



Early Child Development Toolkit: Sample Editorial

The following sample op-ed was written by FrameWorks to show one way to incorporate the framing research and elements of the core story of early childhood development into the format of a guest editorial. This language can be included into your own opinion pieces.

As a family physician, I have the distinct honor of meeting our state's future every day in my office. I see newborn babies, preschool and school-age children, and adolescents on the brink of adulthood. Regardless of their age or life stage, when I look into their eyes I see tomorrow's prosperity for our state. That's because our future is inextricably tied to how we, as adult citizens, work to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. Some communities have made the decisions that will ensure this prosperity, but others have not. We know exactly what we need to do in order for all children to thrive. The time to act is now. **[Begins with a Value: Future Prosperity]**

Thirty years of practice have taught me many lessons, but one lesson that is reinforced time and again is this: What we invest in children almost always comes back to us threefold. What do I mean by this? When we fully attend to all of the domains of children's development – cognitive, physical, social/emotional – we can expect to see children who grow up to be productive workers and responsible citizens who participate in civic life. When we fail to attend to the developmental domains of our children, we all pay a steep price: a diminished and insecure society. **[How development happens: "Can't Do One Without the Other" model]**

Recent discoveries in the neurosciences confirm this important life lesson. We now know that the early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the developing brain. As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows – and getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix them later. **[Brain Architecture simplifying model]**

When early experiences are positive, the architecture of the brain can build itself from the bottom up in a healthy fashion. But when children experience such stressful things as extreme poverty, abuse or severe maternal depression, that building process is thwarted, and the probability of poor outcomes increases. It is important to distinguish among three kinds of stress: positive, tolerable and toxic. We do not need to worry about positive stress (which is short-lived stress, like solving a difficult problem). Another kind of stress occurs during the inevitable challenges of life, such as the death of a loved one, that is made tolerable by the

presence of supportive relationships. But toxic stress lasts longer, happens without consistent supportive relationships, and leads to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health. In fact, new research shows that children exposed to toxic stress develop an exaggerated stress response that, over time, weakens their defense system against diseases, from heart disease to diabetes and depression. That exaggerated response never goes away, with lifelong health consequences. **[What harms development: Toxic Stress model]**

How do we create conditions in our communities that build healthy brain architecture by reducing and buffering exposure to toxic stress? Again, the research is eminently clear: All children need to live in an environment of healthy relationships – with family members, with caregivers, with members of the community. Like the process of serve and return in games such as tennis and volleyball, children naturally reach out for interaction. For our youngest children, it may be through babbling and facial expressions; for older children, it is through conversation and positive attention. If adults do not respond by getting in sync and offering back the same level of engagement, the child's learning process is incomplete. This has huge negative implications for later learning and health. **[How development happens: Serve and Return model]**

The Kids Come First coalition is working to ensure that all children, from the time they come into the world until they are launched into adulthood, have the opportunities and supports they need to support their healthy brain development. We are working to increase support for policies and programs that reduce toxic stress and support environments of healthy relationships by creating high-quality child care environments for all children, improving economic environments for all families, and making sure all children have access to preventive health care. **[Policy solutions]** As a society, we now have a diagnosis. It's time to come together to provide the treatment that we know works. **[Value of Ingenuity]**