

# Using science to reduce health consequences of early childhood adversity

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How early experiences are built into the body with lasting effects on learning, behavior and health may be made clearer through advances in science.

In a special communication article published online by *JAMA Pediatrics*, Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D., of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., writes about leveraging science to reduce the [health consequences](#) of [childhood adversity](#).

"This growing [knowledge base](#) suggests four shifts in thinking about policy and practice: (1) early experiences affect lifelong health, not just learning; (2) healthy brain development requires protection from toxic stress, not just enrichment; (3) achieving breakthrough outcomes for young children facing adversity requires supporting the adults who care for them to transform their own lives; and (4) more effective interventions are needed in the prenatal period and first three years after birth for the most disadvantaged children and families. The time has come to leverage 21st-century [science](#) to catalyze the design, testing and scaling of more powerful approaches for reducing lifelong disease by mitigating the effects of early adversity," Shonkoff writes.

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