

## What Happens in Childhood Can Matter for a Lifetime

### The science behind the why of new born home visiting

Brain research tells us that critical aspects of brain architecture are shaped by experience before and very soon after birth. The exceptionally strong influence of early experience on brain architecture makes the early years of life a period of both great opportunity and great vulnerability.<sup>1</sup>

Research on the biology of stress shows how major adversity, such as extreme poverty, abuse, or neglect, can weaken developing brain architecture and set the body's stress response system on high alert. Science also shows that stable, responsive, nurturing relationships in the earliest years of life can prevent or even reverse the damage of early life stress, with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior and health.<sup>2</sup>

**Early experiences influence the developing brain.** The brain undergoes its most rapid development from the prenatal period through the first years of life. During this time, chronic or extreme adversity can interrupt normal brain development. Responsive, dependable interaction with adults is needed to ensure healthy emotional and cognitive development.<sup>2</sup>

**Chronic stress can be toxic to developing brains.** Learning how to cope with adversity is an important part of healthy child development. Our bodies cope with stress by activating a variety of physiological responses such as increased heart rate and blood pressure and the production of serum glucose and stress hormones. Strong, frequent or prolonged exposure to adversity without adult support do not allow a child's stress level to return to normal, thus becoming toxic. Toxic stress disrupts developing brain circuits. Positive stress, on the other hand, results from a child learning to cope with challenges with the support of a caring adult.<sup>2</sup>

**Significant early adversity can lead to lifelong problems.** Common causes of toxic stress include poverty, abuse or neglect, parental substance abuse or mental illness and exposure to violence. Exposure, especially to multiple causes, can have a cumulative effect on both mental and physical health. The more adverse experiences in childhood, the

greater the likelihood of developmental delays and other problems. Adults with more adverse experiences in childhood are also more likely to have health problems such as heart disease and diabetes, as well as conditions such as alcoholism and depression, which can inhibit their ability to parent effectively.<sup>2</sup>

Protective factors promoted by the Arkansas Children's Trust Fund:

Nurturing and Attachment in Infancy

Parental Resilience

Concrete Support in Times of Need

Children's Social and Emotional Development

Social Connections

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

**Early intervention can prevent the consequences of early adversity.** The architecture of the brain continues to adapt into adulthood. However, research has shown that the earlier the intervention with children in adverse situations, the better. The sooner eligible children are enrolled in appropriate programs, preferably before they exhibit problems in behavior or development, the more likely they are to develop the foundation they need for optimal outcomes.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Stable, caring relationships are essential for healthy development.** Studies show that toddlers who have secure, trusting relationships with caregivers experience minimal stress hormone activation when frightened by a strange event. Those who have insecure relationships experience a significant activation of the stress response system. Research supports the belief that providing supportive, responsive relationships as early in life as possible can prevent or even reverse the effects of toxic stress.<sup>2</sup>

The environment of relationships in which young children live literally shapes the architecture of their brains. Effective programs are those that provide two-generation services immediately after birth (and preferably prenatally). These programs provide growth-promoting experiences for children while also helping parents create a home environment that increases the probability that their children will enter school with the social, emotional and cognitive skills needed to succeed in school and beyond.<sup>1</sup> The evidence supports the effectiveness of newborn home visiting in promoting safe, stable and nurturing environments where children thrive from birth and develop to their full potential.

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# PROGRAM NEWS

## 11 Programs Receive New Children's Trust Fund Grants

The Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Board has awarded 11 new Children's Trust Fund grants. These grants will be used to establish home visiting services for pregnant and parenting teens or young women enrolled in a formal educational program.

The programs will follow the THRIVE model in which trained professionals provide parenting information, resources and support in the home of the teen. In addition to home visits, the programs will also include monthly support group meetings to promote social connections among the young mothers and to reinforce skills learned during the home visits.

The organizations that have been funded for 2011-2012 are:

Central Arkansas  
Development Council  
Dallas and Calhoun Counties

Child Development, Inc.  
Pope County

College of the Ouachitas  
Hot Spring County



Choosing to Excel  
Faulkner County

DeQueen School District  
Sevier County

Inspired Communities, Foundation  
Sharp County

Lamar School District  
Johnson County

North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education  
Boone County

Northwest Arkansas Child Care  
Resource and Referral Center  
Benton County

Paragould School District/  
School of the 21st Century  
Greene County

Prevention Education Programs,  
Inc., Arkansas County



## APEN Seeks Award Nominees

The Arkansas Parenting Education Network is now accepting nominations for the APEN Awards Program.

The awards program is intended to recognize individuals and organizations that have done an exceptional job of helping families achieve success. The award categories are:

**Parent Educator of the Year**—to be awarded to an individual who successfully engages families through especially effective or innovative parent education strategies.

**Bernice Jones Award**—may be awarded to an individual who advocates for programs and policies that make a mean-

ingful difference in the lives of Arkansas' children and families.

**Calvin Johnson Award**—may be awarded to a group or organization that effectively engages parents, schools and communities in the success of children.

Nominees will be recognized at the 13th Annual Arkansas Conference for Parent Education and Involvement, October 19-21, 2011 in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

For complete nomination guidelines, go to <http://arkansasctf.org> and follow the APEN links.

## Children's Bedtime Picture Routine Chart

A bedtime picture routine chart is simply a visual schedule of a child's nighttime routine. Help your child practice their other skills while learning about getting ready for bed by making a bedtime picture routine chart with your child.

### Decide the Schedule for the Bedtime Routine

Create a bedtime schedule with your child. Ask your child what things he or she needs to do each night to get ready for bed. Invite your child to think about what things need to be done first in the bedtime routine and what things need to be done later in the bedtime routine.

### Find or Make Pictures for a Visual Bedtime Routine Chart

Use your creativity to prepare the visual elements of your chart. Pictures can be drawn by you or your child, can be cut from magazines or catalogs, or be printed from clip art software. If you are very ambitious, you can take photos of your child completing the bedtime routine for the chart.

### Create a Bedtime Picture Routine Chart

Involve your child in making the picture routine chart. Children can complete tasks such as cutting pictures out of magazines and pasting pictures onto the chart. Children will have more ownership in their nighttime schedule and will be more likely to cooperate with their bedtime routine if they have been involved in making the bedtime routine chart.

### Decide on a Beginning and Ending Time

It's important to have a starting and ending time for the bedtime routine. Estimate how long the bedtime routine might take and add five more minutes. Start the bedtime routine so that your child will be in bed at the correct time. The ending time will be the time you decide is your child's bedtime. Try out the bedtime routine and see how it works, then make adjustments if needed.

Make sure your child knows that the bedtime routine has an ending time. Create your child's routine so that the important steps such as brushing teeth and putting on pajamas are early in the routine and extras such as reading books are at the end of the routine. If the routine ends at 8:30 p.m. then bedtime is at 8:30 p.m. So if a

child has only brushed his teeth, washed his face and put on his pajamas by 8:30 p.m., it is now the child's bedtime whether he has completed the routine or not. Of course, it is the parent's or caregiver's job to make sure that the routine starts on time.

### Practice the Bedtime Routine Chart Each Night

You can be a little bit flexible with the routine when you need to be, but as a general rule, consistency is best. In order for children to learn a bedtime routine and be in charge of the chart, they must use the chart. Although it can be boring for adults to follow the bedtime routine chart each time, having a routine provides comfort and structure for young children.

The book *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers* [Prima Publishing, 1998] recommends the following tips for creating a bedtime routine with children:

- Keep the bedtime routine list short. It should have no more than six or seven tasks on it.
- Make the routine chart together with your child. Include your child in the task of drawing pictures or cutting and pasting pictures from magazines.
- Let the routine chart be the boss instead of the parent. Ask your child, "What's next on your chart?"
- Do not try to establish more than one routine at a time.
- Remember, a routine chart isn't a reward chart; it's a way for children and adults to learn what comes next and to work together without argument.

Although bedtime routine charts require time to prepare, they save time and energy each night for parents when getting kids ready for bed. Routine charts work well for parents because children take more ownership over their bedtime schedule which reduces parental nagging. Picture routine charts help children learn independence, structure and know what to expect at bedtime.

Reference:  
Jane Nelsen, Cheryl Erwin, Rosalyn Duffy,  
*Positive Discipline for Preschoolers*, Prima  
Publishing, 1998.



# RESOURCES

## References

### What Happens in Childhood Can Matter for a Lifetime

1. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007). *The Timing and Quality of Early Experiences Combine to Shape Brain Architecture: Working Paper #5*. <http://www.developingchild.net>
2. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. *InBrief: The Impact of Adversity on Children's Development*. <http://www.developingchild.net>

### Related Research:

Anda, R.F., & Felitti, V. (2003). A Free Research Publication Dealing With the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Adult Health and Well Being. *ACE Reporter*, 1(1), 1-4.

### Other Research & Reports

*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2011* provides a summary of national indicators of children's well-being and monitors changes in these indicators. Available at <http://www.childstats.gov>.

### Fatherhood Resources

A collection of resources compiled by the Office of Head Start to support father engagement, responsible fatherhood, and more. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/New%20Parental%20Involvement/Fatherhood>.

### CTF on the Web

The Arkansas Children's Trust Fund is currently updating our website. If you are interested in previewing the site to offer feedback or have requests/suggestions for content, please contact us at [arkansasctf@arkansasctf.org](mailto:arkansasctf@arkansasctf.org).

We are also working to maintain a Facebook presence. You can help us get our own URL by "liking" us when you visit our page.

## Tools

*Parenting Skills Workshop Series*—The manual for this program presents five basic parenting skills in a hands-on learning format suitable for any level of literacy. Regardless of the curriculum, many parent educators will find the sections on group facilitation, role modeling, role play, and coaching especially helpful. View or download at [http://www.parenting.cit.cornell.edu/pp\\_psws.html](http://www.parenting.cit.cornell.edu/pp_psws.html).

*Navigating Life's Journey*—weekly email tips on improving personal well-being and family relationships from the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. To learn more or to sign up, go to <http://www.arfamilies.org>.

## Training

### *13th Annual Arkansas Conference for Parent Education and Involvement: It's a Jungle Out There!*

October 19-21, 2011 in Hot Springs, Arkansas  
Brochures will be distributed by August 15th.

Online information and registration will also be available by following the APEN links at <http://arkansasctf.org>.

## NOTABLE DATES

### Fun and interesting dates to plan a parent group meeting or family activity around:

August	National Immunization Awareness Month
August 28	World Sauntering Day
September	5-a-Day Month Baby Safety Month
September 9	Teddy Bear Day
September 16	Collect Rocks Day/National Play-Doh Day
September 25	Good Neighbor Day
October 9	Curious Events Day
October 12	Moment of Frustration Day
October 22	Make a Difference Day
November 2	Look for Circles Day

## Arkansas Children's Trust Fund

415 North McKinley Suite 462  
Little Rock, AR  
501.664.2227

[www.arkansasctf.org](http://www.arkansasctf.org)