

Violence Prevention



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# Safe, Stable, and Nurturing Relationships May Shield Children Against Poor Health Later in Life

Early childhood exposure to adversities such as child abuse or neglect increases the risk of lifetime physical and mental health consequences. A recent CDC commentary in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) [↗](#) suggests that progress in preventing the nation's worst health problems – such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease – can be made by investing in programs that promote raising infants and young children in healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing surroundings.

In [Creating a Healthier Future Through Early Interventions for Children](#) [↗](#), the authors suggest investments in programs that are effective in promoting these important aspects of children's surroundings can counter adverse experiences in childhood, promote optimal development, and reduce disparities in health.

## Additional Resources

- **The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan**



Stress is an inevitable part of life. It helps children develop the skills they need to cope with and adapt to new and potentially threatening situations throughout life. However, the beneficial aspects of stress diminish when it is severe enough to overwhelm a child's ability to cope effectively. Intensive and prolonged stress can lead to a variety of short- and long-term negative health effects. It can disrupt early brain development and compromise functioning of the nervous and immune systems. In addition, childhood stress can lead to health problems later in life including alcoholism, depression, eating disorders, cancer, and other chronic diseases. *The Effects of Childhood Stress on Health Across the Lifespan* summarizes the research on childhood stress and its implications for adult health and well-being. Of particular interest is the stress caused by child abuse, neglect, and repeated exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV). This publication provides violence prevention practitioners with ideas about how to incorporate information on childhood stress into their work.

- **Neuroscience, Molecular Biology, and the Childhood Roots of Health Disparities: Building a Framework for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention**

In a CDC-funded paper, [Neuroscience, Molecular Biology, and the Childhood Roots of Health Disparities: Building a New Framework for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention](#) [↗](#), authors Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D, W. Thomas Boyce, M.D., and Bruce S. McEwen, Ph.D., discuss how the origins of many adult diseases can be traced to negative experiences early in life. The authors suggest confronting the causes of adversity before and shortly after birth may be a promising way to improve adult health and reduce premature deaths.

- **Child Maltreatment Strategic Direction**

CDC's key strategy in preventing child maltreatment is the promotion of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships between children and caregivers.

- [Full version of the strategic direction](#)  [PDF 276KB]
- [One page version of the strategic direction](#)  [PDF 93KB]

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