

The story of brain development

Science tells us that what happens to us in the first few years of our lives affects how our brains develop.



This means brains aren't just born, they're built over time based on our experiences.

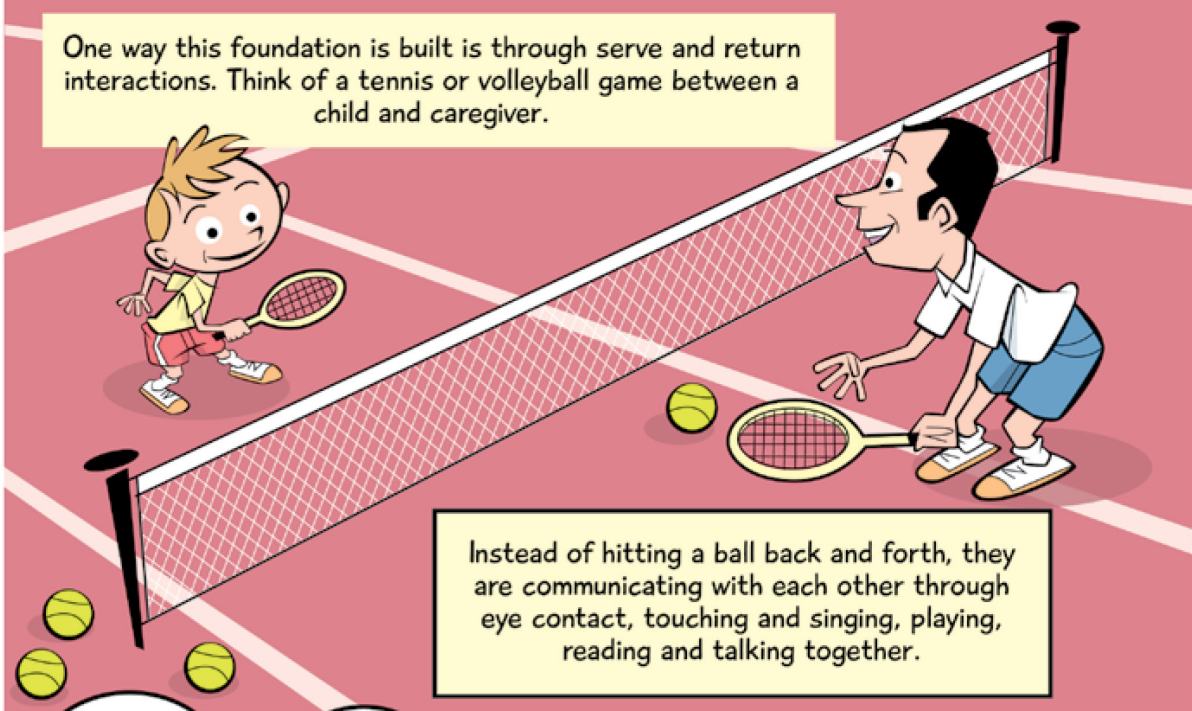


Just as a house needs a sturdy foundation to hold up the walls and roof, a brain needs a solid base to support development, good mental function and lifelong health.



The architecture of the developing brain is built by positive interactions between young children and caregivers.

One way this foundation is built is through serve and return interactions. Think of a tennis or volleyball game between a child and caregiver.



Instead of hitting a ball back and forth, they are communicating with each other through eye contact, touching and singing, playing, reading and talking together.

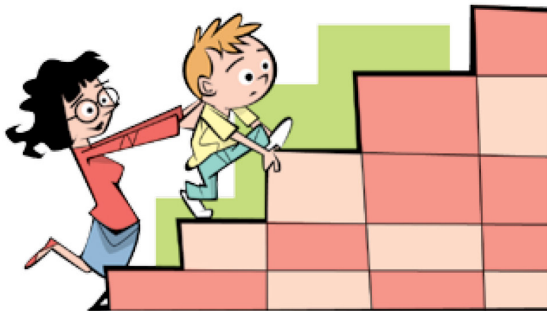


Doing these interactions over and over during the first few years of a child's life are the bricks that build the foundation for all future development.

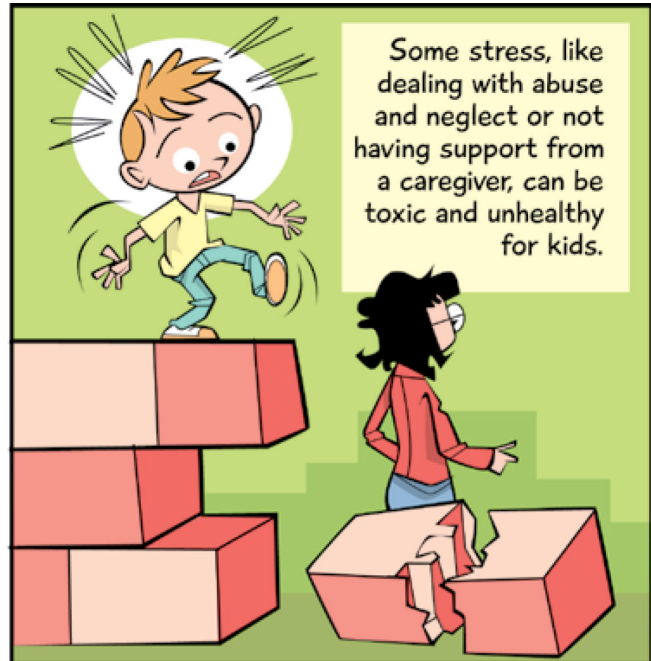
Another kind of experience also shapes brain development.
Stress.



Good kinds of stress, like meeting new people or studying for a test, are healthy for kids because they help them learn how to cope with life.



Toxic stress can weaken brain architecture and cause a lifetime of problems.

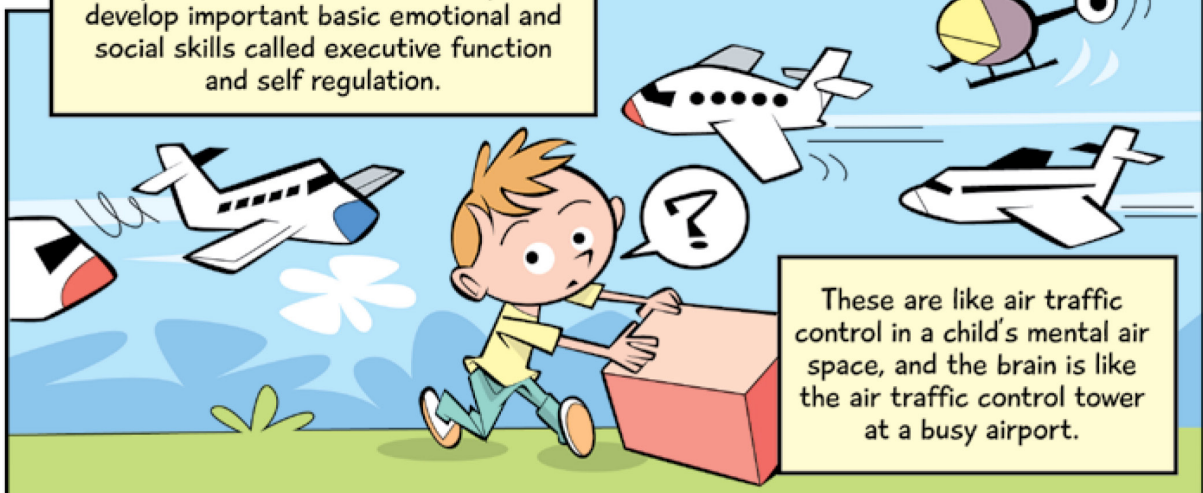


Some stress, like dealing with abuse and neglect or not having support from a caregiver, can be toxic and unhealthy for kids.



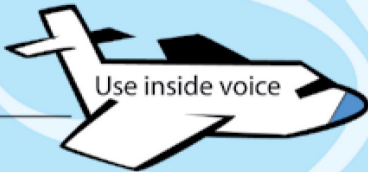
While some of the damage caused by toxic stress can be fixed later, it's easier, more effective and less expensive to build solid brain architecture in the first place.

Sturdy brain architecture also helps kids develop important basic emotional and social skills called executive function and self regulation.



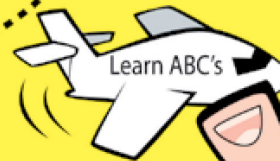
These are like air traffic control in a child's mental air space, and the brain is like the air traffic control tower at a busy airport.

All those planes landing and taking off at once need attention to avoid a crash. It's the same for a child learning to pay attention, plan ahead and follow rules.



Like all of us, kids have to react to everything around them while also dealing with their worries, temptation and obligations.

As these demands for attention pile up, air traffic control helps a child regulate the flow of information, focus on tasks and above all, manage stress and avoid collisions.

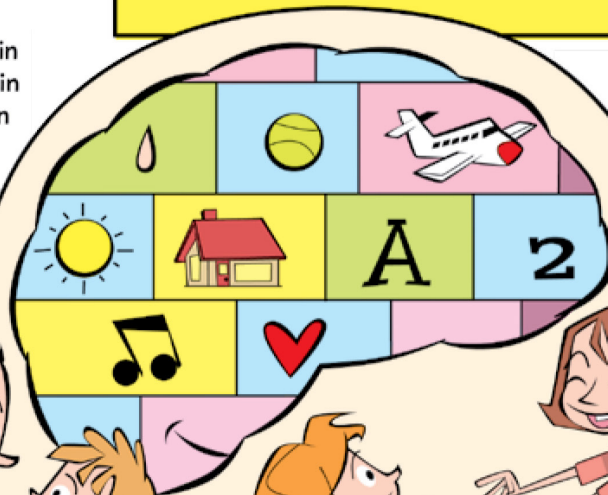


We need these abilities to have positive and level mental health.



Kids need adults in order to build brain architecture, learn air traffic control and avoid toxic stress.

It's up to all of us as a community to make sure young people have the kinds of nurturing experiences they need for positive development.



To build better futures, we need to build better brains.

Simard