



## Child Abuse Prevention Toolkit: Sample Editorial

*The following sample guest editorial is an example of incorporating the framing research into the format of a guest editorial.*

Today, we have a very special opportunity to consider the best path to a prosperous future for our community, by giving all children the experiences they need to become leaders tomorrow. This is what End Child Abuse Awareness Day is all about. For the past ten years, our coalition of businesses, faith communities, community-based programs and concerned individuals has been engaged in understanding, and then sharing with others, what it means to create a community that enables all of its children to develop – socially, emotionally and cognitively. **[Begins with a value: Future Prosperity]**

What does development, and specifically, brain development, have to do with ending child abuse? Plenty. Science tells us that the experiences children have early in life actually build the architecture of their developing brains. Brains are built over time, just like houses. And just as a well-built house requires a strong foundation, our children's brains also need a strong foundation for all of the development that comes after. Experiences of abuse and neglect damage this foundation, harm brain development, and diminish our community's future. **[Brain Architecture Simplifying Model]**

Science also tells us that certain environments produce "toxic stress" – or chronic conditions such as extreme poverty and abusive situations – that can compromise the brain's architecture and destabilize that foundation, derailing later development. Fortunately, the research also tells us what types of environments ensure healthy brain development, what types of environments produce toxic stress, and what communities, health practitioners, teachers and ordinary citizens can do to ensure that all of our children have the solid foundations they need for healthy development. **[What harms development: Toxic Stress]**

First, while it's vitally important to provide children with opportunities to develop their cognitive abilities, we must pay equal attention to their social and emotional abilities. That's because all of the developmental domains work together, each affecting and affected by the other. This development happens in an environment of relationships, where children have the opportunity to develop interactions with caregivers in a "serve and return" fashion, much like in a game of tennis or volleyball. When an infant or child reaches out for interaction with a caregiver, and that caregiver responds consistently and appropriately, critical neural pathways in children's brains are built. Healthy pathways are not built in the brains of children who are living in

environments of abuse and neglect, which has a negative impact on children's development – in the short and long term. **[How development happens: "Can't Do One Without the Other" and "Serve and Return" models]**

Secondly, children need environments free of toxic stress, or the kind of chronic, serious stress caused by experiences such as violence, abuse or neglect. This toxic stress literally damages children's brains by releasing chemicals in the brain that stunt cell growth. This even impairs their physical health because children develop an exaggerated stress response that weakens their defense system against later illness, from heart disease to diabetes and depression.

**[What Harms Development: Toxic Stress model]**

In order to support healthy brain development in all children, we need to maintain a comprehensive set of programs to protect children from exposure to toxic stress, and encourage strong "serve and return" interactions with their caregivers. One way to do this is by supporting our [name of program], which provides free home visits from public health nurses to all newborns in our community. These voluntary visits allow nurses to identify which families are experiencing the conditions that can cause toxic stress, such as extreme poverty, maternal depression and other mental health concerns, and family violence. Once identified, the program can connect these families to the community supports they need to buffer this toxic stress, increasing the likelihood of healthy outcomes. **[Solution]**

The program we have currently reaches some, but not all, of the families in our county who need it. Last year, 251 babies were born in our county, but only 125 received a home visit. It's as if we had a vaccine that prevents a serious childhood disease, but only half of all children were protected. **[Use of Social Math]**

Our Coalition's goal is to ensure that more children have the opportunity they deserve to thrive by bringing this effective program to every family in the county who could benefit. Certainly, trying to change behavior or build new skills on a foundation of brain circuits that were not wired properly in the first place is more difficult than getting it right the first time. Our partners at the county social services office tell us that of the families that received assistance through the home visiting program in the past five years, less than 3 percent have been reported for later neglect and abuse of their children. Home visits to newborns offer an opportunity to lay a strong foundation right from the very start of life. **[What are the consequences: Pay Now or Pay Later]**

On the tenth anniversary of End Child Abuse Awareness Day, let us celebrate that many parts of our community are coming together to create positive, healthy environments that support children's development. With additional private and public funds, we can continue working together to support this cause by extending our effective nurse home visiting program. Please join us in supporting this vital initiative to end child abuse in our community, and create a more prosperous, positive future for all of us. **[Closes with value of Innovation]**