Talking Points

Child Development and Adverse Childhood Experiences

Lead with the values of *Human Potential* and *Civic Potential* to establish why the early years are a matter of public concern.

"When we ensure that all of Jacksonville's kids have the opportunity to learn and develop, they become our city's biggest assets—our future potential. We need the contributions and talents of all of our children for our city to become as vibrant as it can be. By making sure our city systems work together to support children's health and learning, we are also making sure that our city has the human potential it needs to grow economically and thrive socially."

Make sure people know why and how "early" matters. Use the *Brain Architecture* metaphor to explain early development as a process that unfolds over time and is influenced by many factors.

"We now know from neuroscience that the earliest period of life matters quite a bit, because this is the time when the brain's architecture is being established. Just as a house is built in a predictable sequence, from the ground up, children's brains start to develop before birth and continue developing through adolescence and into adulthood. The experiences young children have, the environmental factors they are exposed to, and the nutrition they get establish the brain's foundation. The strength of the foundation influences development, learning and physical health. When we ensure that Jacksonville's children grow sturdy brains, we are also ensuring that Jacksonville has the foundation that it needs to be a healthy, vibrant city."

Use the *Toxic Stress* metaphor to establish childhood adversity as a threat to healthy development.

"Some minor stresses are a healthy part of child development, but severely stressful conditions— such as community violence or chronic neglect—can have a negative effect on child development. The body's stress systems can go on high alert and stay there. This flood of hormones is toxic to the

developing brain and organs, which can lead to a range of problems with health, learning, and mental health."

Close with a discussion of solutions to establish the community as an agent of change.

- *We can make Jacksonville a brain-building city.* "By supporting programs that help build sturdy brain architecture in the earliest years of life, we can make sure that all of Jacksonville's kids have a strong foundation for health and development. An example is …"

- *We can prevent or reduce severe stressors.* By putting in place policies and programs that reduce severe stressors, we can prevent the risk of toxic stress. Examples include … "

- *We can put more buffers in place.* "Not every serious stressor needs to lead to a toxic stress response. Stable, responsive adults are a buffer. When we ensure that children have responsive relationships with adult caregivers, such as parents, extended family, mentors, teachers, and coaches, we buffer toxic stress. Examples of how we're doing this include …"