



Promoting Healthy Relationships for Children's Mental Health


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NETWORKS OF
CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE





Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network PREVNet

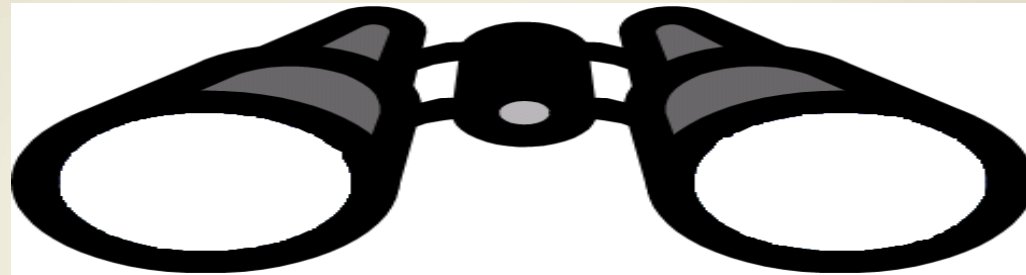


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Developmental-Relationships Perspective



Child or youth's
needs,
strengths,
challenges

Child's or youth's
relationships
with family,
peers, adults, &
community

Pepler, 2006

Interventions and Development

- Interventions can be best understood as accelerating development (e.g., an 8 year old looks like a 3 year old).
- Need to identify and target the developmental mechanisms – what promotes development?



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Relationships and Relationship Capacity

Share my growing understanding that relationship capacity and relationships are the primary developmental mechanisms to target through interventions to prevent and intervene in children and youths' mental health problems



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Relationships Matter for the Brain through Genes and Experiences

The brain adapts to experiences that a child has:

If the child has positive experiences, the brain adapts positively for learning, memory, and regulation

If the child has stressful experiences, the brain adapts negatively, with too much or too little response to any stress.

As the brain develops, the gene expression adapts as well, leading to further positive or negative brain development



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Beginning My Journey with SNAP®

1985, origins of Stop Now And Plan®

- social skills deficit – filling up the child with requisite skills
- We learned that focusing on accelerating the child's development was not enough because we had not changed the relationships around the child.



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Developmental-Relationship Interventions

- SNAP[®] incorporated a parent training component
- Teaches children and their parents, how to manage their emotions and behaviour by getting them to stop, think and plan positive alternatives before acting impulsively.



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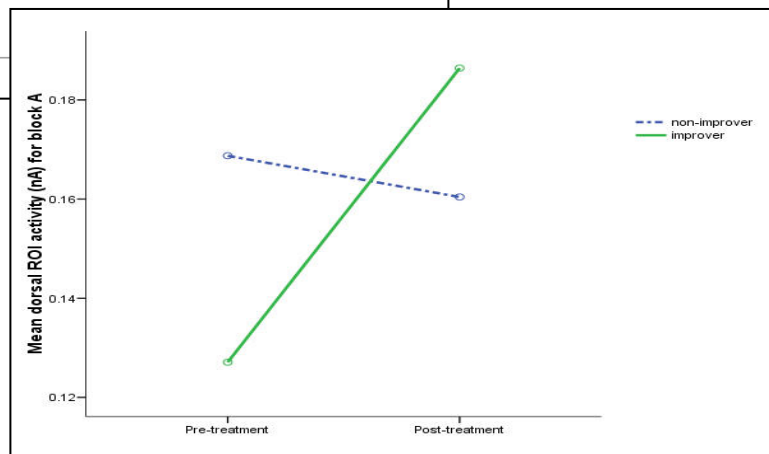
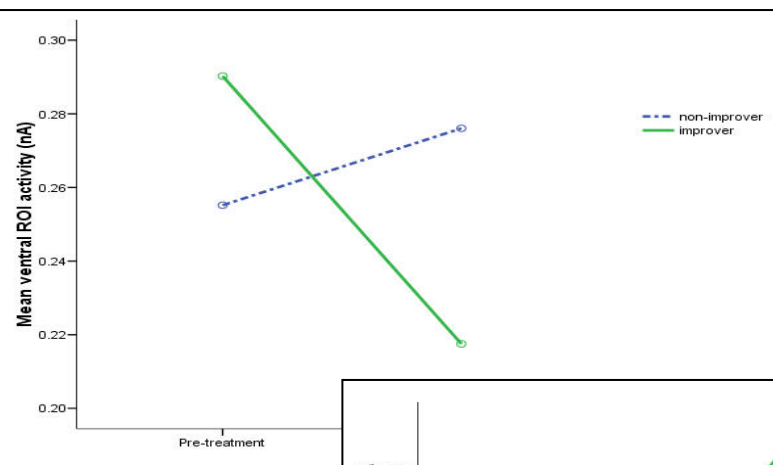
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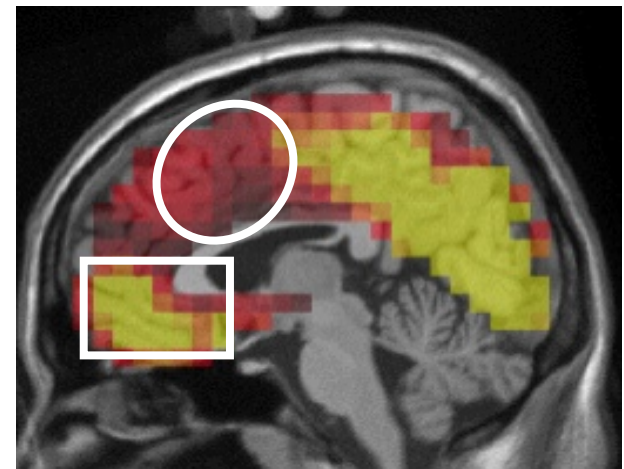
BEHAVIOURAL & BRAIN CHANGES ASSOCIATED WITH TREATMENT OUTCOMES: VENTRAL & DORSAL TREATMENT EFFECTS (PRE TO POST)

HYPOTHESIS:

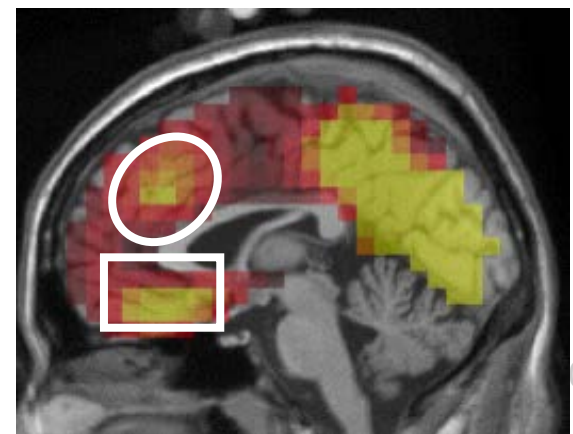
With treatment, we should see a decrease in activity in the ventral brain regions and an increase in activity in the dorsal brain regions implicated in emotional self-regulation and deliberate cognitive control!



PRE



POST



The Mother-Child Study: Evaluating Treatments for Substance-Using Women

A Focus on Relationships



Breaking the Cycle: Early Intervention to Support Struggling Mothers and Children



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Breaking the Cycle

Relationships are a Critical Mechanism of Change

- BTC focused on supporting mother's development and her child's development
- We are recognizing that this occurs to a large extent by supporting the mother-child relationship
- The mother-child relationship is primary context for children's early development.
- Now learning that the mother also develops in the context of this important relationship.



Pine River Institute

Pine River Institute works with youth and families from an attachment perspective. Youth identified relational mechanisms as critical to change:

- Development through critical relationships
- Development of self through relationships
- Supporting change in the family
- Positive experiences in relationships

Julia Riddell (2014) MA thesis



Pine River Institute



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Connect – An Attachment Based Program for Parents Moretti

By working with parents and caregivers, Connect promotes:

- social, emotional and behavioural adjustment and
- attachment security

Children and youth between the ages of 8 and 18 years of age



Developmental Perspective

- How does the development of relationship capacity compare to developing numeracy and literacy?
- Developmental perspective moves us away from a discipline perspective
- Honouring children's mistakes
- Child rights perspective
-



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When Relationships Do Not Support Healthy Development

Adverse Childhood Experiences (Felitti et al 1998)

Disruptive relationships that are not able to nurture and are destabilizing for a child:

- Physical, psychological and sexual abuse
- Mother/stepmother physically abused
- Living with a problem drinker or drug user
- Household member depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide
- Imprisoned household member

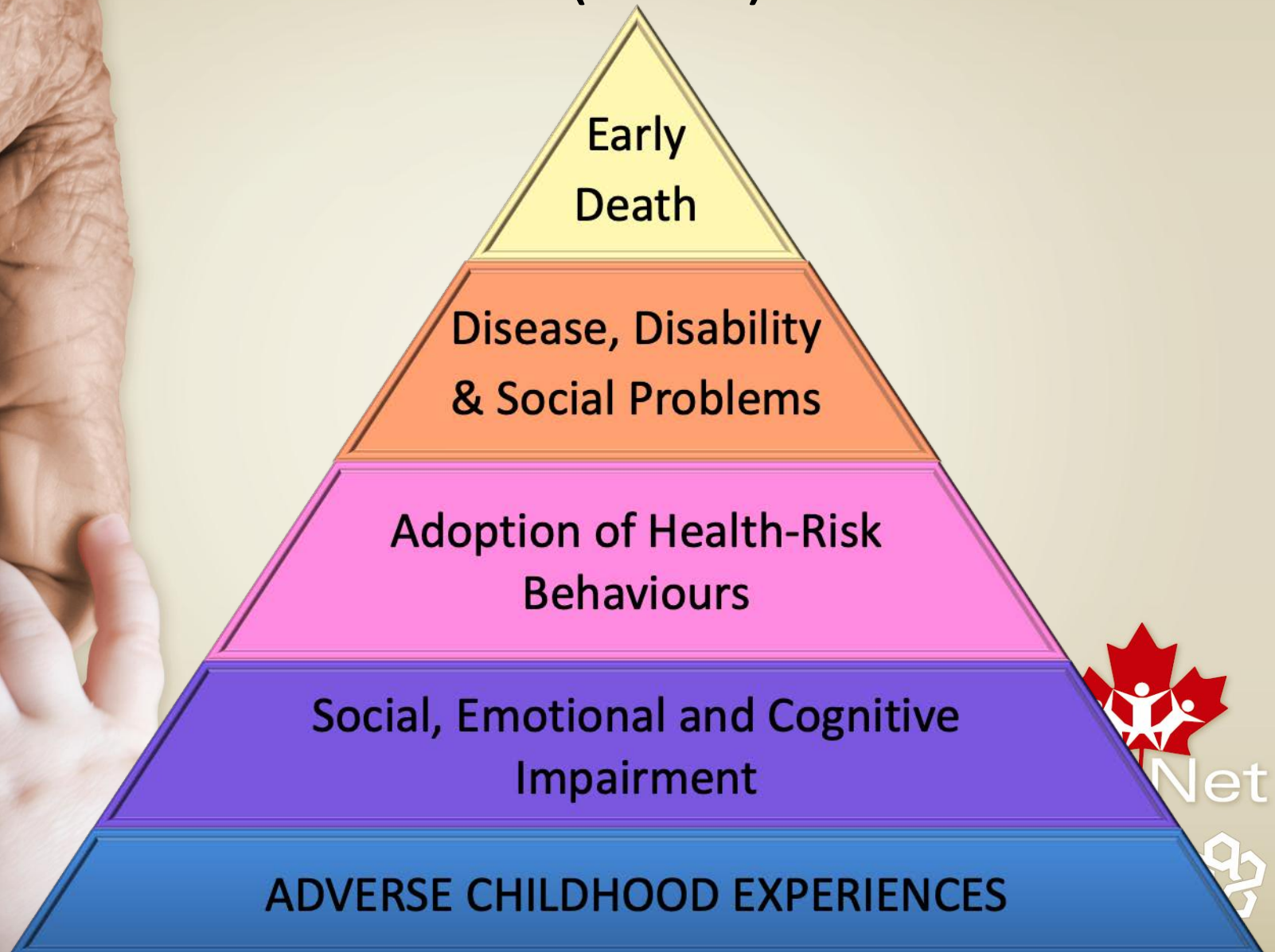


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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Felitti et al., 1998





Adverse Childhood Experiences

I hypothesize that developmental mechanisms underlying mental and physical health problems are:

Unhealthy relationships that fail to nurture healthy development.



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Nurturing Environments

“If we want to prevent multiple problems and increase the prevalence of young people who develop successfully, we must increase the prevalence of nurturing environments.” Biglan et al. (2012, p. 258)

“Nearly all problems of human behavior stem from our failure to ensure that people live in environments that nurture their well-being” (Biglan, 2015, p. 3)



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Questions for Child and Youth Mental Health

- What broad structural changes do we need (e.g., racism, discipline of those lagging developmentally, intensive support for those who have not had the opportunity to develop)?
- How can we ensure that all children feel safe, trusting, valued and supported in all the contexts where they live, learn, and play?



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Promoting Child and Youth Mental Health

- Depends on the quality of all relationships at home, school, community
- What about parents who lacked nurturing for healthy development? Whose responsibility it is to support them in becoming the best parent that they can be?
- Ours as a society because we failed to protect their rights as children



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Developmental-Relationship Perspective

Developmental perspective – Scaffolding

- What has not developed that we know should be promoted for a healthy, happy and productive life course (e.g., self regulation)?
- What has developed that is interfering with successful adaptation and relationships (e.g., hostile attributional bias, aggression as a problem solving strategy, attention-seeking behaviour)

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Developmental-Relationship Perspective

Relationship Perspective – Social Architecture


- How do we organize children's social experiences to promote positive development and buffer stress?
- What do healthy minute-to-minute interactions need to be like to positively shape a child's experience and development?



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Relationships are the “active ingredients” of the environment’s influence on healthy human development.

Relationships engage children in the human community in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people.

National Scientific Council on the
Developing Child

Working paper #1. Young children
develop in the environment of
relationships



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Nature and Nurture

Children experience their world as an environment of relationships.

- Relationships are important throughout development
- Relationships affect all aspects of development – intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, and moral.

Adults are responsible for the quality of children's relationships



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A photograph of a woman with blonde hair and glasses looking down at a young child in a park. The child is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The background shows trees and a house.

Growing Healthy Children

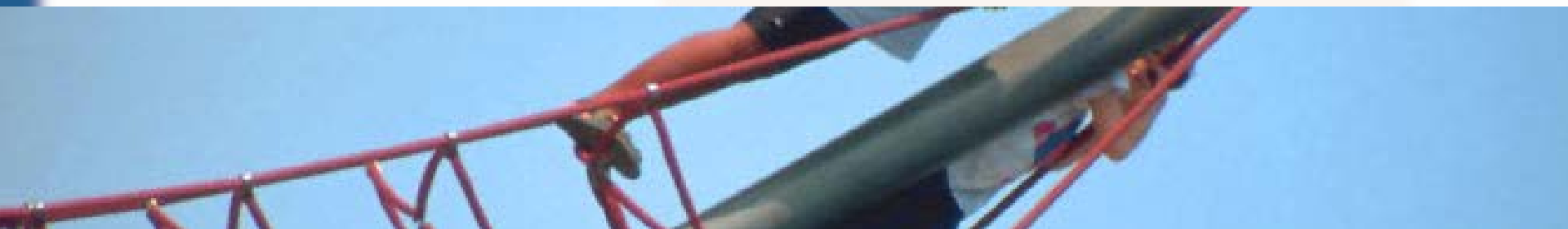
Healthy development depends on healthy relationships



THANK YOU!



For Helping Bridge Research and Practice
to Promote Healthy Development and Relationships



www.growinghealthychildrenblog.wordpress.com
www.prevnet.ca