



Violence Exposure and Trauma-Informed Approaches in the Education System

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VIOLENCE & THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

- Schools are one of few systems where *all* children are served
- Tremendous opportunity to either mitigate or enhance impacts of violence
- Important even if exposure is not *within* the school system
 - Can serve to enhance resilience of 60% of children exposed in communities, homes (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009)

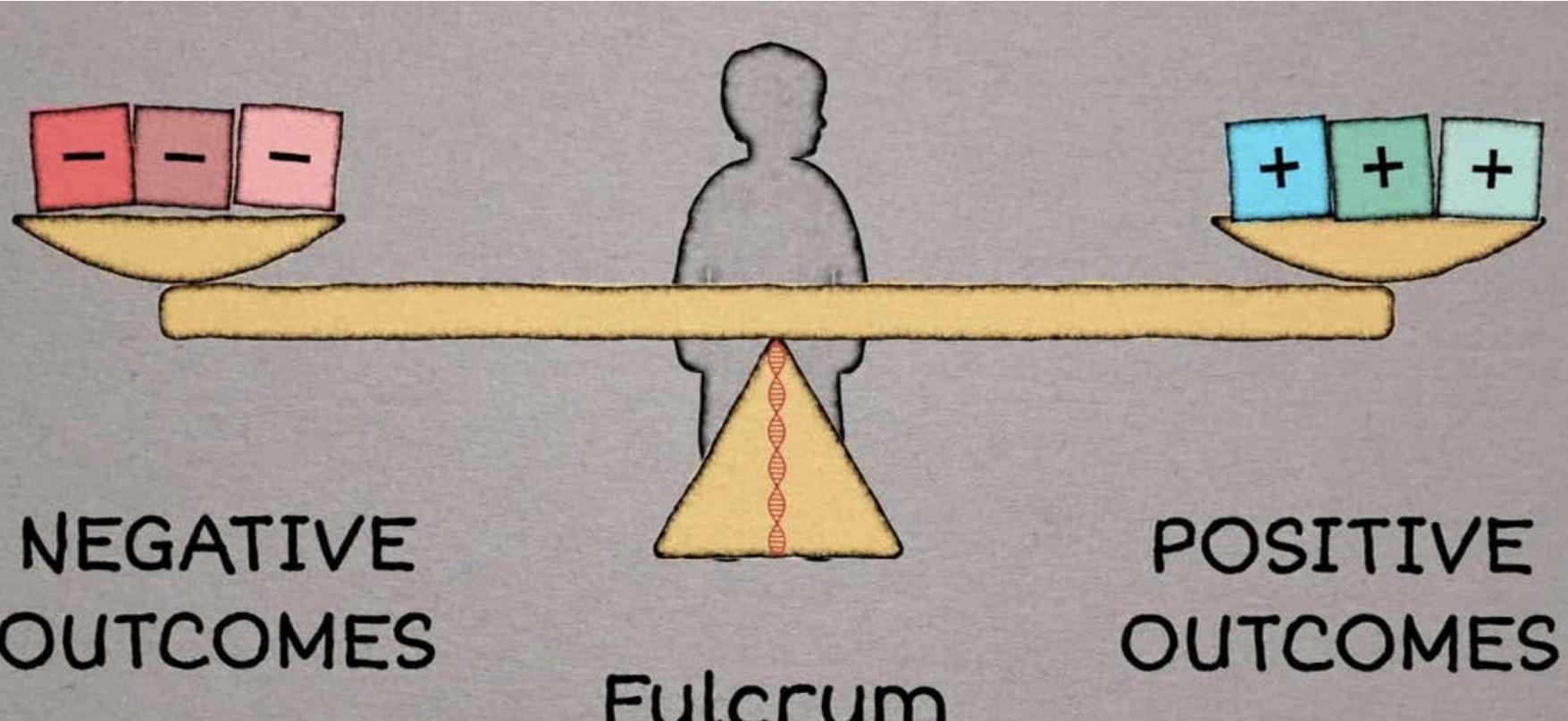
Goal of education system is to provide **prevention**, **promotion**, and **protection** for *all children*, in addition to reactionary support for those who need it most

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

- To optimize trauma-exposed children's outcomes, educational approaches should be:
 1. Focused on skill-building
 2. Holistic in scope
 3. Implemented early

1) SKILL-BUILDING

RESILIENCE AS A BALANCE SCALE



“TIPPING THE SCALE”

Option 1: Reduce adversity

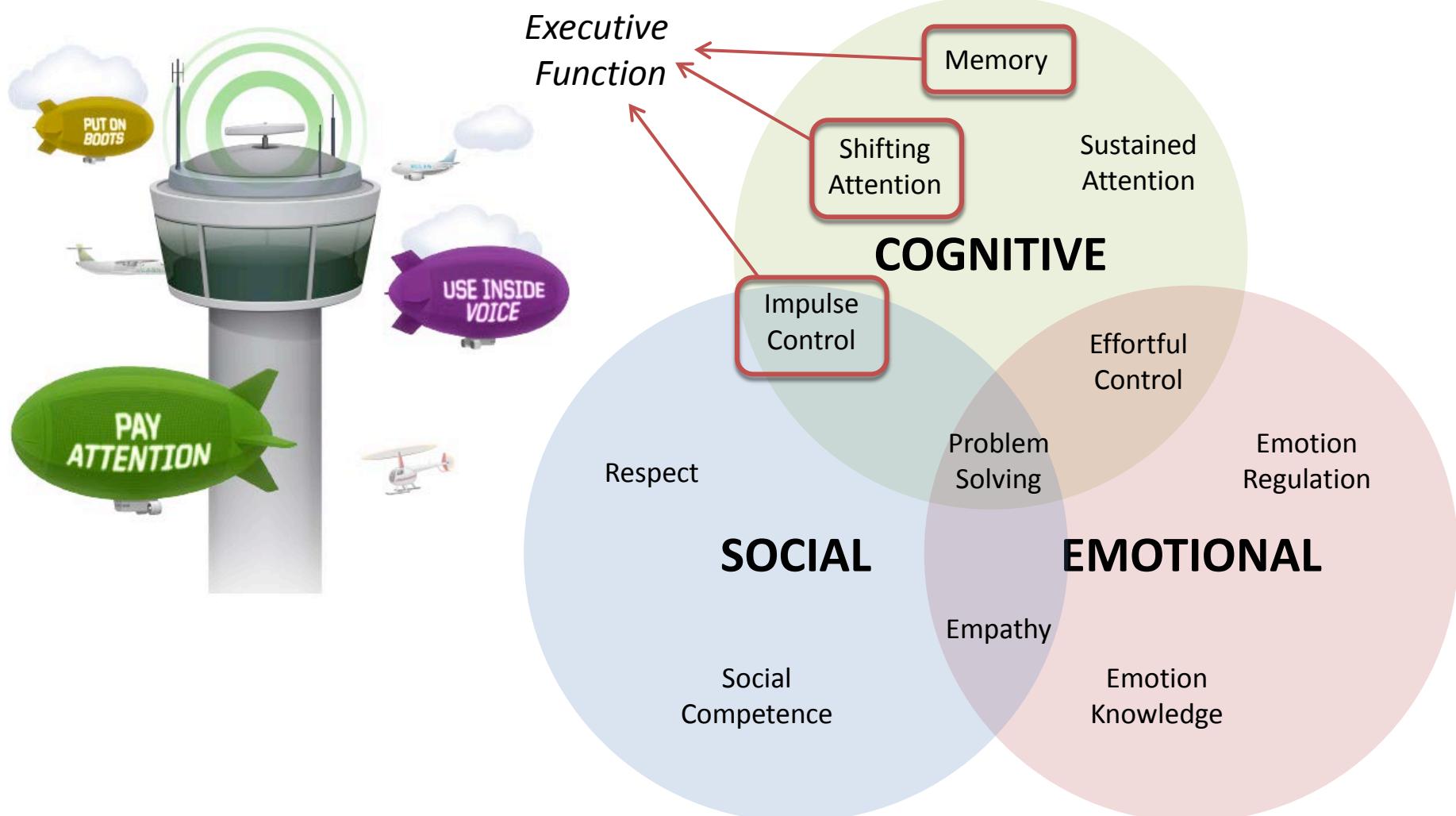


Option 2: Provide supports



- Supports can help children to acquire **social-emotional skills** that:
 - help kids to cope with aftermath of trauma
 - *break cycles of violence over time*
- These skills are not inborn! **We must teach them!**

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS



WHY ARE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS IMPORTANT?

Early Social-Emotional Skills



Pay attention in school
Wait for turn
Control anger
Respect peers & adults
Show compassion
Remember & follow directions

Successful Adults



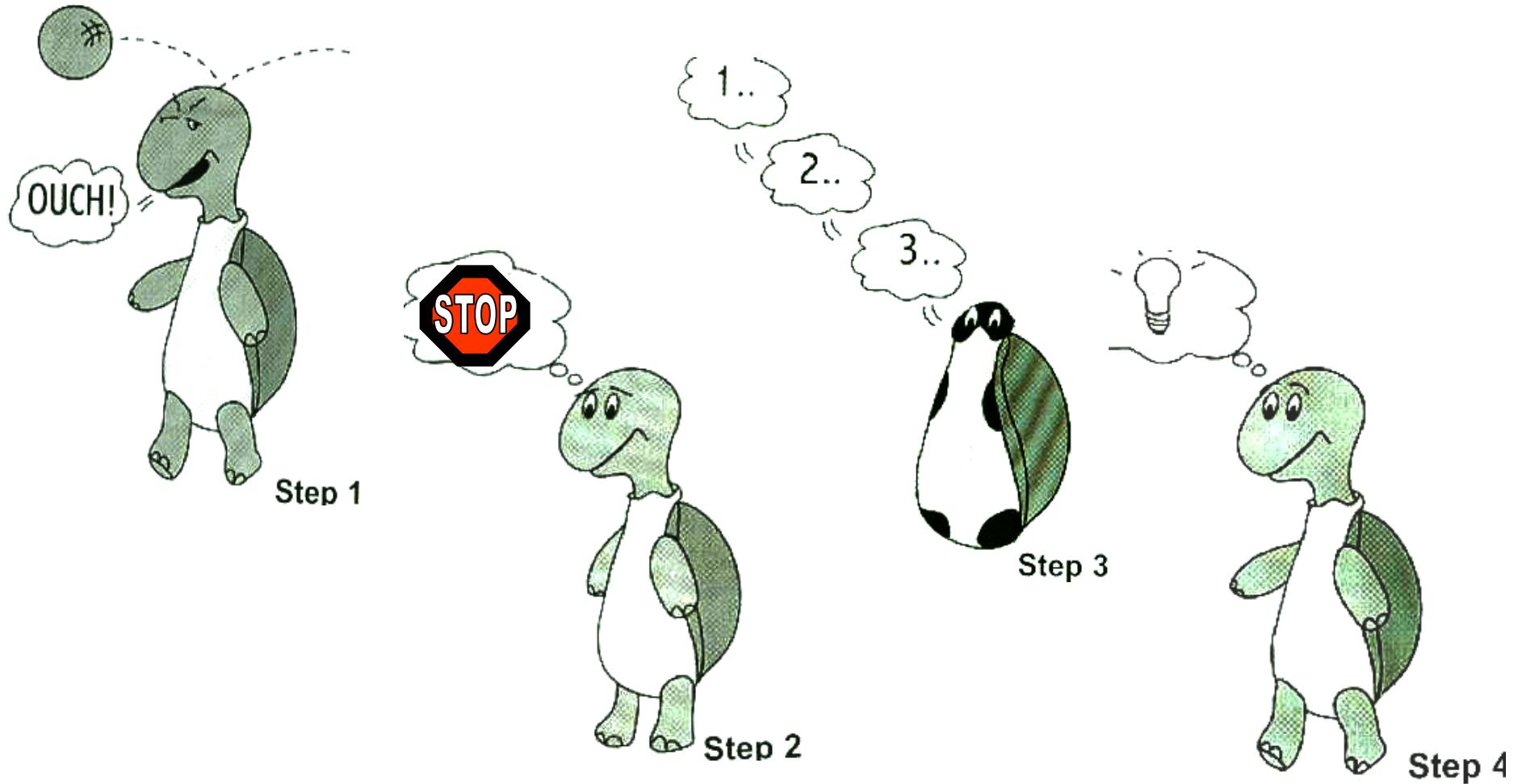
School learning
Academic achievement
On-time graduation
Mental and physical health
Reduced violence
Increased earnings



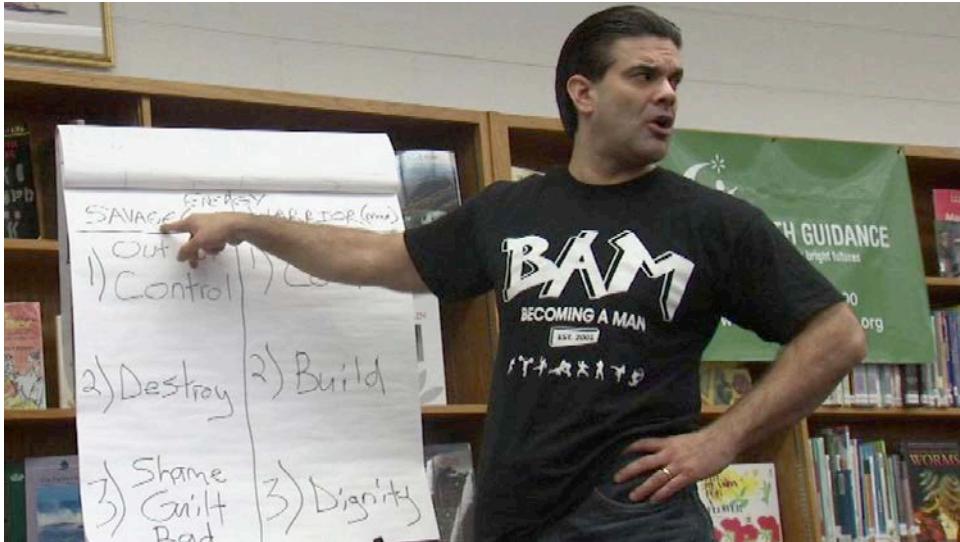
SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS

- There are numerous school-based programs and curricula to support social-emotional development
- For example:
 - **Tools of the Mind**: preschool (toolsofthemind.org)
 - **Preschool PATHS**: preschool (pathstraining.com)
 - **Incredible Years**: preschool (incredibleyears.com)
 - **Chicago School Readiness Project**: preschool (steinhardt.nyu.edu/ihdsc/crsp/)
 - **4Rs**: elementary school (morningsidecenter.org/4rs-research-study)
 - **Becoming a Man**: high school

TUCKER THE TURTLE (PATHS)



ADAPTED CBT (BECOMING A MAN)



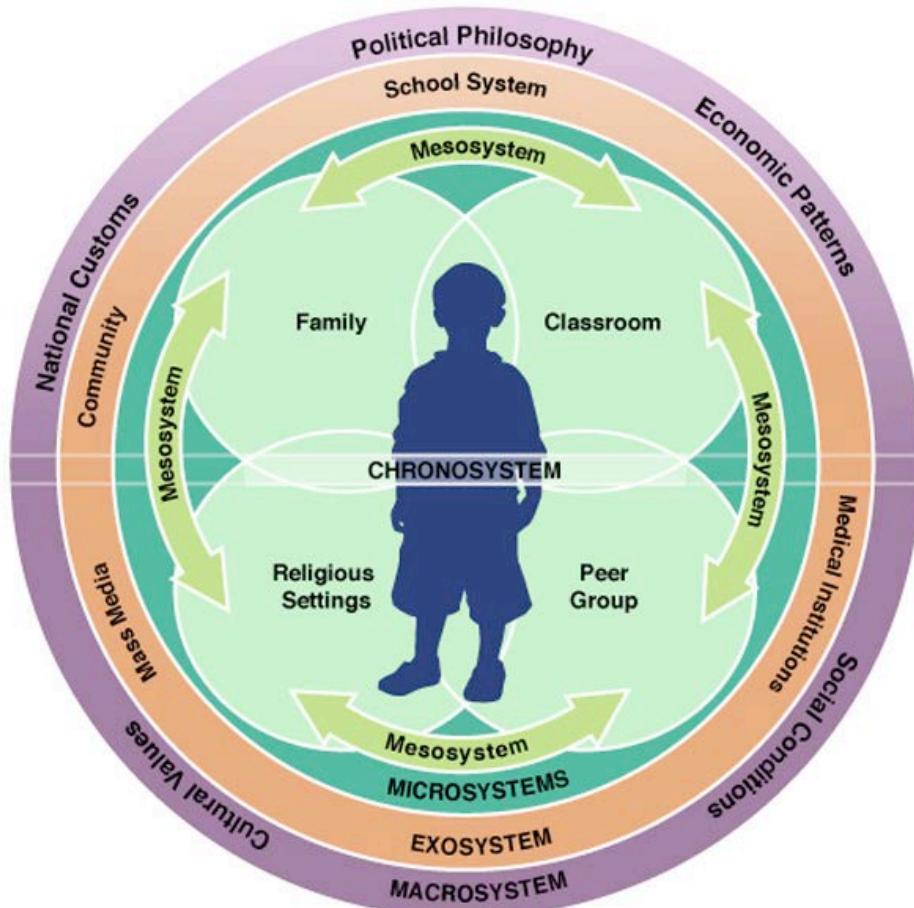
2) HOLISTIC

DIRECT & INDIRECT EXPOSURE

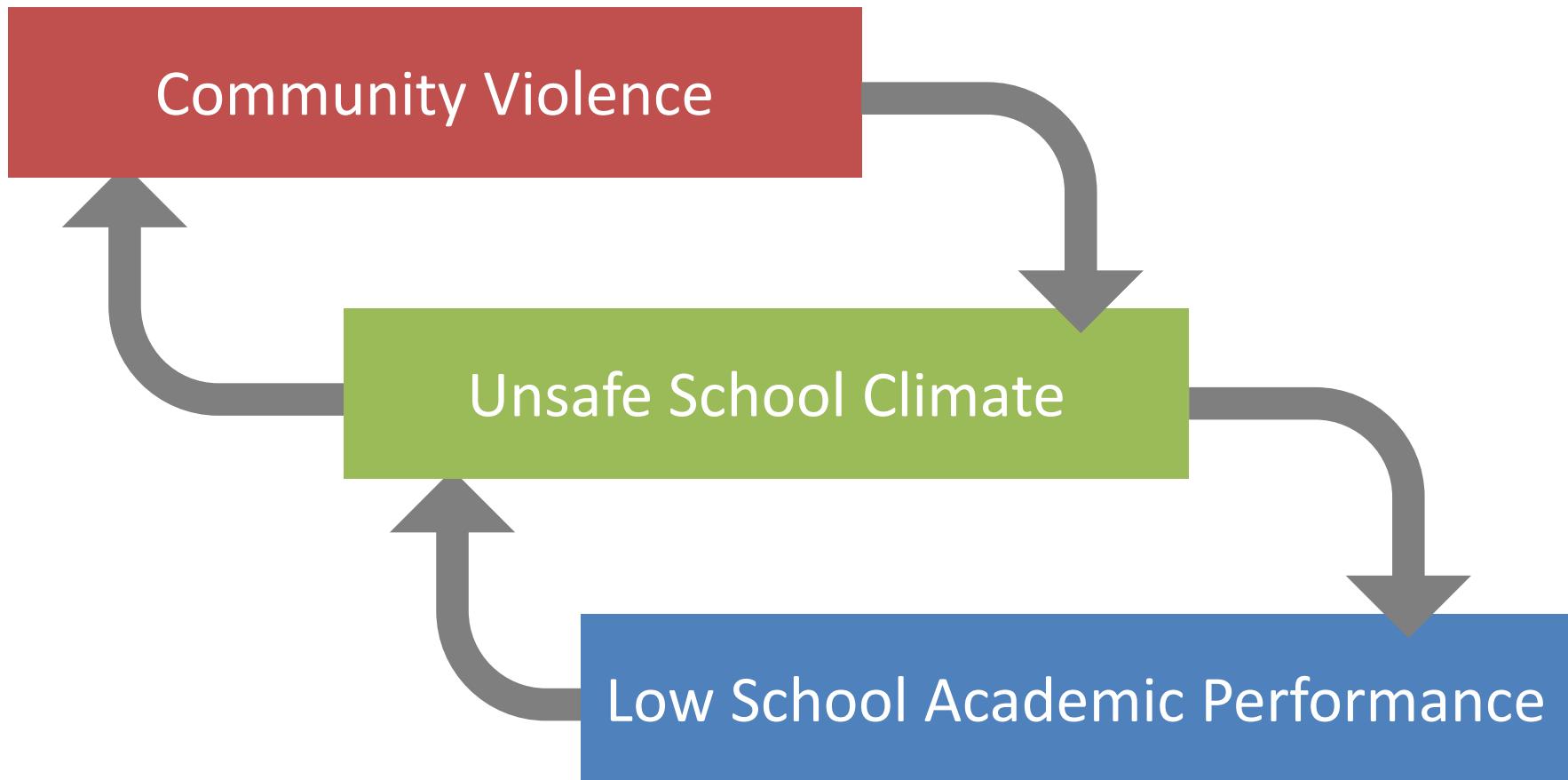
- Violence affects children directly & indirectly
- Effects of **direct exposure** (witnessing, direct victimization) tend to be acute, intense
- Effects of **indirect exposure** tend to be longer-lasting, pervasive
 - Higher levels of teacher/parent stress and mental health issues that compromise the quality of adult-child interactions and modeling of healthy behaviors
 - Less freedom to explore environments and receive direct enrichment
 - Broader changes in social norms and expectations for behavior

BIOECOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development



A RESEARCH EXAMPLE

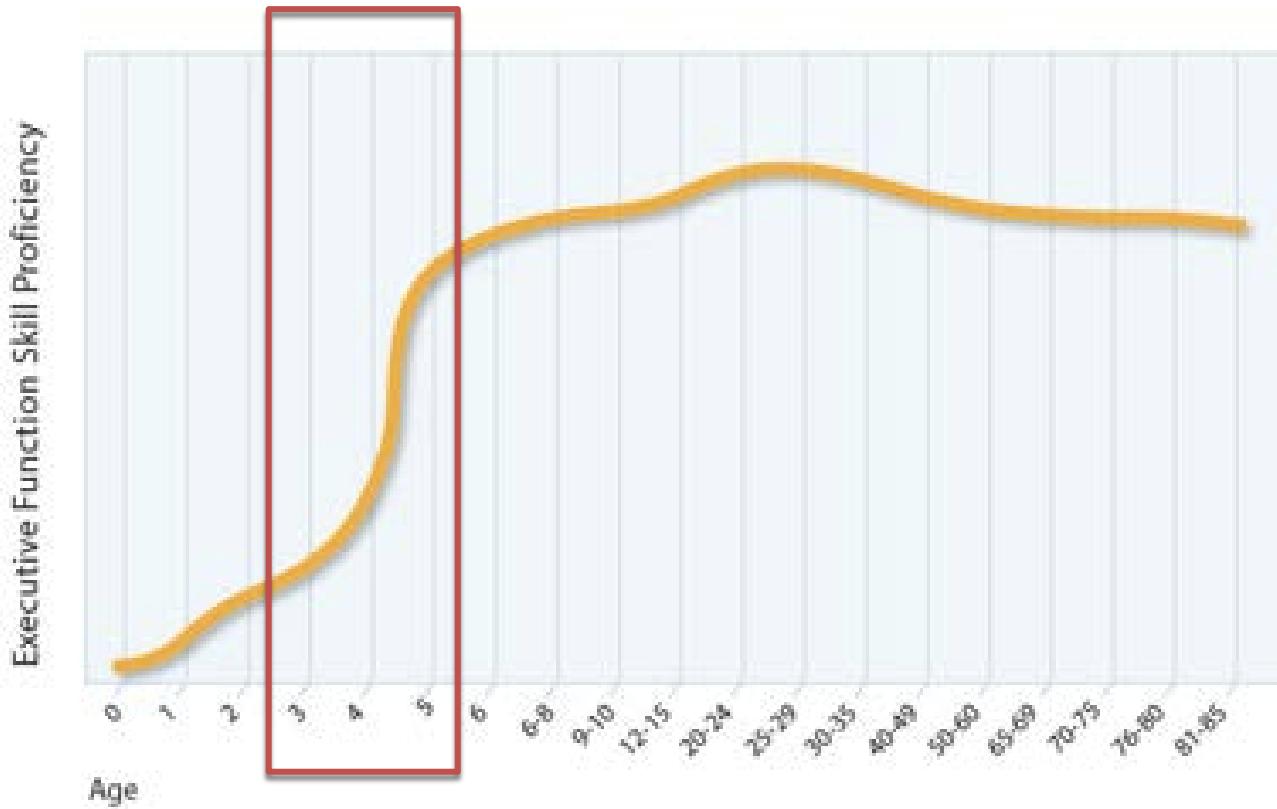


IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

- First priority: Provide **direct supports** to affected children
 - Mental health and counseling services
 - Often take place outside of school
- Additional priorities: **Extend supports** to individuals and systems that support children
 - Provide on- and off-site **wrap-around services** for children and families (see: Head Start)
 - Involve **parents/siblings** in school activities
 - Provide **services for teachers** and staff
 - Serve as **community leader for defining norms** and behavioral expectations

3) EARLY

SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

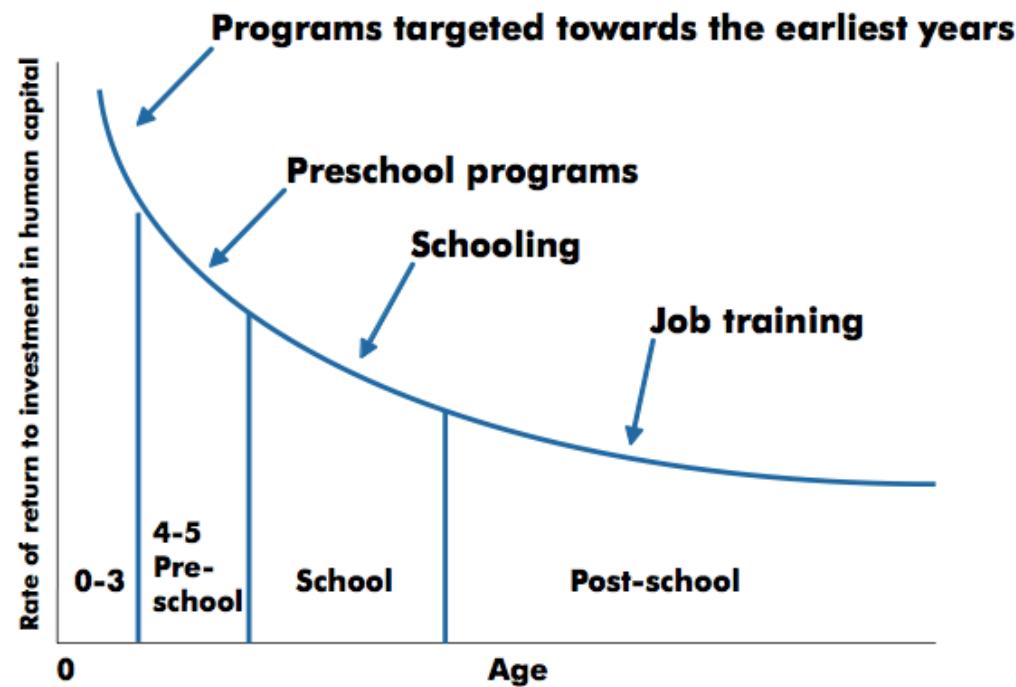


* The preschool period is an important “window of opportunity” for building social-emotional skills!

INTERVENTIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD ARE PARTICULARLY COST-EFFECTIVE

Figure 1a
Returns to a Unit Dollar Invested

(a) Return to a unit dollar invested at different ages from the perspective of the beginning of life, assuming one dollar initially invested at each age



CONCLUSION

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

- To optimize trauma-exposed children's outcomes, educational approaches should be:
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BEST PRACTICES FOR PREVENTION

- Structure children's environments so that they are **stimulating**, yet **predictable** and **low in stress**
- **Teach** children strategies they can use to solve problems and control their reactions to emotions
- Allow children the **freedom** to (safely) practice these strategies, be creative, and explore
- **Praise** and **reward** children when they show positive social-emotional skills; avoid harsh punishment
- Help children to develop strong **relationships** with caring adults who can support them and model empathy, positive self-regulation, and conflict resolution
- **Integrate** these practices **consistently** across environments

A FINAL WORD

"When we think that kids just need willpower to overcome adversity, we miss opportunities to provide the relationships and build the skills that can actually strengthen resilience."



Jack Shonkoff, M.D.

Professor of Child Health and Development
Harvard Graduate School of Education

THANK YOU!

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For additional information on
development and resilience in the face of adversity, visit
developingchild.harvard.edu