

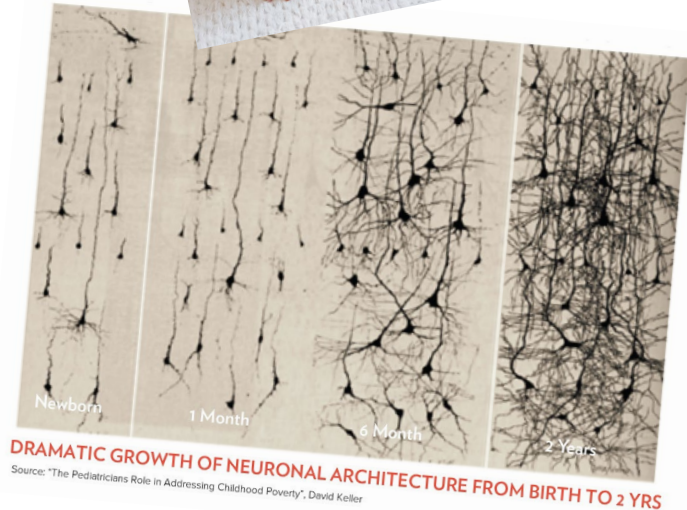
# Giving every child the best start for life

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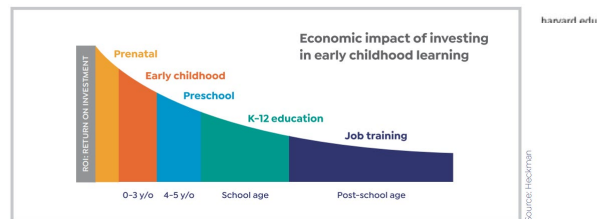
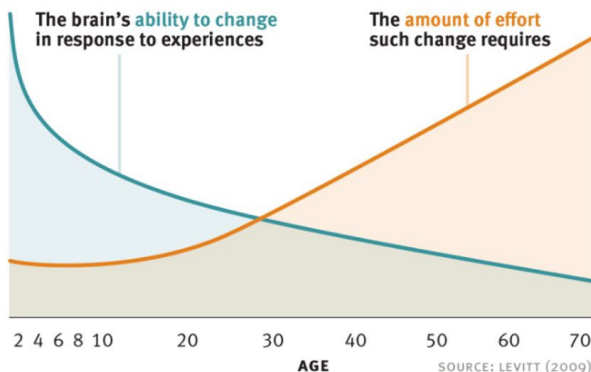
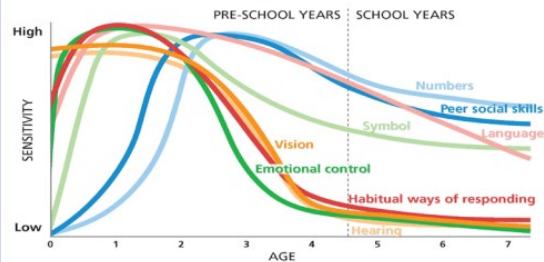




- The first 1001 days are a period of **uniquely rapid growth**.
- More than **1 million new connections** are formed every second in a baby's growing brain.
- The **basic architecture of the brain** is shaped during this period, providing the foundation for future development.
- This is a time of **opportunity and vulnerability**.



## Sensitive Periods in Early Brain Development



It's never too late.

But...

- This is the moment when we have most opportunity to make a difference.
- The brain is most **plastic**.
- Many parents are **willing to engage** with services and receptive to support.
- Because of the cumulative impact of interventions, there is the greatest **return on investment**.



- Babies' brain development is shaped **by their environment.**

*'Plasticity is a double-edged sword that leads to both adaptation and vulnerability.'* (Neurons to Neighborhoods.)

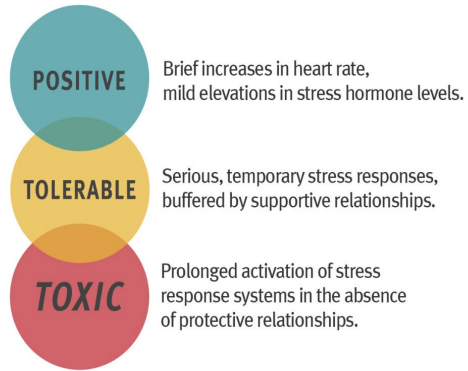
- Even before birth the foetal brain changes in response to the biochemical experience of mothers' mental health and physical health. This process, known as **foetal programming**, ensures the baby is highly adapted to the world into which it will be born.



“Young children experience their world as **an environment of relationships**, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development.”

Harvard Centre for the Developing Child

- After birth, babies’ environment is largely **shaped by their primary caregivers** (parents!).
- The evidence is clear: **at least one secure, responsive relationship with a consistent adult is a vital ingredient** in babies’ healthy brain development and their emotional wellbeing.
- Persistent, severe difficulties in early relationships have **pervasive impacts** on many aspects of child development.



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Beyond the ACE score: Examining relationships between timing of developmental adversity, relational health and developmental outcomes in children

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- Adversity and relationship stress/neglect matter because they lead to **toxic levels of stress**.
- When toxic stress response occurs repeatedly, it can have a **cumulative toll on a baby's physical and mental development** leading to a range of poor later outcomes.
- Research into ACEs shows that **adversity in the earliest months is particularly damaging** because children are particularly vulnerable and it impacts early development.
- **Relational poverty is more damaging** to young children than other forms of adversity.







- We can make a difference.
- There are many interventions and practices with a **proven impact on early outcomes**.
- No single intervention hold the answer – **whole system responses** are needed to ensure families get the right support, at the right time, and to sustain impact.
- There is also much still to learn!



## **The costs of getting this wrong are enormous...**

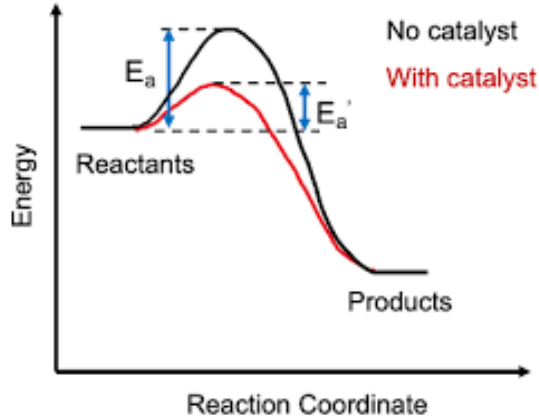
**Opportunities to support Star's family in the antenatal period were missed due to strains on the HV service.**

**Star's 9-12 month review was a phone call.**

***"The issue of capacity in health visiting services is a national concern and merits further attention"***







“This is a time of opportunity and vulnerability.”

- Start for Life funding is piecemeal and time-limited. It comes against the backdrop of austerity and inflation, with many core services reaching crisis point.
- **BUT** it does provide an opportunity for system wide change for babies, children and their families.

