



A Poverty Solution That Starts With a Hug

PERHAPS the most widespread peril children face isn't guns, swimming pools or speeding cars. Rather, scientists are suggesting that it may be "toxic stress" early in life, or even before birth.

This month, the American Academy of Pediatrics is issuing a landmark warning that this toxic stress can harm children for life. I'm as skeptical as anyone of headlines from new medical studies (Coffee is good for you! Coffee is bad for you!), but that's not what this is.

Rather, this is a "policy statement" from the premier association of pediatricians, based on two decades of scientific research. This has revolutionary implications for medicine and for how we can more effectively chip away at poverty and crime.

Toxic stress might arise from parent abuse of alcohol or drugs. It could occur in a home where children are threatened and beaten. It might derive from chronic neglect — a child cries without being cuddled. Affection seems to defuse toxic stress — keep those hugs and lullabies coming! — suggesting that the stress emerges when a child senses persistent threats but no protector.



Cues of a hostile or indifferent environment flood an infant, or even a fetus, with stress hormones like cortisol in ways that can disrupt the body's metabolism or the architecture of the brain.

The upshot is that children are sometimes permanently undermined. Even many years later, as adults, they are more likely to suffer heart disease, obesity, diabetes and other physical ailments. They are also more likely to struggle in school, have short tempers and tangle with the law.

The crucial period seems to be from conception through early childhood. After that, the brain is less pliable and has trouble being remolded.

"You can modify behavior later, but you can't rewire disrupted brain circuits," notes Jack P. Shonkoff, a Harvard pediatrician who has been a leader in this field. "We're beginning to get a pretty compelling biological model of why kids who have experienced adversity have trouble learning."

This new research addresses an uncomfortable truth: Poverty is difficult to overcome partly because of self-destructive behaviors. Children from

poor homes often shine, but others may skip school, abuse narcotics, break the law, and have trouble settling down in a marriage and a job. Then their children may replicate this pattern.

Liberals sometimes ignore these self-destructive pathologies. Conservatives sometimes rely on them to blame poverty on the poor.

The research suggests that the roots of impairment and underachievement

are biologically embedded, but preventable. "This is the biology of social class disparities," Dr. Shonkoff said. "Early experiences are literally built into our bodies."

The implication is that the most cost-effective window to bring about change isn't high school or even kindergarten — although much greater efforts are needed in schools as well — but in the early years of life, or even before birth.

Protecting young children from adversity is a promising, science-based strategy to address many of the most persistent and costly problems facing contemporary society, including limited educational achievement, diminished economic productivity, criminality, and disparities in health," the pediatrics academy said in its policy statement.

One successful example of early intervention is home visitation by childcare experts, like those from the Nurse-Family Partnership. This organization sends nurses to visit poor, vulnerable women who are pregnant for the first time. The nurse warns against smoking and alcohol and drug abuse, and later encourages breast-feeding and good nutrition, while coaxing mothers to cuddle their children and read to them. This program continues until the child is 2.

At age 6, studies have found, these children are only one-third as likely to have

behavioral or intellectual problems as others who weren't enrolled. At age 15, the children are less than half as likely to have been arrested.

Evidence of the importance of early experiences has been mounting like



snowflakes in a blizzard. For example, several studies examined Dutch men and women who had been in utero during a brief famine at the end of World War II. Decades later, those "famine babies" had more trouble concentrating and more

heart disease than those born before or after.

Other scholars examined children who had been badly neglected in Romanian orphanages. Those who spent more time in the orphanages had shorter telomeres, a change in chromosomes that's a marker of accelerated aging. Their brain scans also looked different.

The science is still accumulating. But a compelling message from biology is that if we want to chip away at poverty and improve educational and health outcomes, we have to start earlier. For many children, damage has been suffered before the first day of school.

As Frederick Douglass noted, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

—Nicholas D. Kristof in the New York Times, January 7, 2012

Developmental Screening Starts the New Year



Ann Heron (in red) with the Manatee Community Action Agency and Chaye Estep (standing) School Social Work Intern, assist a family .



Ann Burke (standing) and Mylene Sylva (seated right of Ann) from Manatee Glens assist a family .



Edwina Jones (left) from Community Haven at one of several screening stations.

Thanks to all the dedication and commitment of Whole Child Partners and Friends, Community Developmental Screenings remain on the Whole Child action agenda in spite of all the funding cutbacks.

The new year schedule started at Rogers Elementary at 3PM as usual on January 25th. Pizza was delivered around 4PM for everyone to get through the late afternoon hunger pangs.

Participating Whole Child Partners and supporters were: Celeste Preseault and Carol Baity from Child Find (FDLRS); Edwina Jones, David Scott and Ellen Hepner, Whole Child Advisor, from CHAC; Ann Burke, Mylene Silva and David Griffin from Manatee Glens; Nicole Murphy of Easter Seals SW FL;

Alicia Ordonez of Healthy Start Manatee; Ann Herron of Manatee Community Action Agency; Kim Barger with Early Steps; Pat Johnson, Coordinator, Advisors Kim Ross and Maria Zavala of Whole Child Manatee; Jacqueline Ross, Whole Child Volunteer and event photographer; and Kerry Gaylord of the Early Learning Coalition of Manatee in the Community Resource Van providing a noise reduced environment for the hearing test.

Twenty families expressed interest in the screening. Several were referred to other sources and others made appointments for future screening dates. The next screening will be held at Tillman Elementary in Palmetto on March 21st. Reservations can be made by calling Kim Ross at 941.753.0958, ext. 201 or Maria Zavala at 941.723.4993 weekdays.



Looking inside the ELC Community Resource Van.



The Whole Child Manatee Parent Resource Table

Jewish Family & Children's Services Increasing Services in Manatee



JFCS
Jewish Family & Children's Services of Sarasota-Manatee, Inc.

Our Mission ...
to help people overcome life's challenges, **EMPOWERS** our community

Our Programs ...
counseling, prevention, intervention, outreach and education, **POSITIVELY IMPACT** the lives of children, families and seniors

Our Focus ...
to provide services on a non-denominational basis, **TOUCHES** the entire community

2688 Fruitville Road • Sarasota, FL 34237 • jfcs@jfcs-cares.org • www.JFCS-CARES.org • 941-366-2224

Build A Brighter Future: With Healthy Families/Healthy Children And Healthy Fathers/Healthy Families

All Adults 18 years of age or older-- ALL programs are FREE --All services are offered in English and in Spanish:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Relationship education | One-on-One family supportive services |
| Parenting education | Family Law education |
| Tools for financial improvement | Program incentives for attendance |
| Employability training | Programs for "Dad Only" |

Have a **FUN** night out **Free** child care onsite and **Free** dinner while attending classes!

For more information please call **Betsy Schwartz, 366-2224 x139** or **Aldo Botter x 178 (Spanish)**

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"These services are available to all eligible persons, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, or religion."

The Neuroscience of Nurturing

"The active ingredient in the environment that's having an influence on development is the quality of the relationships that children have with the important people in their lives.

That's what it's all about".

- Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.



Whole Child First Quarter Statistics

The following statistics are based on profiles submitted between October 1, 2011 and December 31, 2011.

Top 50% problem responses and referral generated questions:

- Do you want to know about activities in the community for your family? 70%
- Do you usually run out of money before your food, shelter and clothing needs are met? 67%
- Do you have a dentist for your children? 66%
- Need information about job placement, training, GED, ESOL or higher education? 64%
- Do you have a doctor for yourself and the rest of the family? 60%
- Do you have health insurance/Medicaid for the rest of your family? 58%
- Do you need information related to women's health needs? 54%
- Do you need childcare/preschool for your children under age 6? 53%
- If you are expecting a child, do you have prenatal care? 51%

We've been asked to define Wellness. The working definition we agreed to...was: "Wellness is a continuous health improvement process that includes regular physical activity, healthy food choices and finding work/life balance." We choose to see wellness as a pursuit across the lifespan, rather than as the achievement of specific number targets... Wellness is a lifestyle, not a benchmark.

Judith Sedgemen, EdD
Manatee Healthcare Alliance

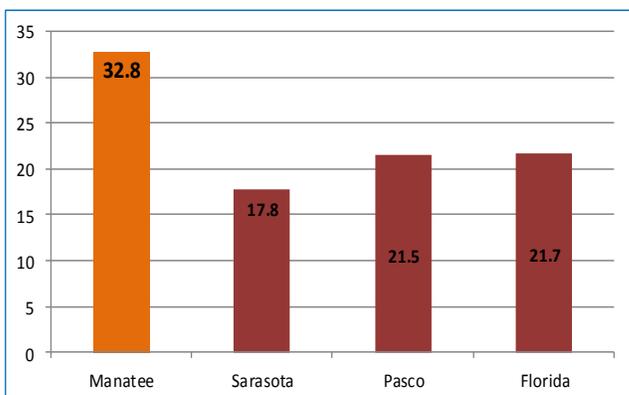
Prenatal Data for County

On February the 2nd, the Manatee Healthcare Alliance was the subject of the opening program of Manatee Tiger Bay. Dr. Jennifer Bencie, Administrator for the Manatee County Health Department presented the Health Profile for Manatee County. Several slides dealt with statistics on prenatal care.

Percentage of Manatee county Births to Mothers without 1st Trimester Prenatal Care

| 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | Health Profile 2020 Target |
|------|------|------|----------------------------|
| 33.1 | 30.5 | 32.8 | 22.1 |

Percentage of Mothers without 1st Trimester Prenatal Care



What if your child could receive a K-12 Scholarship?

Step Up for Students awards scholarships based on income not academic performance. The students who choose the scholarship are among the lowest performing students from the public schools they leave behind. However, on their latest standardized tests, these students achieved the same gains as students of all income levels nationally.

What is the Step Up For Students Program?

It is an initiative of the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program. The innovative program provides K-12 education scholarships for qualifying low-income students who are entering kindergarten or first grade OR who attended public school the previous year. The scholarships give low-income parents the opportunity to choose the K-12 school that best meets their children's needs. The scholarships cover up to a projected \$4,011 for private school tuition and books or up to \$500 in transportation costs to an out-of-district public school.



You may qualify for a scholarship if:

1. A child entering kindergarten must be 5 by September 1st.
2. A child entering 1st grade must be 6 by September 1st.
3. A child entering grades 2-12 must have attended a Florida public school for the 2011-12 school year.

AND

3. Your household income is at or below the amount shown on the income guidelines chart below.

Is your household income at or below these levels?

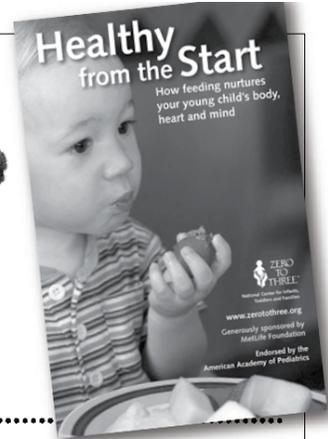
| # of people in household | Total Gross Monthly Household Income |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 | \$2,333 |
| 3 | \$2,944 |
| 4 | \$3,554 |
| 5 | \$4,165 |

2012-13 income guidelines add \$611 for each additional member

On the web at www.stepupforstudents.org

Healthy from the Start

How feeding nurtures your young child's body, heart and mind



Feeding is one of a parent's most important jobs. It is how we help our children grow healthy and strong. But mealtimes are about much more than food. Meal and snack times give you a chance to help your baby or toddler:

- Learn healthy eating habits
- Feel important and loved
- Feel understood and respected
- Trust that others will care for her
- Feel good about her body

To see full booklet on feeding, go to www.zerotothree.org

Here are some ways to help your child become a healthy eater:

- 1. Remember: Meals are about more than food.** They are a time to connect with your child and to support her overall development. Talk with your child during meals and don't let her eat alone. This helps build strong family relationships.
- 2. Create routines around mealtime.** Routines make children feel loved and secure. Establish regular meal and snack times beginning when your child is 9-12 months old. Rou-



tines help children look forward to each meal.

Healthy eating and exercise go hand in hand.



- 3. Offer 3 to 4 healthy food choices (that your child likes) at each meal.** Research shows that children will choose a healthy diet when they are offered a selection of different healthy foods.
- 4. Don't force your baby or toddler to eat.** This often results in children refusing the food and eating less.
- 5. Don't give up on new foods!** Patience is the key. You may have to offer your child a new food 10 or 15 times

before he will eat it.

- 6. Turn off the TV (computers, etc) at mealtime.** The television can distract children from eating. It also takes time away from talking as a family.
- 7. Healthy eating and exercise go hand in hand.** So make active play a part of everyday family life.



- 8. If you are concerned about your child's weight or activity level, talk to your child's health care provider. To learn more about feeding and young children, visit www.zerotothree.org.**

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