

Building Healthy Early Childhood Development in Pediatric Settings

Provided by St. David's Foundation, Updated March 2022

Developing brain architecture is shaped by early experiences, particularly during the sensitive period that occurs prenatally through age 3. The degree to which early experiences support healthy brain development depends on relationships and environmental factors. The following resources can help pediatric settings leverage this understanding to improve outcomes for young children and their families.

Early Brain Development – General. *Information on the critical period of brain development that occurs prenatally through early childhood and the connection to later health and economic and social outcomes.*

[How Brains are Built: The Core Story of Brain Development.](#) **4-minute video** by Alberta Family Wellness Institute.

[Key Concepts of Pediatric Brain Development.](#) **Brief overviews in video and narrative form** of key scientific concepts (brain architecture, toxic stress response, resilience, serve and return) created by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and the Harvard Center for the Developing Child.

[From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts.](#) **41-page** overview of current science and opportunities to improve outcomes by National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2016).

Role for Pediatric Practices in Supporting Early Development. *Resources related to role of pediatrics in promoting health development and positive experiences.*

[How Early Childhood Experiences Affect Lifelong Health.](#) **5-minute video** describing how developing biological systems in the body interact and the role for pediatrics within a system that supports healthy development.

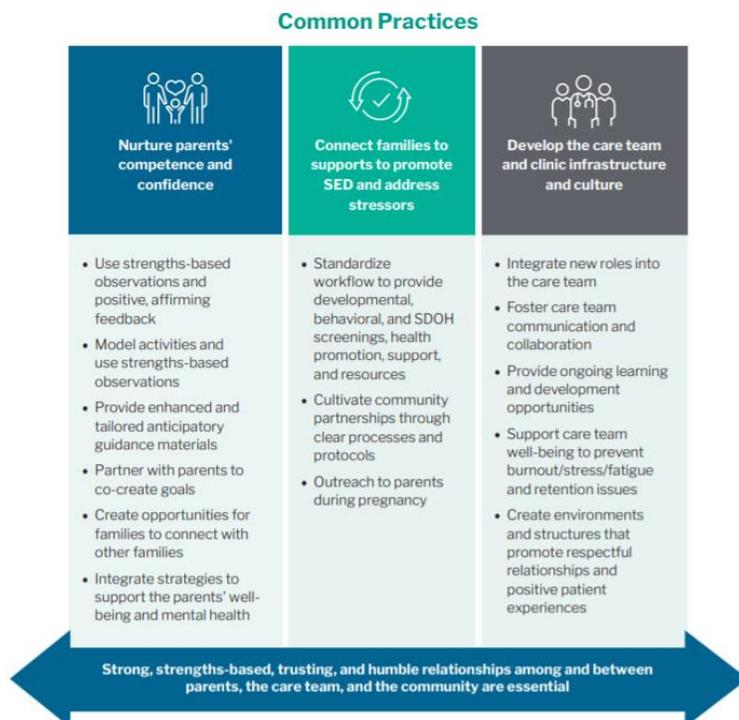
[American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement on Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress and Partnering with Families and Communities to Promote Relational Health.](#) **16-page statement in Pediatrics** describing how pediatric practices can apply a public health approach to mitigating toxic stress by building relational health. (Related [video](#) of Dr. Garner presentation, start at min 4)

[Fostering Social and Emotional Health through Pediatric Primary Care: Common Threads to Transform Everyday Practice and Systems.](#) **39-page paper** by Center for Study of Social Policy (2019) describes **3 common practices** pediatric settings can use to foster social and emotional health of their patients' families. (See graphic at right)

[Bright Futures.](#) AAP health promotion initiative providing guidance for preventive care screenings and well-child visits. Helpful [screening toolkit](#).

[Accelerating Child Health Care Transformation: Key Opportunities for Improving Pediatric Care.](#) **37-page paper** by Center for Health Care Strategies (2021) suggesting practice improvements related to social needs screening and racial equity focus.

[Pediatric Panel: Big and Little Things to Support Families in the Clinic.](#) **50 min video** of Texas pediatricians describing how they incorporated screening into their workflows.



[Perspectives on Early Relational Health Series](#). **20 min video** on role pediatric settings can play in supporting Early Relational Health and how to shift from a deficit framework to a strengths-based approach to support families.

[Texas Pediatric Society Trauma Learning Collaborative](#). Resources and videos to assist pediatric practices seeking to incorporate knowledge of how negative early experiences impact child development.

Programs Pediatric Settings Can Partner with or Implement in their Clinics.

[Reach Out and Read](#) operates in medical clinics across the county using developmentally and culturally appropriate books to promote early literacy and *to promote healthy development in PN-3 period*. During well child visits, providers model reading, talking and playing with the child.

Home Visiting Programs can extend the coaching and support families need but which can't be provided in the context of a well child visit. [Strong Roots: Home Visiting Programs Expand Medical Home into Communities](#). **2-page** 2017 AAP article with recommendations for pediatricians for using home visiting programs.

[Centering Parenting](#) uses group-based well child visits lasting 1.5 - 2 hours which follow the Bright Futures periodicity schedule for the 9 well child visits during the 0-2 period. The longer group visit format allows for better observation of parent-child interactions, more time for education and coaching and builds social connections among the families. Research has found participants have better attendance for postpartum visits, higher immunization rates, and extended breastfeeding.

[Child Psychiatric Access Network](#) (CPAN). State program offering pediatric providers free consultation from child psychiatrists. Registered primary care providers may call the CPAN hotline at 1-888-901-CPAN to consult with a pediatric psychiatrist or psychologist within 30 minutes of their call. Dell Med operates CPAN for the Central Texas region and offers a free CME series for primary care/pediatrics.

[Help Me Grow](#) (HMG) is a system model designed to help families and healthcare providers leverage existing resources to identify vulnerable children, link families to community-based services, and empower families to support their child's optimal development. Texas recently implemented HMG; sites in [six communities](#).

Comprehensive Screening and Connection Programs assess the social predictors of health that contribute to long-term child and family wellbeing. These programs offer the benefit of an existing infrastructure approach that connects families to necessary services and supports. Examples are:

- [HealthySteps](#) (PN- 3yrs) is an evidence based, population health model that embeds a child development specialist into the pediatric team. Use of universal screening and risk stratification match services to family need. Evidence shows improved parenting practices, and patient retention. (Related [video](#) of Dr. Rahil Briggs).
- [DULCE](#) - Developmental Understanding and Legal Collaboration for Everyone (for infants up to 6 months old) provides support for infant development by screening for families for 8 SDOH and responds to findings with an interdisciplinary approach.

Deeper Dives. *These resources helpful to increase understanding of brain development and can be used for professional development and/or team building.*

[Brain Architecture Game](#). Game experience that builds understanding of the role of experiences on early brain development that is done in small groups. Often used as a tool to help a team of staff or community members understand how experience can shape core elements of brain development.

[Brain Story Certification](#). Free, on-line, self-paced course on early childhood brain development. Completion of the 19 modules leads to certification. Can be used professional development; facilitation fosters with some facilitation to apply learning to the organization's work.