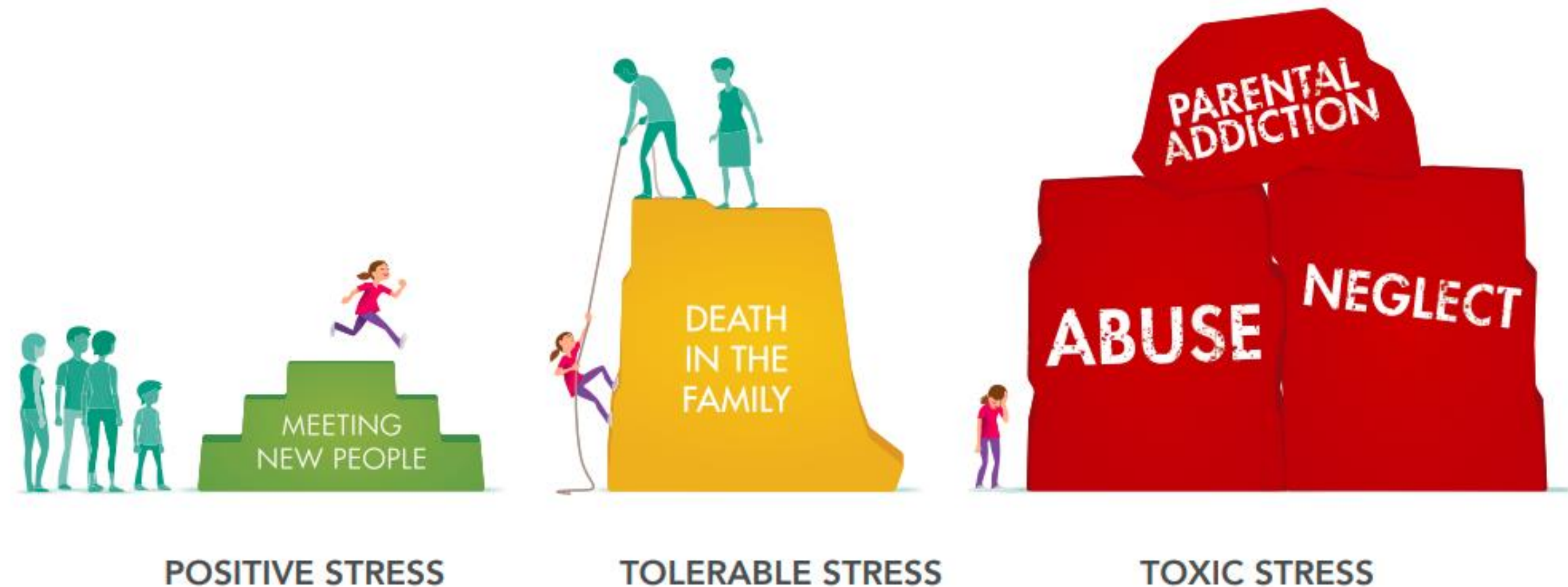
Adverse Childhood Experiences



Early Adversity has Lasting Impacts



Not All Stress is Equal



Toxic stress weakens the architecture of the developing brain and other organ systems
(Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015).

We can tip the scale toward wellness and resilience.



Early Relational Health (ERH)

Not a new concept, but a new term

ERH builds upon decades of research from the fields of:

- Child development
- Infant mental health
- Neurodevelopment



Early Relational Health

Definition: A foundational, culturally embedded and developing set of positive, responsive and reciprocal interactions from birth that nurture and build emotional connections between caregivers, infants and young children and results in the emerging confidence, competence and emotional well-being for all.

Natl ERH Advisory Panel, CSSP, (2020)

Parent-Child Interactions

Early experiences affect the development of **brain architecture**, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behaviour, and health.

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2022)

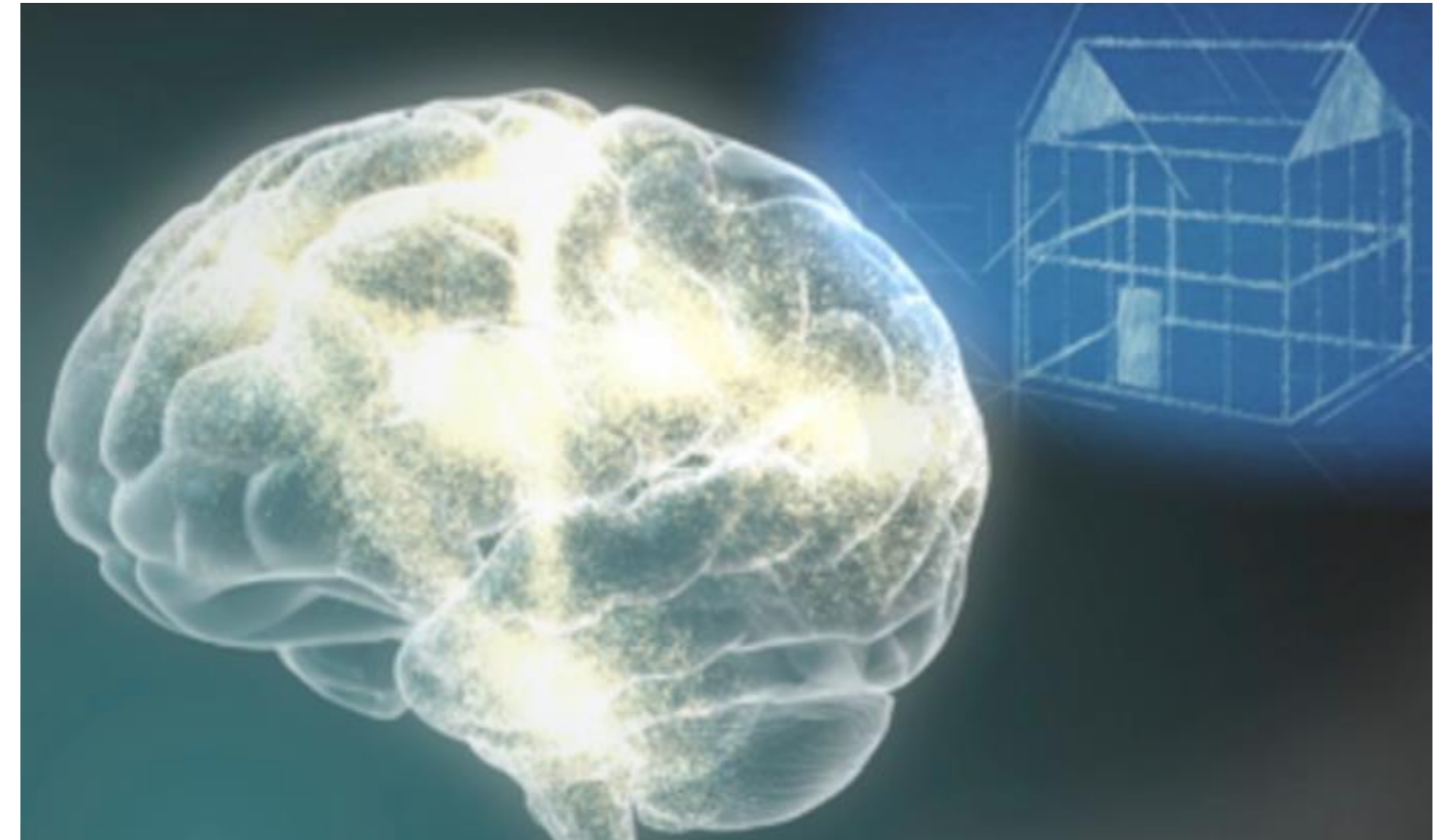


Image source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2022



YouTube: Kingston's conversation with Me over next season (Comedian DJ Pryor)



Reciprocal Benefits of Early Relational Health

Benefits for children

Physical and Behavioural Benefits

- Strengthened immune system
- Decreased risk for cardiovascular disease
- Healthier eating and sleep habits

Social and Emotional Benefits

- Easier management and regulation of emotions
- Decreased anxiety



Benefits for adults

Physical and Behavioural Benefits

- Increased cardiac health
- Increased stress resilience

Social and Emotional Benefits

- Decreased symptoms of depression
- Increased social understanding



Integrating Early Relational Health Into Practice

- **Increase awareness** of ERH and the impact on child development:
 - Builds resilience
 - Mitigates impact of ACEs/Toxic Stress
- **Assess** Relational Health in health care settings (and **Self-Assess** for personal biases)
- **Discuss** concerns with parents using a strength base approach:
 - What is wrong with you or your family vs what happened to you?
 - What is wrong with you vs what is going right with you or your family?
 - Role modelling (nurturing relationship) to parents
 - Praise parents
 - Take the time to develop relationships with clients and their children
 - Connect families to community supports
- Build communities centered on ERH



YouTube: Incorporating Reach Out and Read at the 6-Month Visit (Reach Out and Read)



Reflections

Early relational health links to all maternal-child topics

- Breastfeeding
- Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders
- Nutrition
- And more!

Key Resources

- Canadian Paediatric Society – <https://cps.ca/documents/position/from-aces-to-early-relational-health>
- Alberta Family Wellness Initiative – <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org>
- Center on the Developing Child – Harvard University
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu>
- **More questions:** Please contact us at the North Bay Parry Sound Health Unit, Family Health Information Line available at healthy.families@healthunit.ca or (705) 474-1400 ext 5351 or toll free 1-800-563-2808

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Miigwech! Merci! Thank you!

