



Child Abuse Toolkit: Sample Letters to the Editor

The following examples incorporate the framing research into letters to the editor. These letters to the editor are written in support of a fictitious early childhood advocacy coalition. They are examples of how to use the media to advance a new frame about early childhood development and policy.

To The Editor:

The Tribune's recent coverage of the latest child abuse case ("Investigation Continues into Abuse of Siblings") caused me to reflect on how a sound investment in our community's future requires that all children have the opportunity to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally. Science now tells us that toxic stressors in a child's environment (the kind of stress caused by long-term, persistent factors such as maternal depression, extreme poverty and abuse or neglect) can affect the architecture of the developing brain. This means that interventions in the lives of children who are experiencing toxic stress should not be delayed. Partnerships for Parents has high-quality programs that offer supportive structures and relationships to families experiencing toxic stress. If all children and families had access to these effective programs, we would lay solid foundations for children's development and prevent more serious problems from developing later – and that would be beneficial for all of us.

Nancy Smith, M.D.
Three Oaks Pediatric Clinic

To The Editor:

As a family court judge, I believe it is important to attend to new findings about child development that should be used to improve systems that serve children. We now know that early adversity has life-long effects on learning, behavior and health.

Science tells us that "toxic stress" – like exposure to family violence – literally damages the brain's architecture. We don't have to worry about tolerable stress (falling off your bike, or getting a shot at the doctor's office). But toxic stress lasts longer, is more severe, and leads to lifelong problems in learning, behavior and health. I have seen this in my courtroom, but it doesn't have to be that way. We need to provide better prevention and intervention resources throughout our state, so that judges are able to refer families to supportive programs as early as possible. We can turn that toxic stress into tolerable stress. Our future depends on it.

The Hon. Joseph J. Jones
Family Court Judge, District 4

To The Editor:

As a teacher, I feel honored to do my part in stewarding our next generation of citizens and community leaders. I also see the results in children's learning and behavior for those who have been in early care programs that are responsive to what is essential for healthy development – stable, nurturing interactions with caring adults literally build the architecture of the maturing brain! Every day, I see the differences in learning and behavior of children who have not had that stability. Trying to build new skills on a shaky foundation of brain circuits that were not wired properly when they were first formed requires more work and is less effective than providing stable, protective relationships early in life. If we take seriously our responsibility to nurture our next generation of leaders, we need to improve the systems that serve kids by minimizing multiple placements and disruptions of relationships early in life.

Ana Rodrigues
Eastview Elementary School