

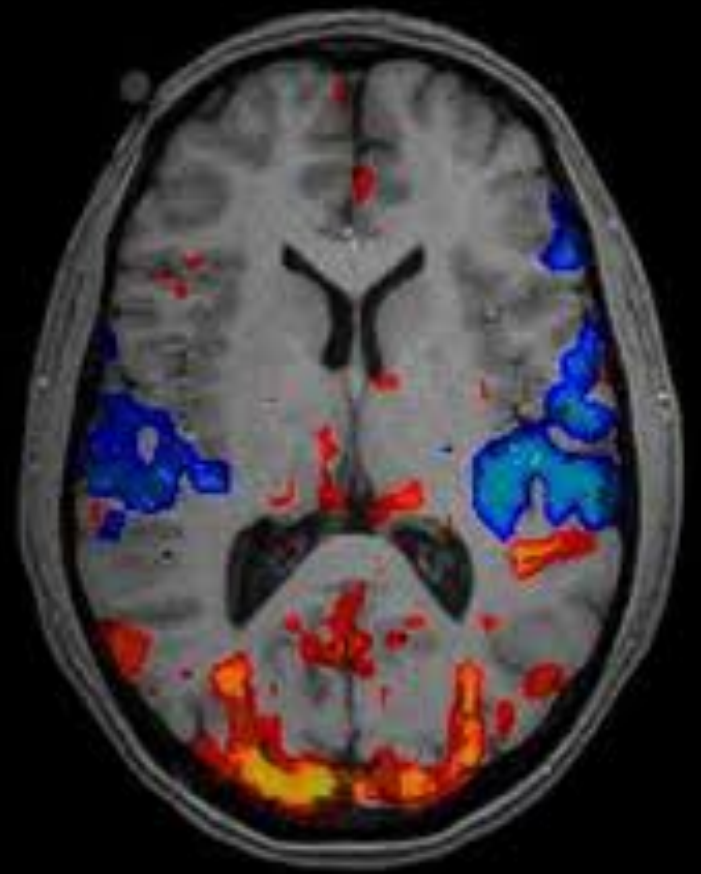
Early Childhood Mental Health

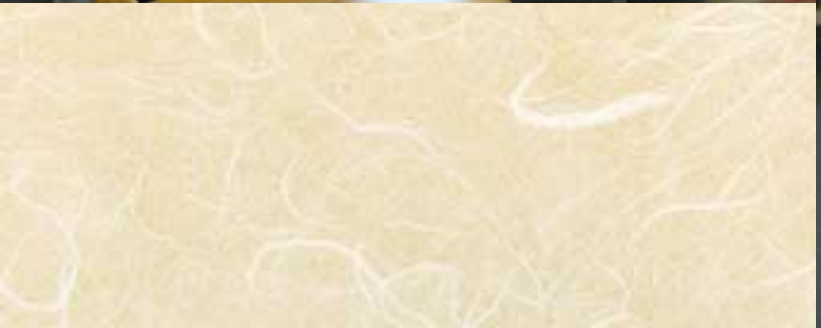
Supporting Emotional Development In Young Children

Ross A. Thompson
University of California, Davis



Barbara Mound Hansen Early Childhood Lecture, Iowa State University, April 3, 2012







**The emotional lives of young children
are deep, rich – and vulnerable**

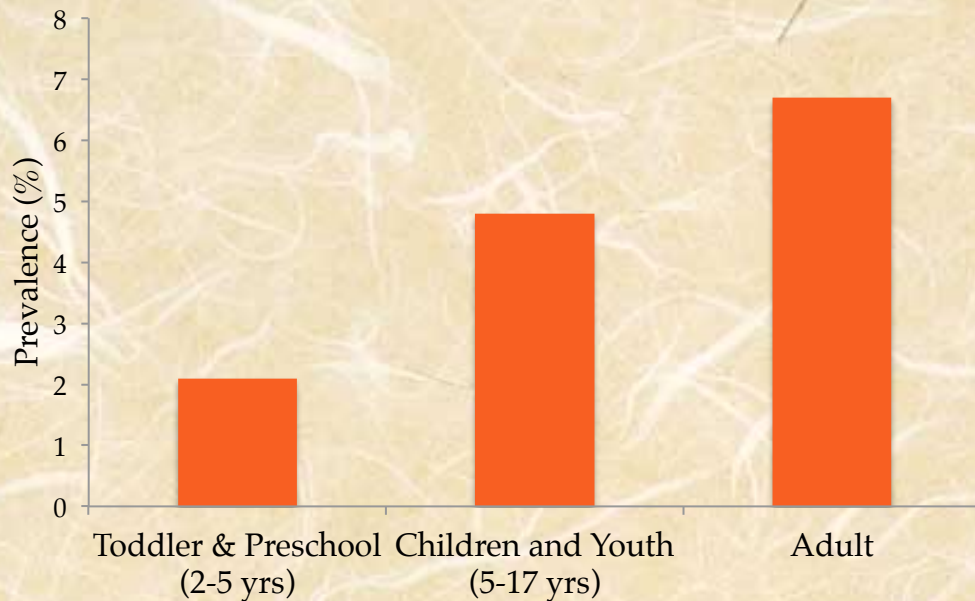
The New York Times

August 25, 2010

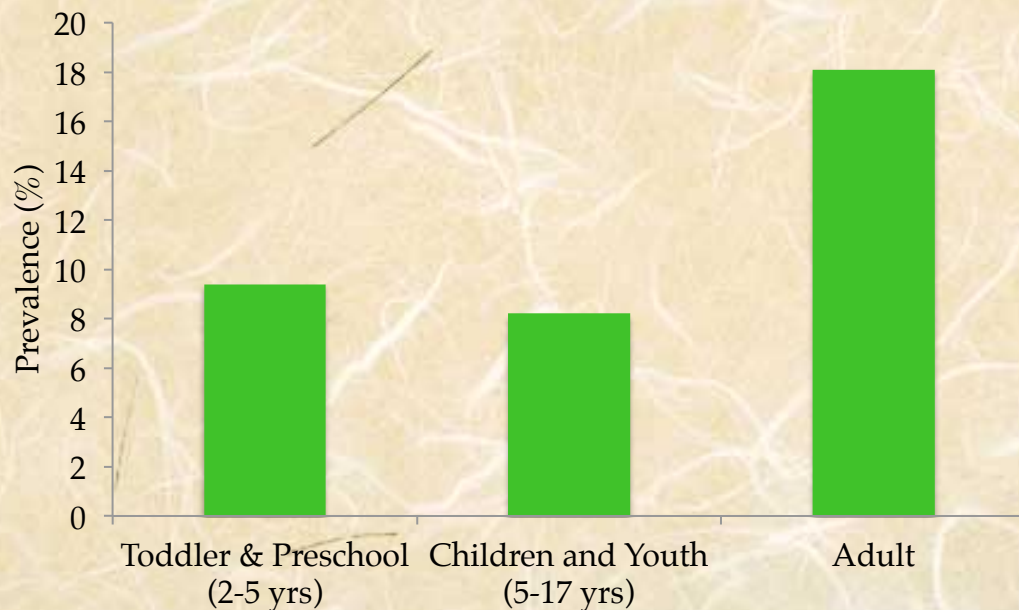
Can Preschoolers Be Depressed?



Depression

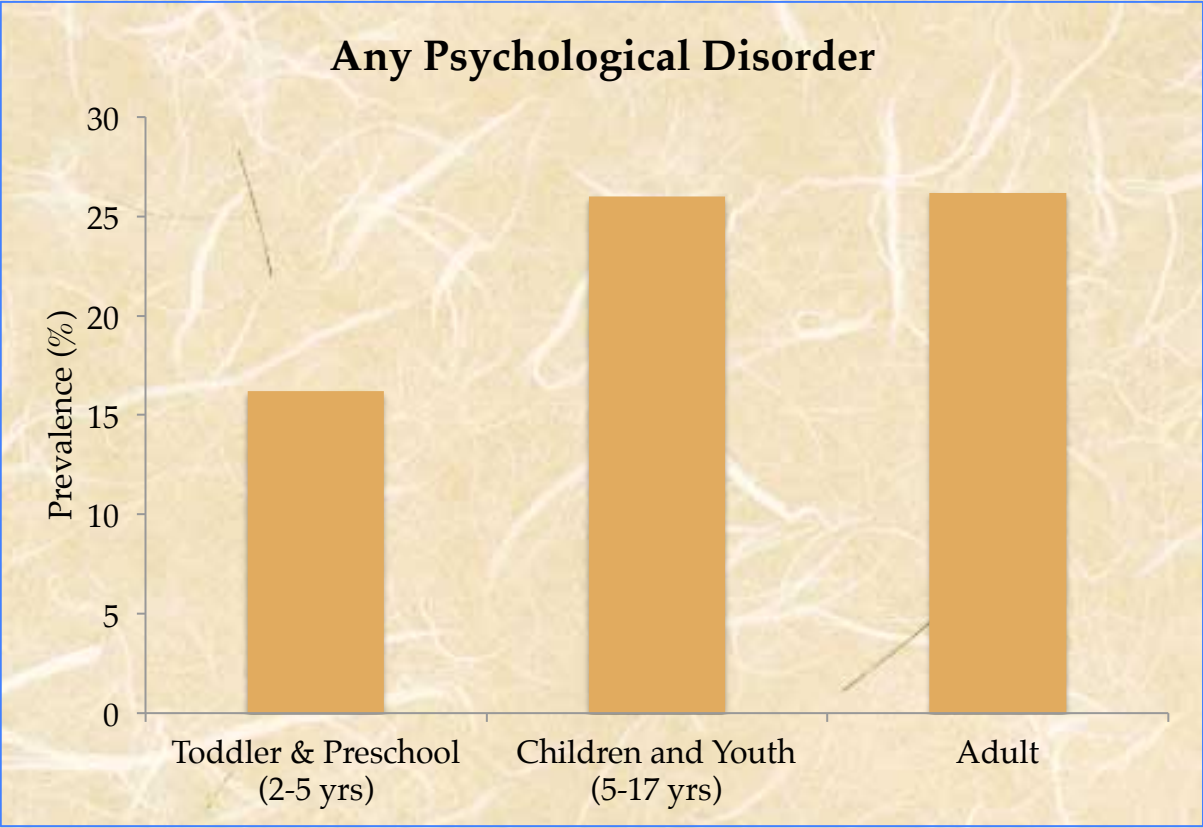


Anxiety Disorders



Sources: Costello, Egger, & Angold, 2005; Kessler, Chin, Demler, & Walters, 2005; Egger & Angold, 2006; and data from the Duke Early Childhood Study, courtesy Dr. Helen Egger, Duke Univ. Medical Center

Any Psychological Disorder

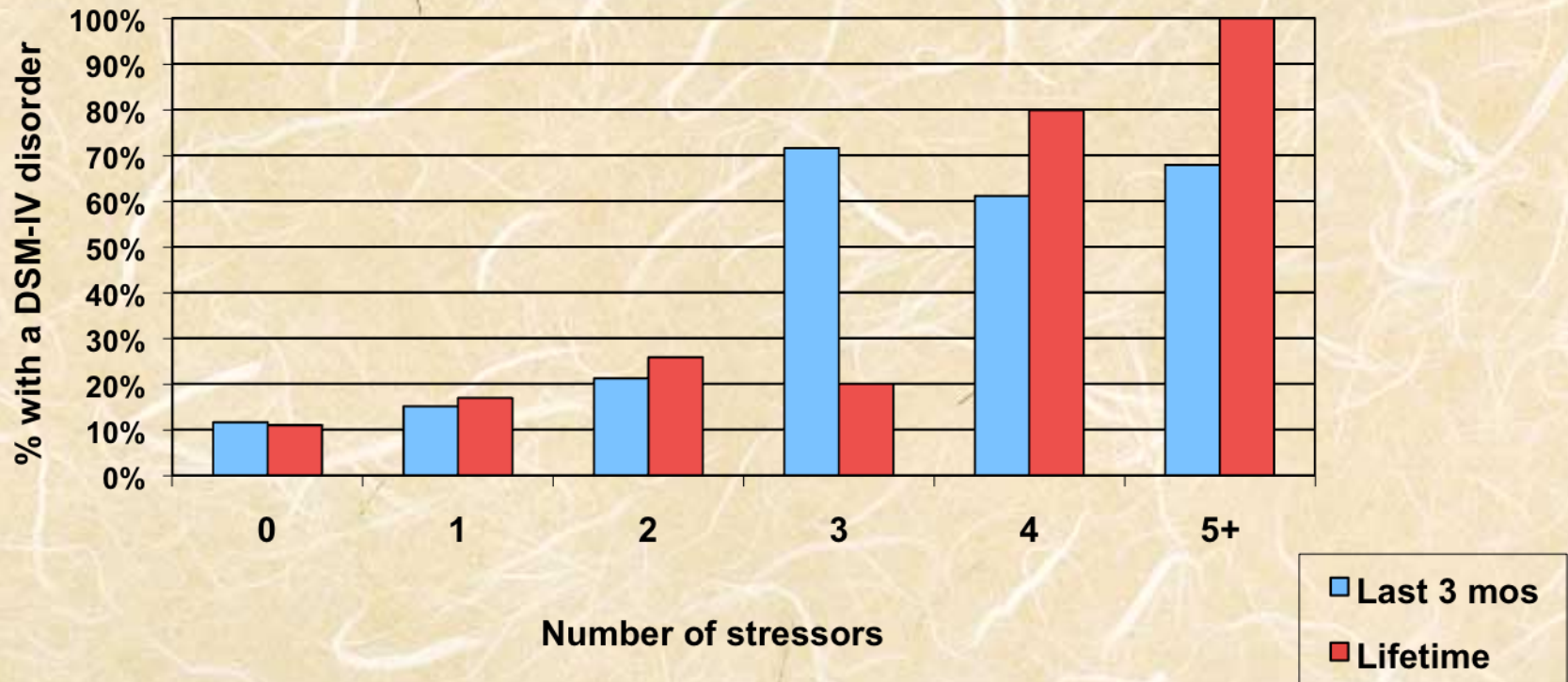


Early childhood mental health is vulnerable to stress

- Roughly 10% of children in kindergarten show disruptive emotional or behavioral problems. For low-income children, the prevalence is double or triple this estimate.
- Stress is associated with: poverty and socioeconomic difficulty; family disruption and parental mental health difficulties; the child's temperamental vulnerability is also important.
- These children are often first identified in early childhood programs as emotionally dysregulated and disruptive.



Cumulative Stressors in Childhood and Psychiatric Disorders



Data from Duke Early Childhood Study, courtesy Dr. Helen Egger, Duke University Medical Center

Three Levels of Stress

Positive

Brief increases in heart rate,
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

Tolerable

Serious, temporary stress responses,
buffered by supportive relationships.

Toxic

Prolonged activation of stress response systems
in the absence of protective relationships.

What is distinctive about **toxic stress**?

- stress is chronic and sometimes severe
- stress is uncontrollable
- parents or other caregivers are not available to provide assistance (instead, they may be the source of stress)



POLICY STATEMENT

Early Childhood Adversity, Toxic Stress, and the Role of the Pediatrician: Translating Developmental Science Into Lifelong Health

abstract

FREE

Advances in a wide range of biological, behavioral, and social sciences are expanding our understanding of how early environmental influences (the ecology) and genetic predispositions (the biologic program) affect learning capacities, adaptive behaviors, lifelong physical and mental health, and adult productivity. A supporting technical report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) presents an integrated ecobiodevelopmental framework to assist in translating these dramatic advances in developmental science into improved health across the life span. Pediatricians are now armed with new information about the adverse effects of toxic stress on brain development, as well as a deeper understanding of the early life origins of many adult diseases. As trusted authorities in child health and development, pediatric providers must now complement the early identification of developmental concerns with a greater focus on those interventions and community investments that reduce external threats to healthy brain growth. To this end, AAP endorses a developing leadership role for the entire pediatric community—one that mobilizes the scientific expertise of both basic and clinical researchers, the family-centered care of the pediatric medical home, and the public influence of AAP and its state chapters—to catalyze fundamental change in early childhood policy and services. AAP is committed to leveraging science to inform the development of innovative strategies to reduce the precipitants of toxic stress in young children and to mitigate their negative effects on the course of development and health across the life span. *Pediatrics* 2012;129:e224–e231

COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH, COMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ADOPTION, AND DEPENDENT CARE, AND SECTION ON DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL PEDIATRICS

KEY WORDS

advocacy, brain development, ecobiodevelopmental framework, family pediatrics, health promotion, human capital investments, new morbidity, toxic stress, resilience

ABBREVIATIONS

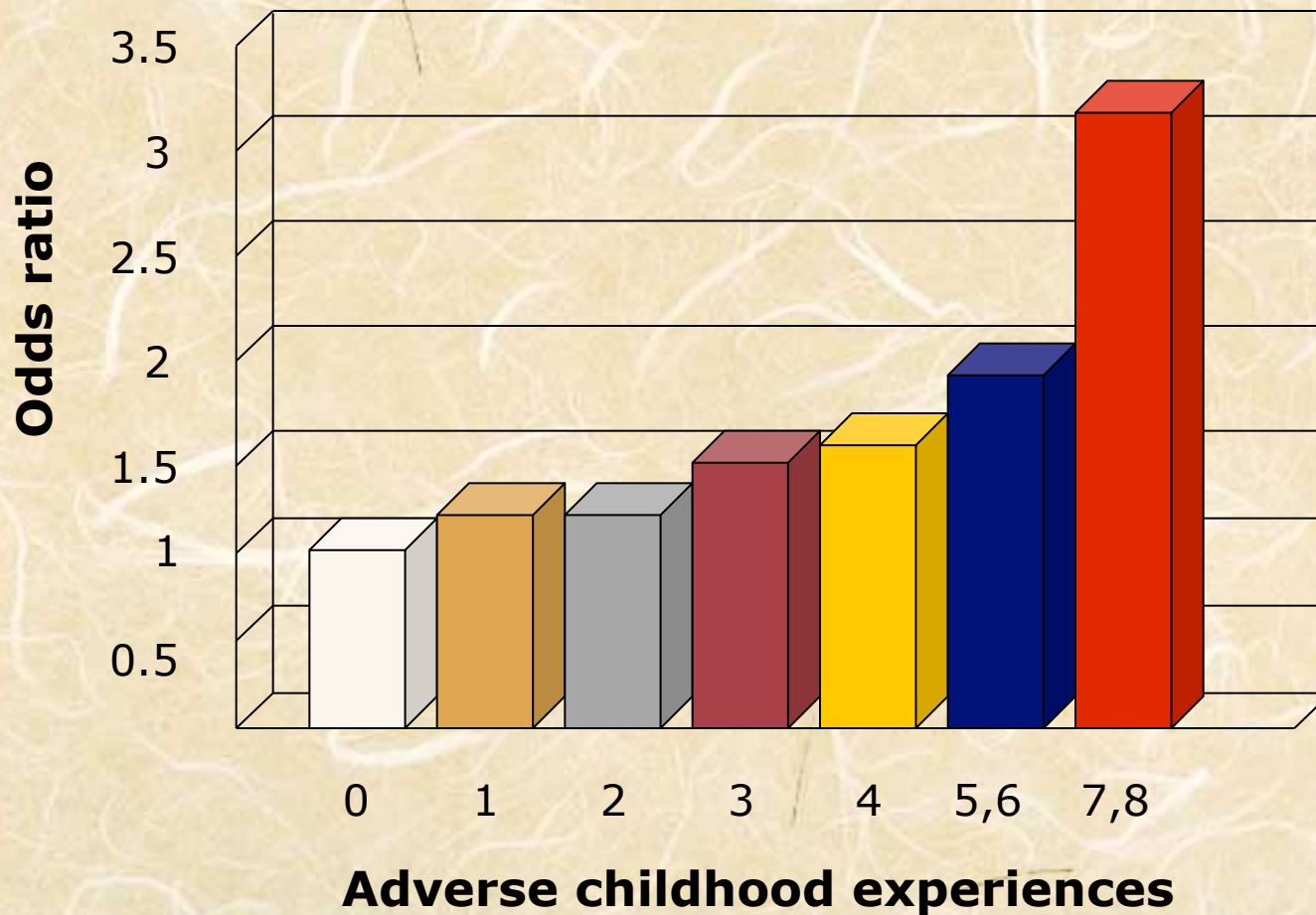
AAP—American Academy of Pediatrics

EBO—ecobiodevelopmental

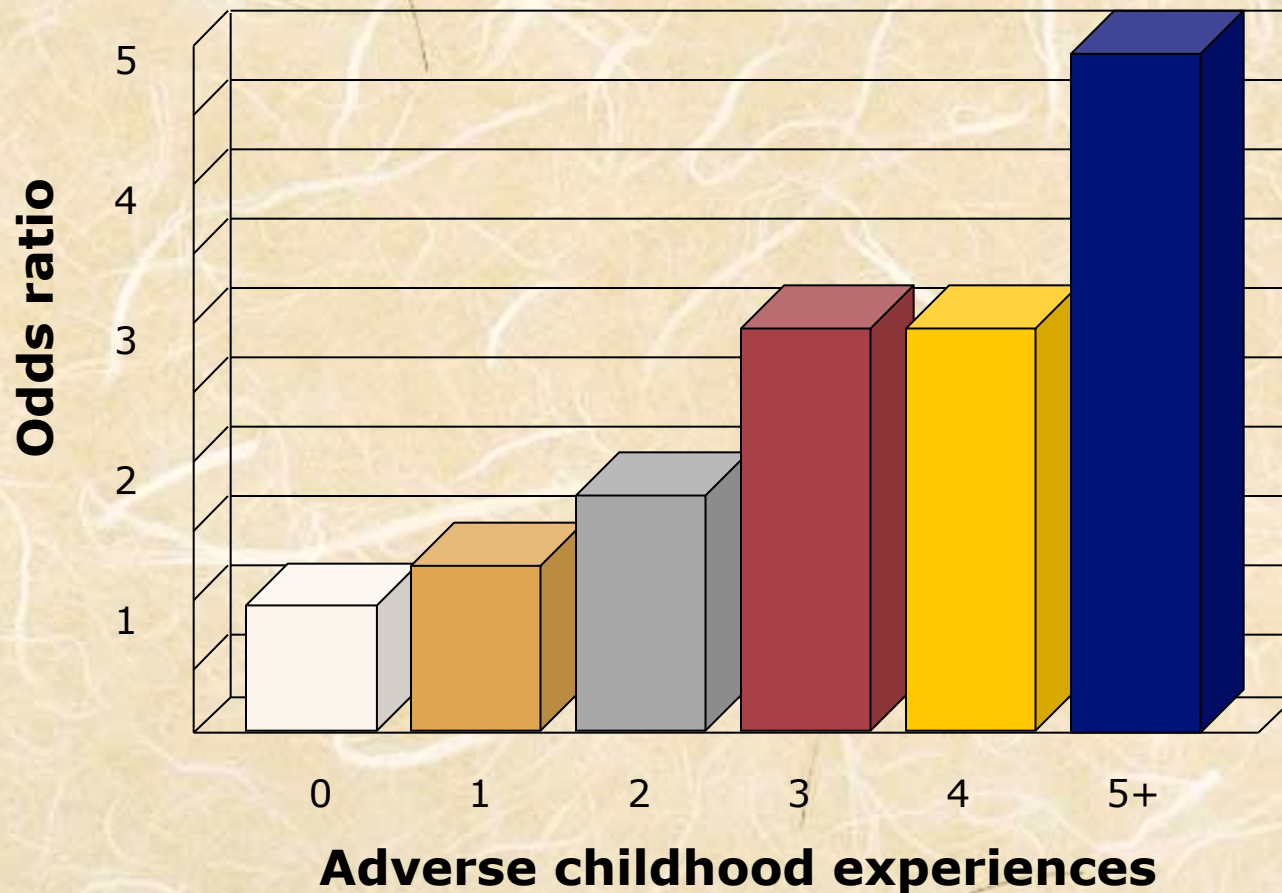
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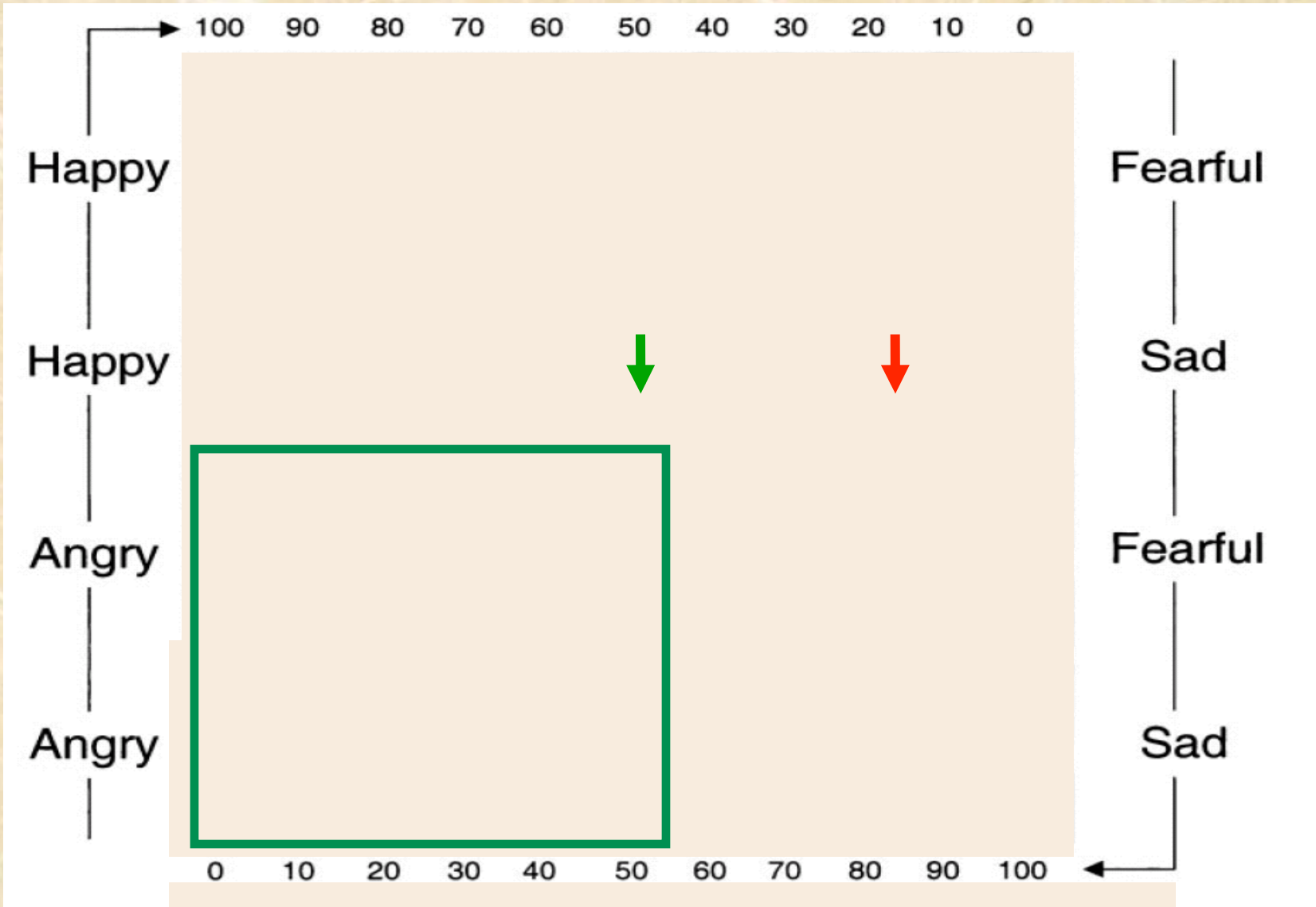
Risk factors for adult heart disease are embedded in adverse childhood experiences

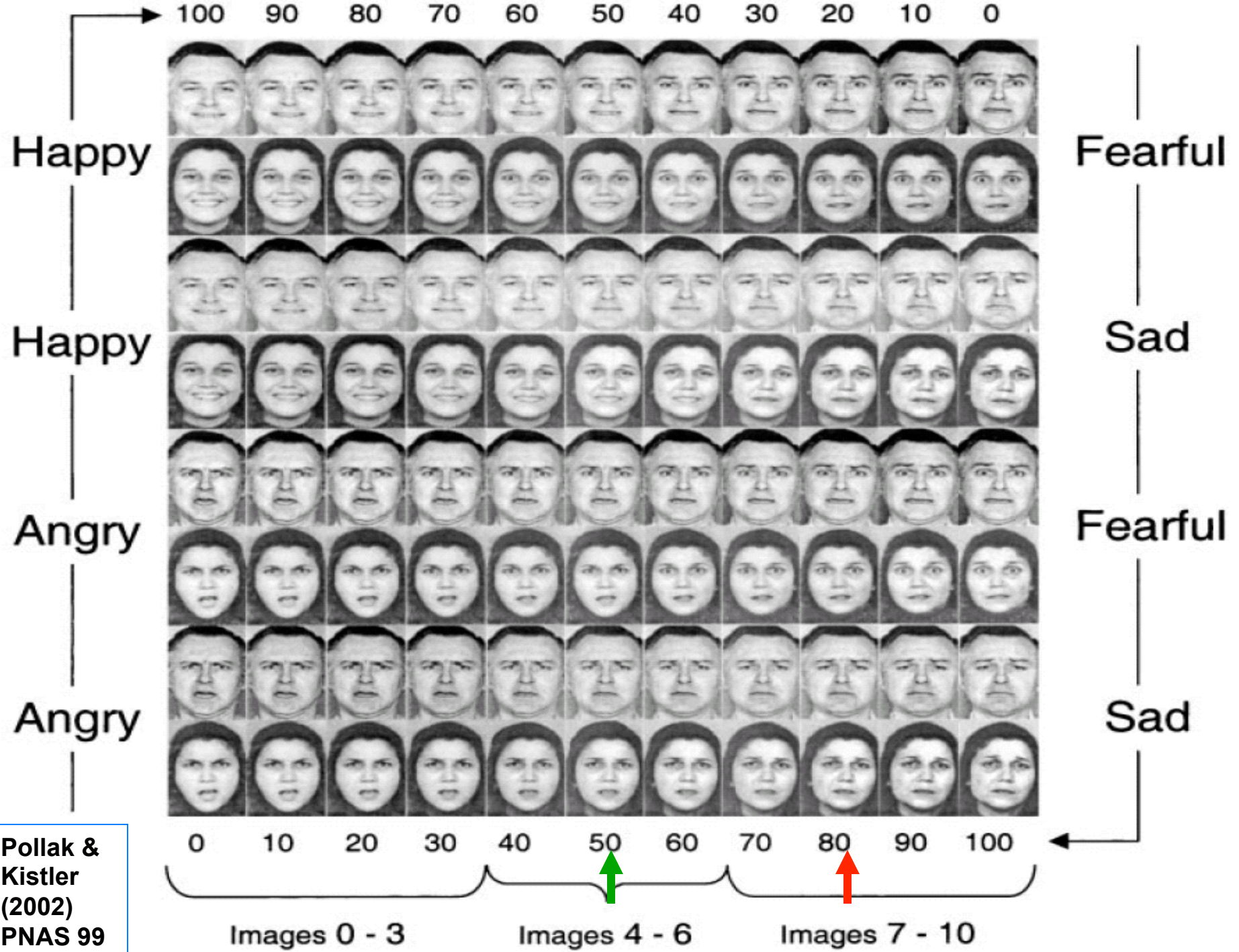


Risk factors for adult depression are embedded in adverse childhood experiences



Source: Chapman et al, 2004





Economic stresses

- housing instability
- lower school quality
- poor health care
- risky neighborhoods

Emotional stresses

- social isolation
- parental stress
- substance abuse risk
- legal problems

Consequences of Poverty for Children

Family Stress

- marital difficulty
- maternal depression

Parenting Quality

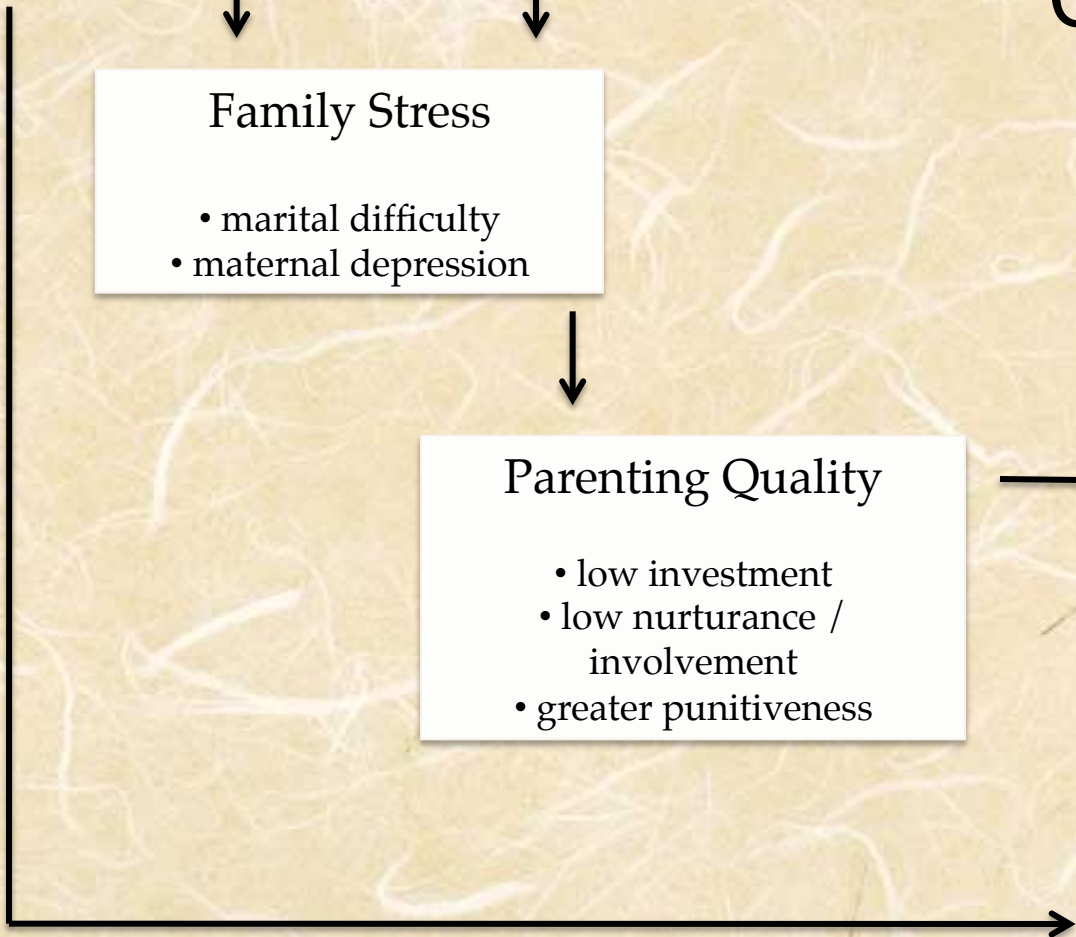
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- low nurturance / involvement
- greater punitiveness

Relational Influences

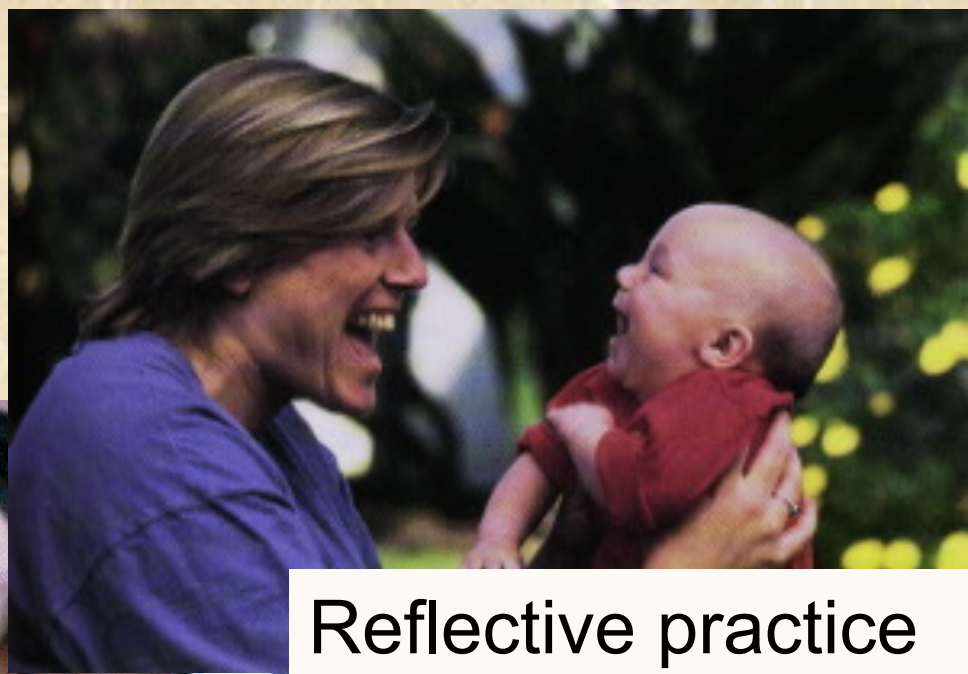
- Insecure attachment
- Parent-child conflict

Child Functioning

- Neurocognitive development
- Stress neurobiology
- Poorer cognitive growth & educational attainment
- Behavioral and emotional problems
- Poorer health outcomes
- Poorer adult employment & income



**Core Principles
of Early Childhood Mental Health
Promotion, Intervention
and Support**



RELATIONSHIPS

Reflective practice



Children develop in an environment of relationships



- It's hard when you feel so angry. You're going "AAAH, he's bouncing my guy off there!" Right?
- How did the other kids feel when you shut off the game?
- It makes you sad thinking about it, doesn't it?
- After you stopped the game, the other guys said, "You know, Joey wasn't really doing so bad." You thought you were losing, but you weren't.

INDIVIDUALITY of the child



Consequences of Poverty for Children

CONTEXT

Economic stresses

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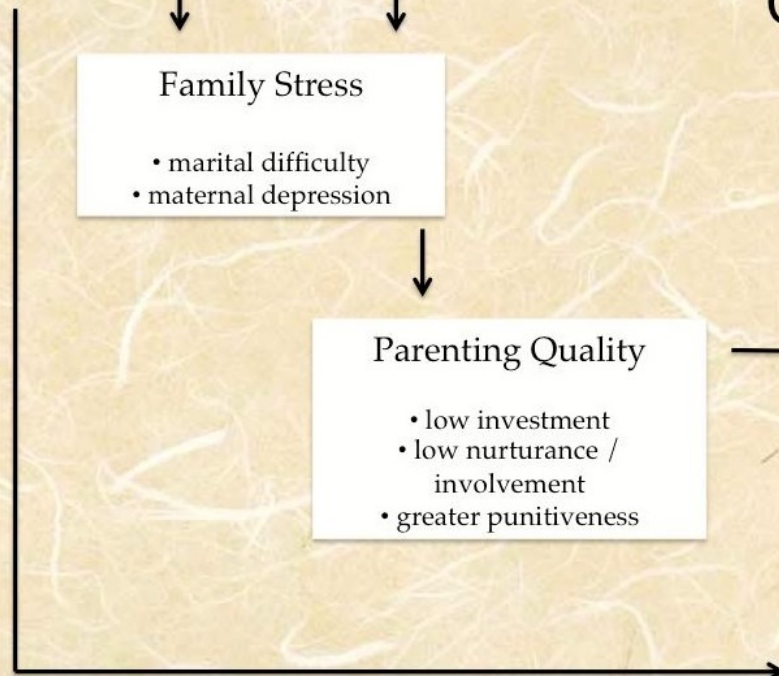
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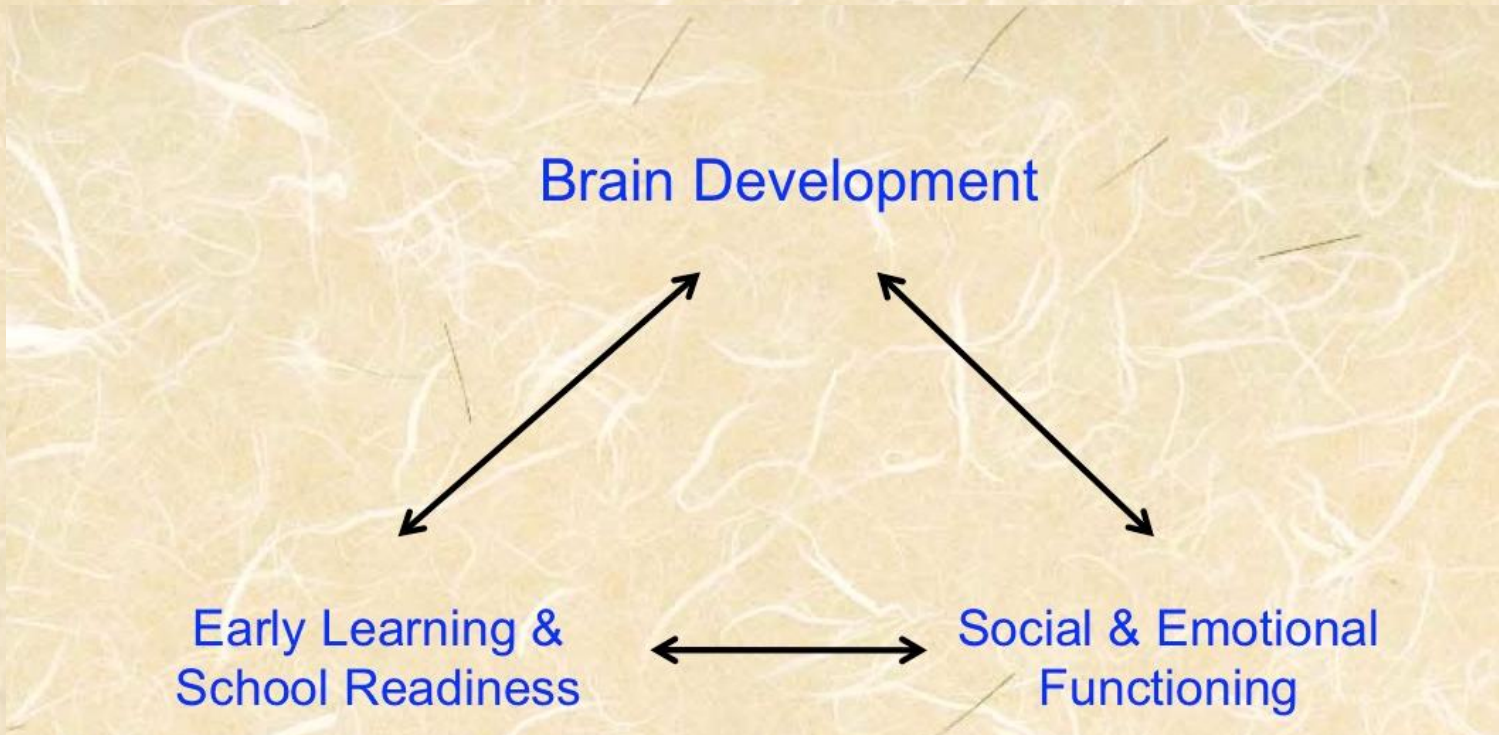
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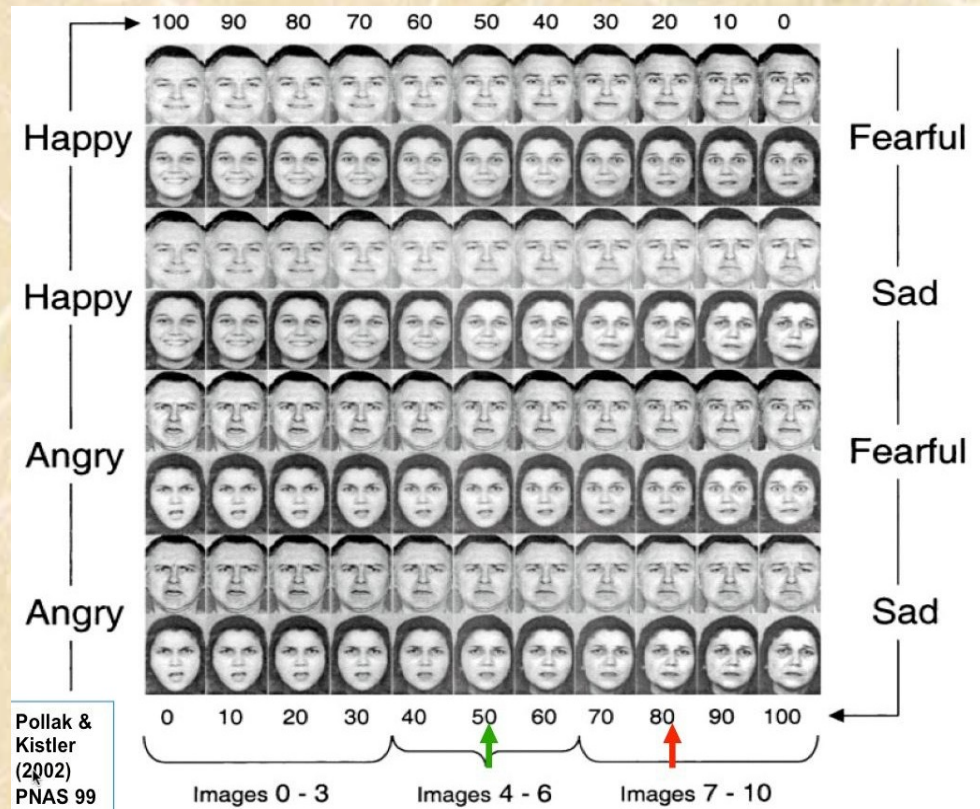
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DEVELOPMENT IS INTERCONNECTED



MENTAL MODELS



PREVENTION



- **Relationships:**
 - home visitation
 - parent education and family support resources
 - assistance to families in poverty and economic stress
 - assistance to children when parents are troubled
- **Context:**
 - high quality early care and education; ECMH consultation
 - strengthening community resources for families
 - training professionals who specialize in ECMH
- **Individuality:**
 - early behavioral screening in pediatric exams
 - special assistance to children with special needs
- **Development is interconnected:**
 - attention to social-emotional functioning in school readiness
 - multisystem coordination of services and funding streams to assist children in need



Thanks!

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