Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Leveraging Science to Support Children and Families in Crisis Settings

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The science behind caring for young children: Strengthening Nurturing Care approaches to achieve better health outcomes

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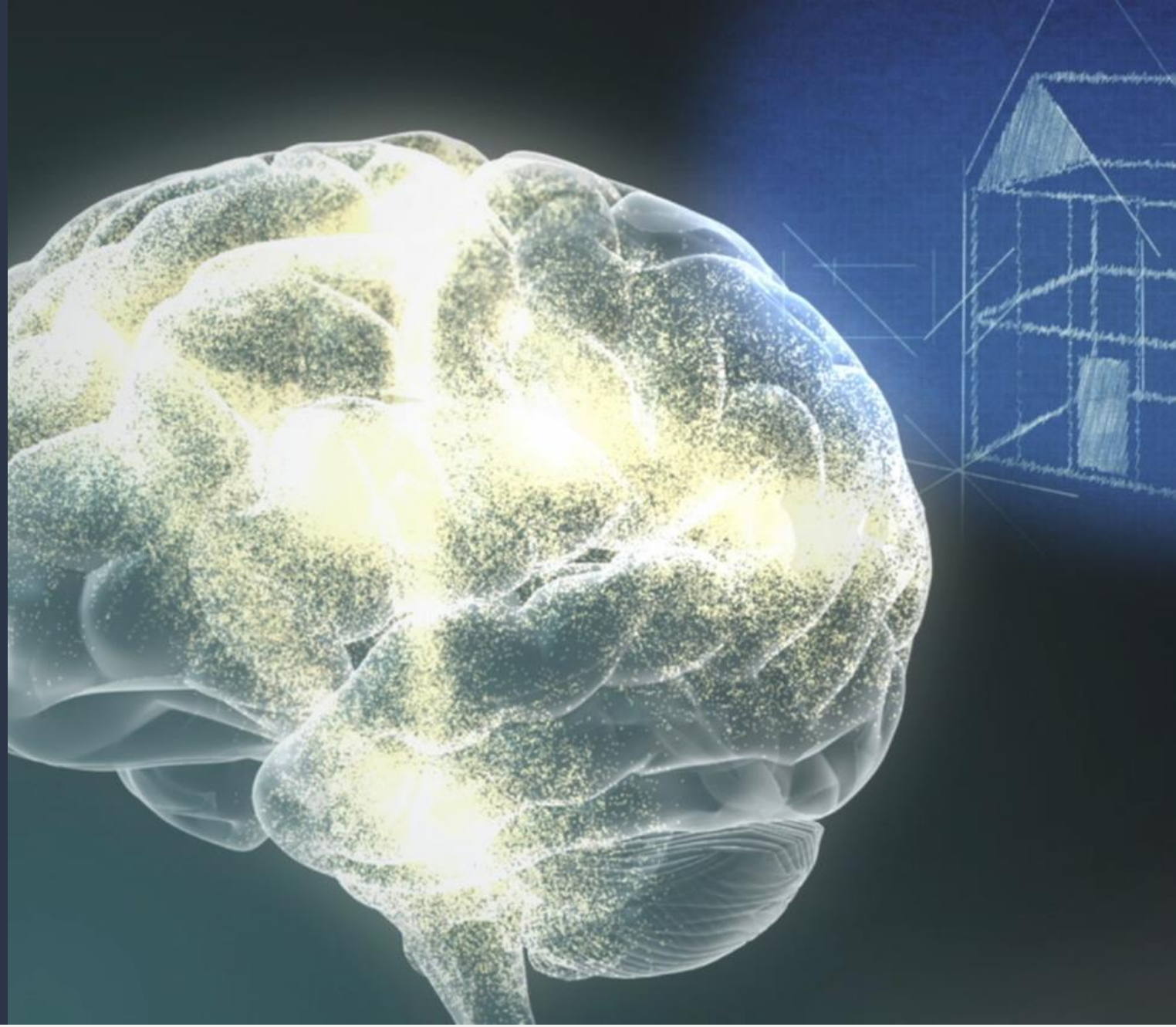
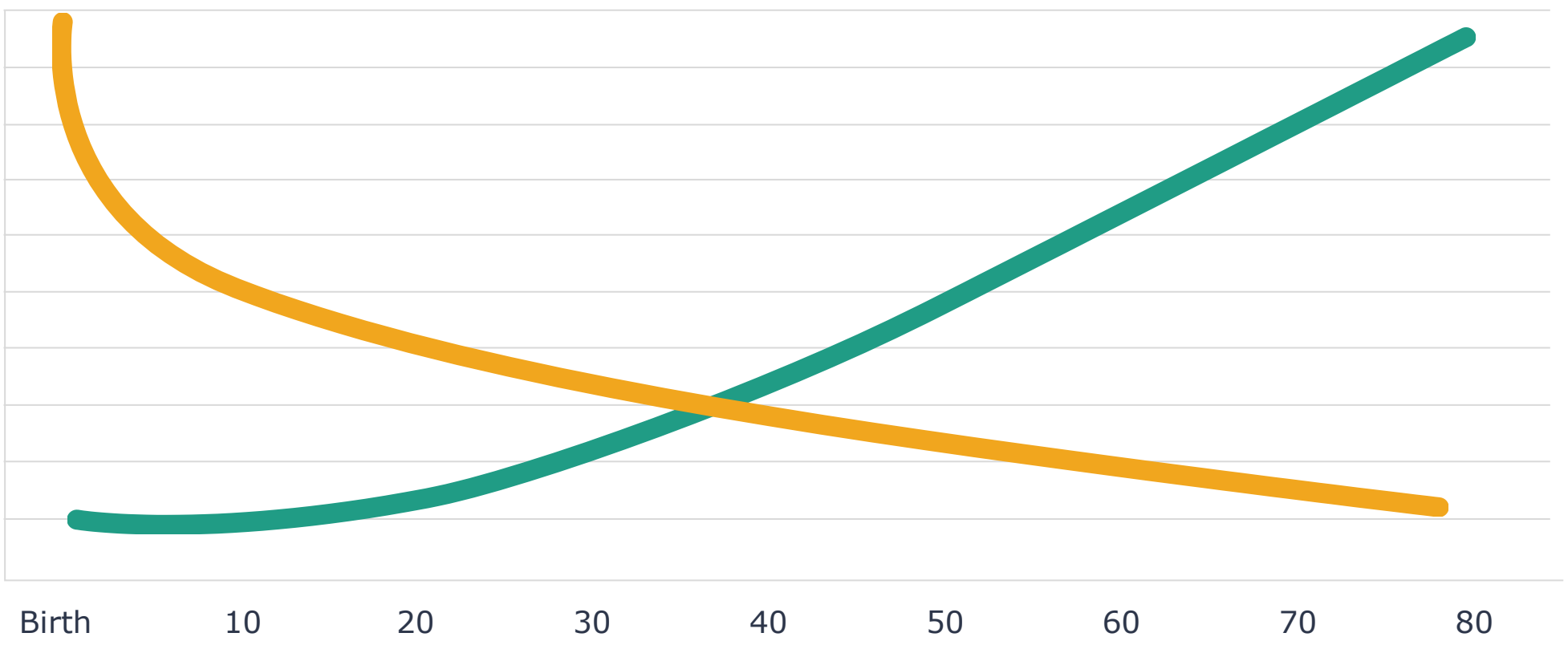
The Challenge

- The **prenatal to age three** period has the most rapid brain development & sets a foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, and health
- The protracted nature of many emergencies means millions of children spend their **entire** childhood in crisis settings
- The humanitarian response system is not set up with a focus on developmental timing

Responsive Relationships and Early Experiences Shape Brain Architecture

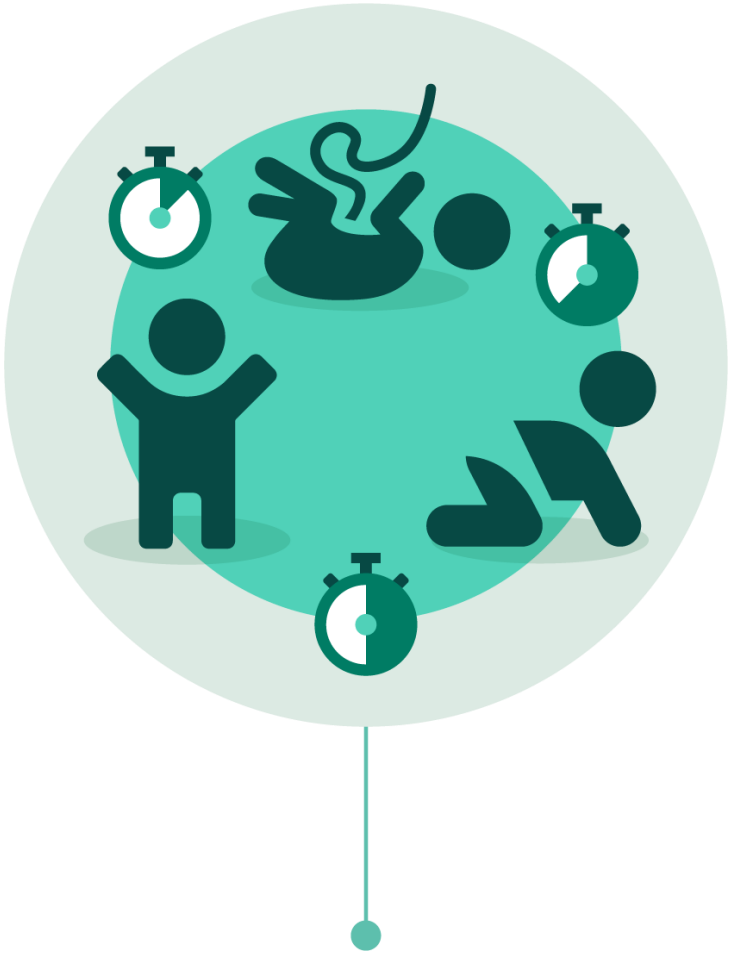


Why Early Experiences are so Important



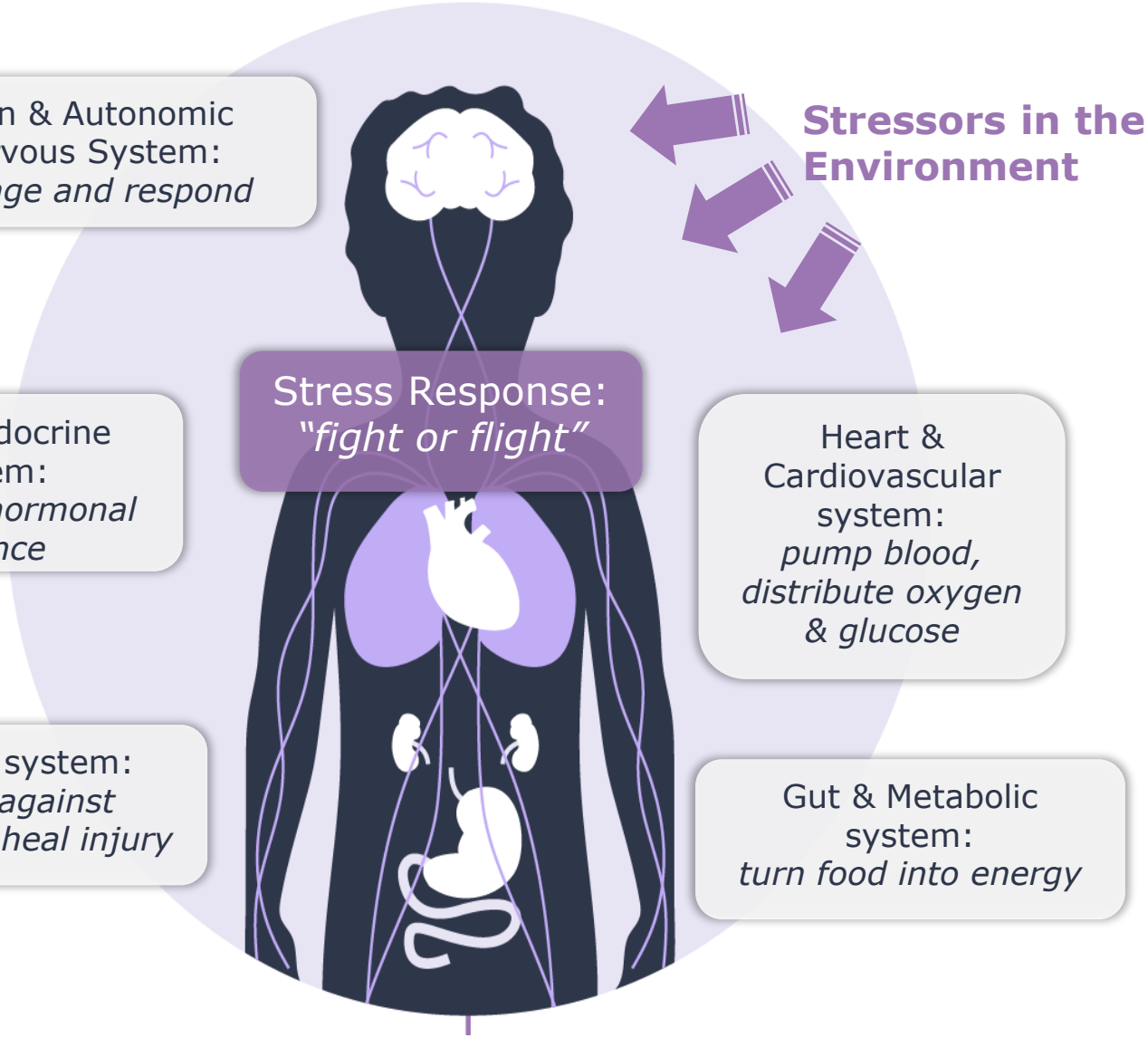
Source: Levitt (2009)

Timing Matters



Timing and critical periods

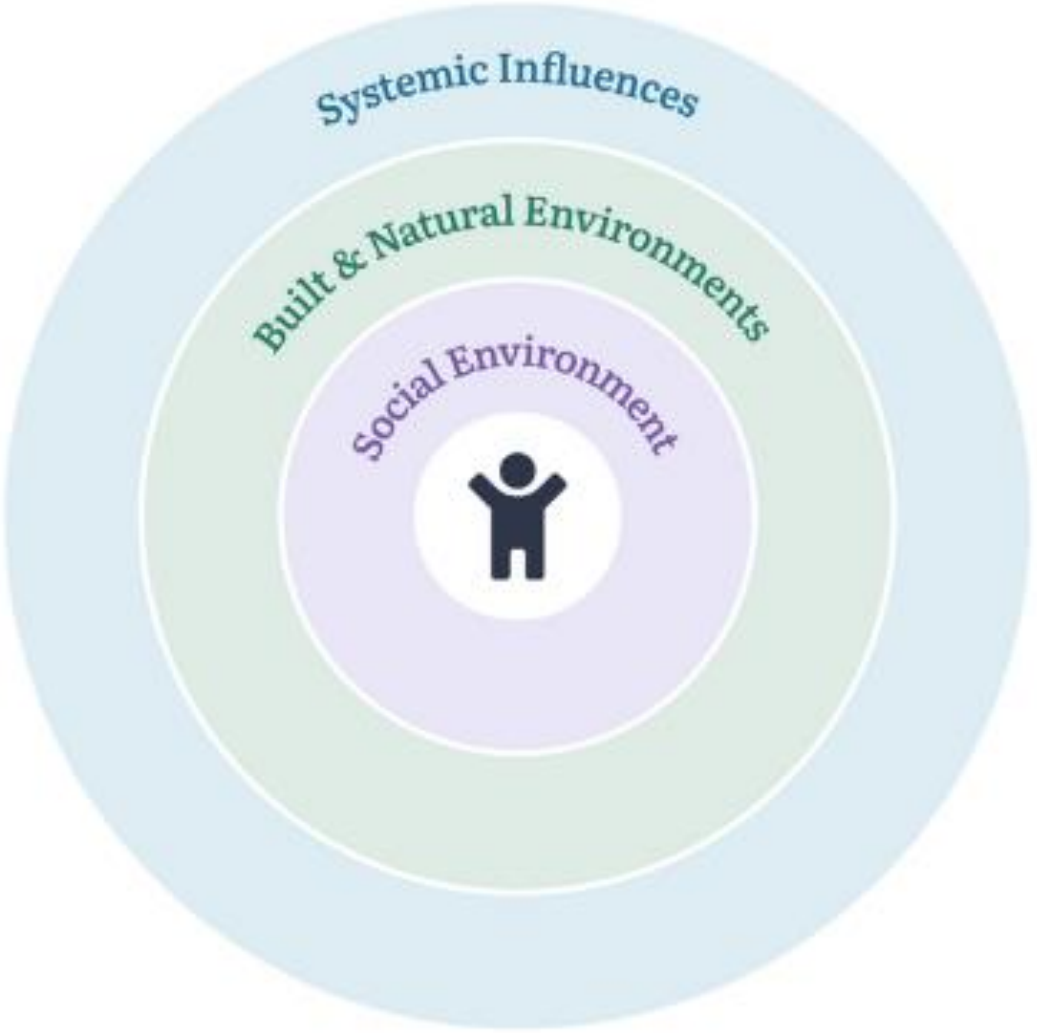
Impact of Stress on Multiple Biological Systems



Take-Home:
Supporting families with young children is as much about building a strong foundation for lifelong health as it is about early learning, social-emotional development, and school readiness.

Place Matters: What Surrounds Us Shapes Us

How the environment we create shapes the foundations of early childhood development



Social Environment

The presence or absence of key influences in a child's social environment plays an important role in their development.

- Responsive relationships
- Significant stress and adversity
- Caregiver well-being
- Social connectedness
- Community supports
- Faith and cultural traditions

Built & Natural Environments

The accessibility and exposure to various influences in a child's built and natural environments shape their development directly, by influencing their developing biological systems, and indirectly, by interacting with their environment of relationships.

- Air quality and temperature
- Clean water supply
- Safe green space
- Safe, healthy housing
- Exposure to toxins and hazards
- Economic opportunities
- Nutritious food
- Neighborhood infrastructure

Systemic Influences

Broader systemic influences such as the ones listed here shape children's development directly, while also shaping their environment of relationships and their built and natural environments.

Current and historic public policies

Systemic racism

Structural inequities

Intergenerational poverty

Healthcare system disparities

Access to quality childcare and education

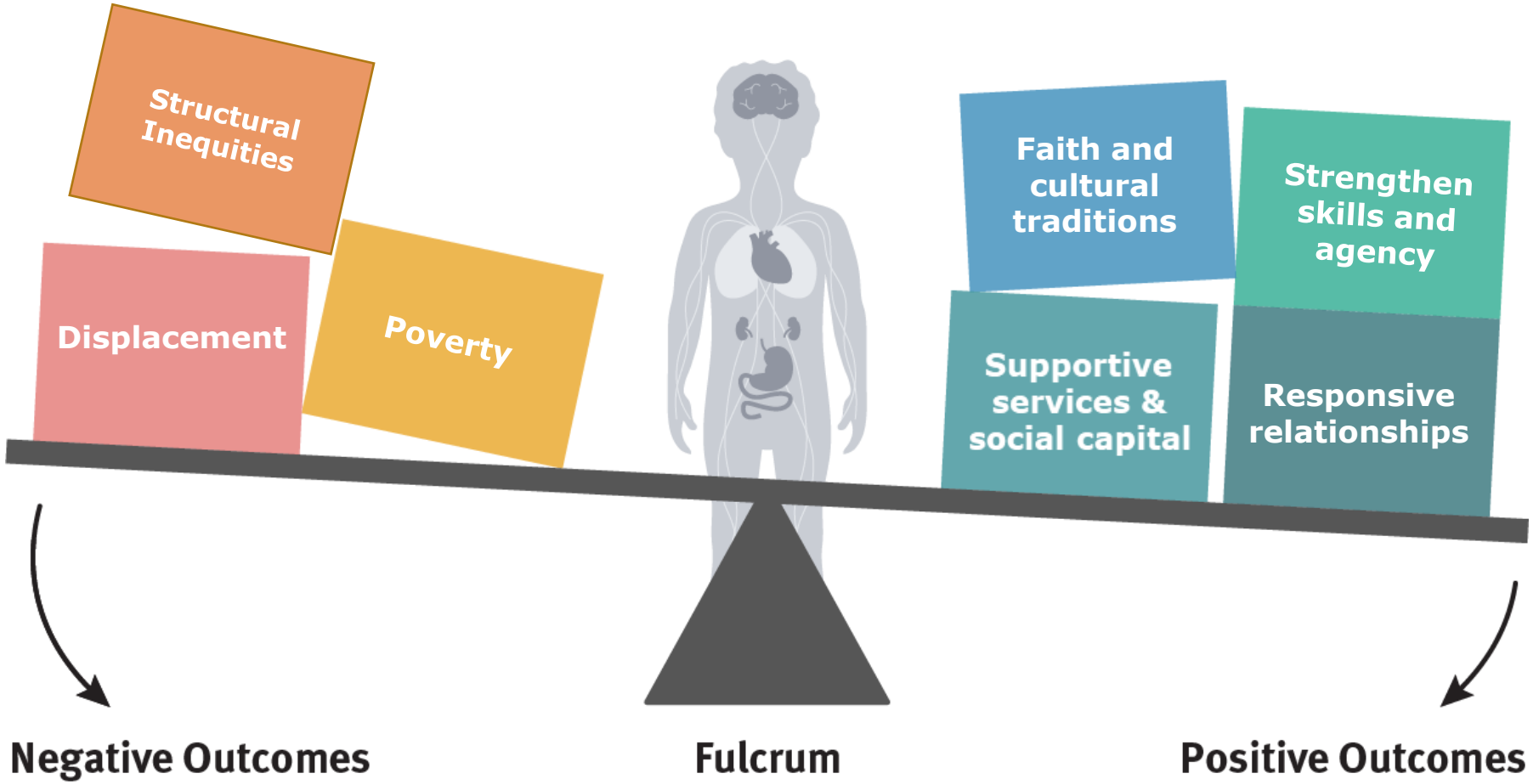
The Science of Resilience

Resilience is a positive, adaptive response in the face of significant hardship or adversity

- Resilience is built over time; it is NOT a trait
- It is the **interaction** between protective factors in the social environment and responsive biological systems
- A combination of supportive relationships, adaptive skill-building, and positive experiences form the foundation of resilience.
- Resilience can be situation-specific, not a generalizable outcome

Increasing Resilience in the Face of Adversity

by strengthening buffers and building adaptive capacities



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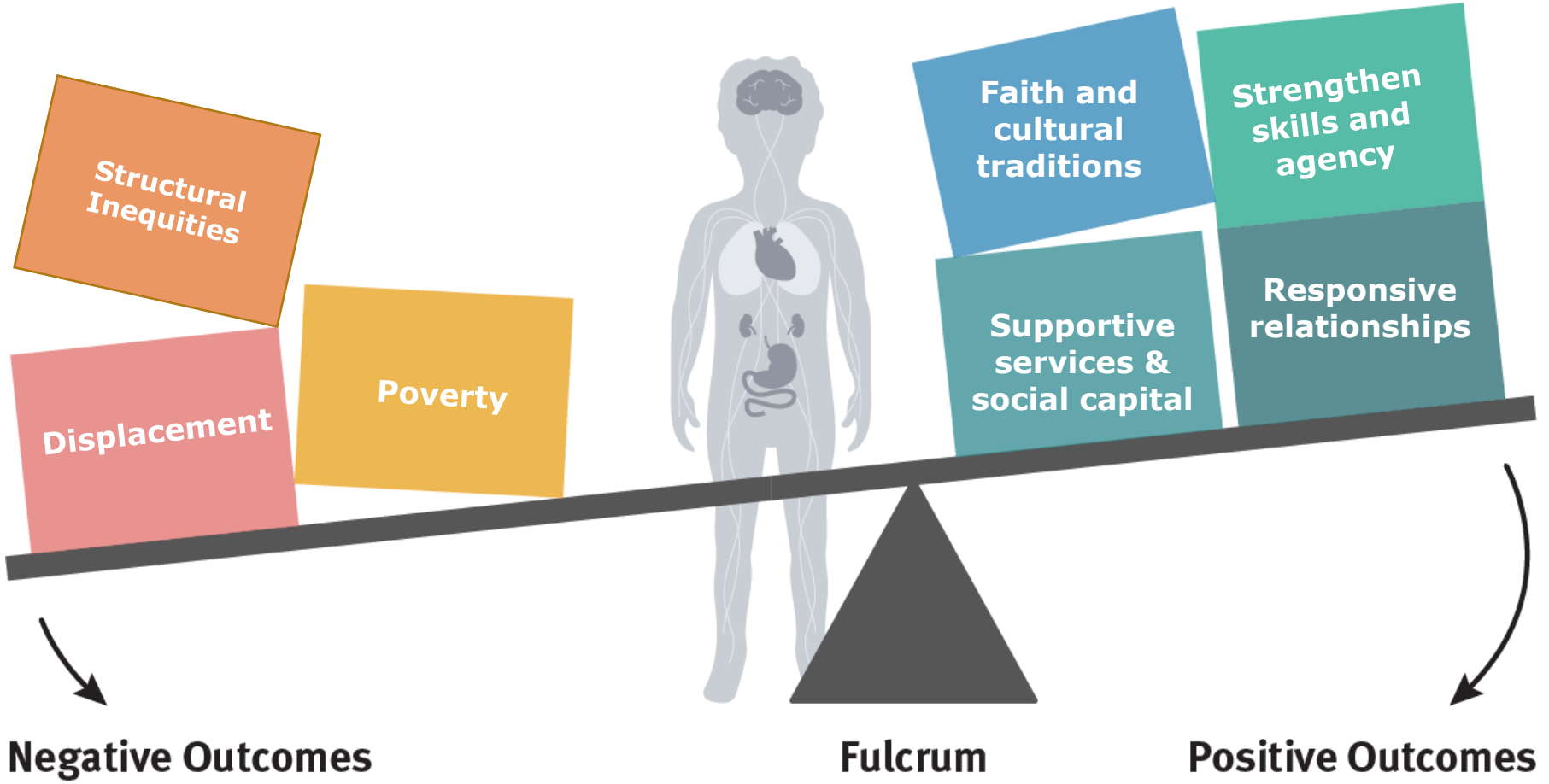
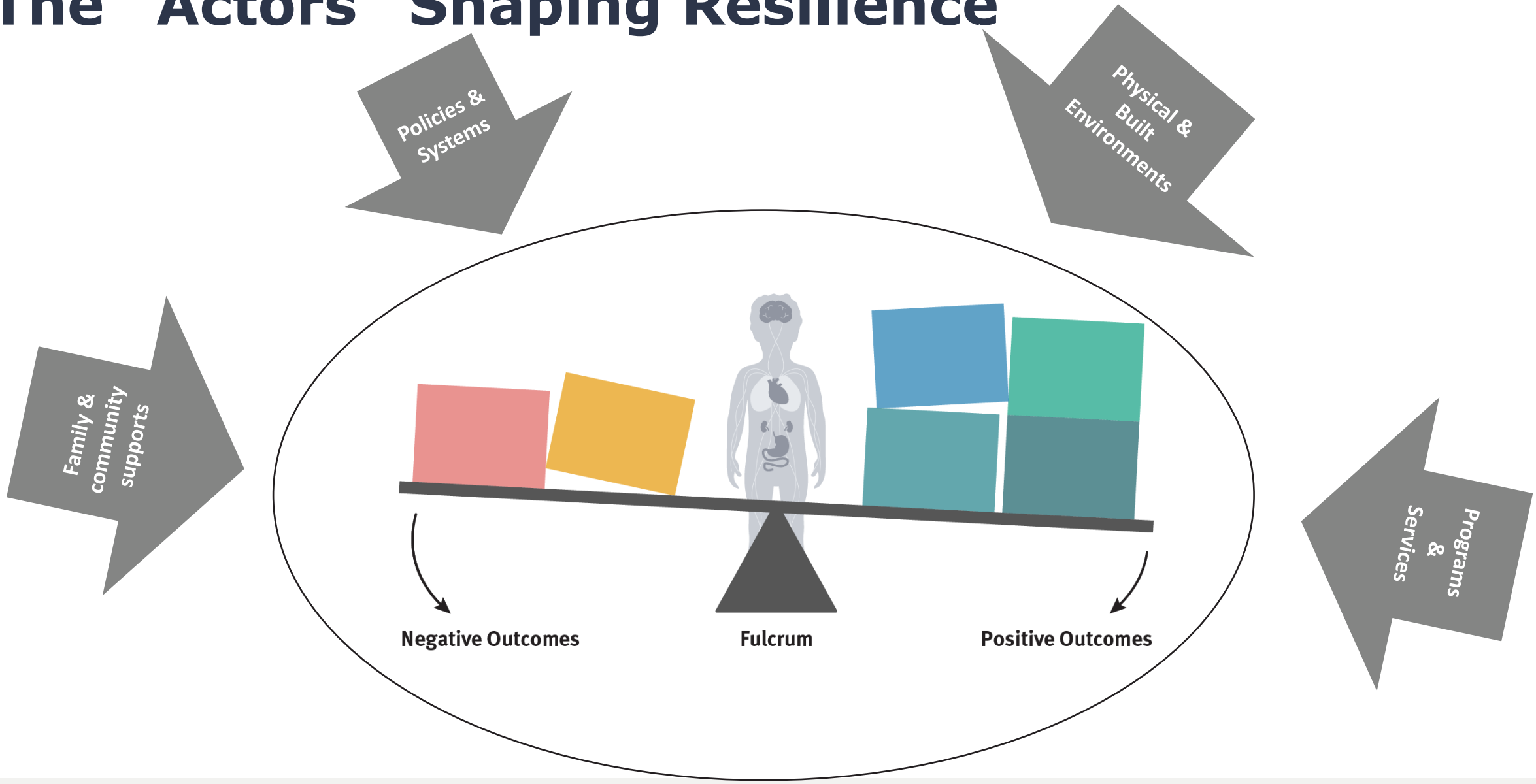
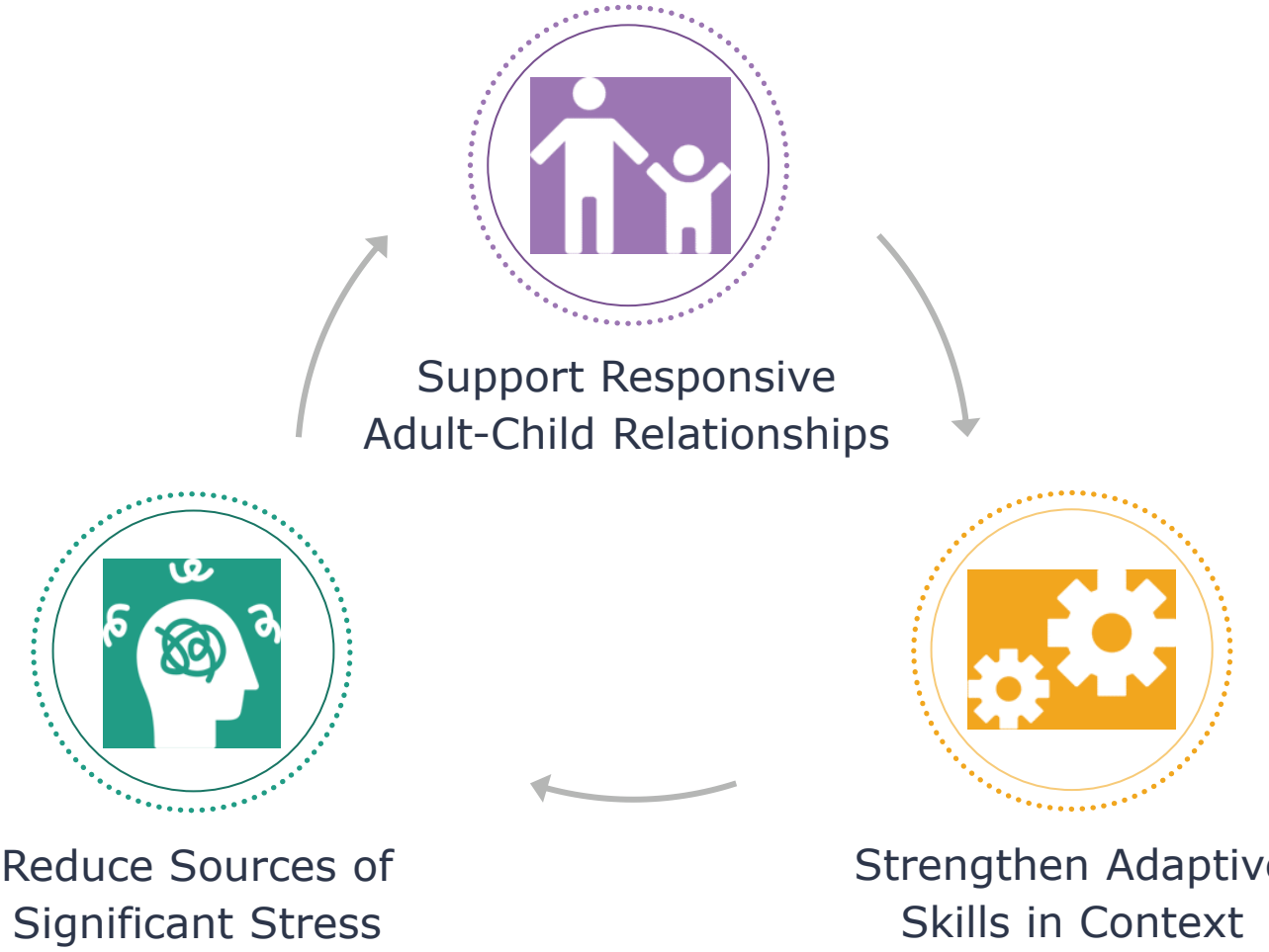


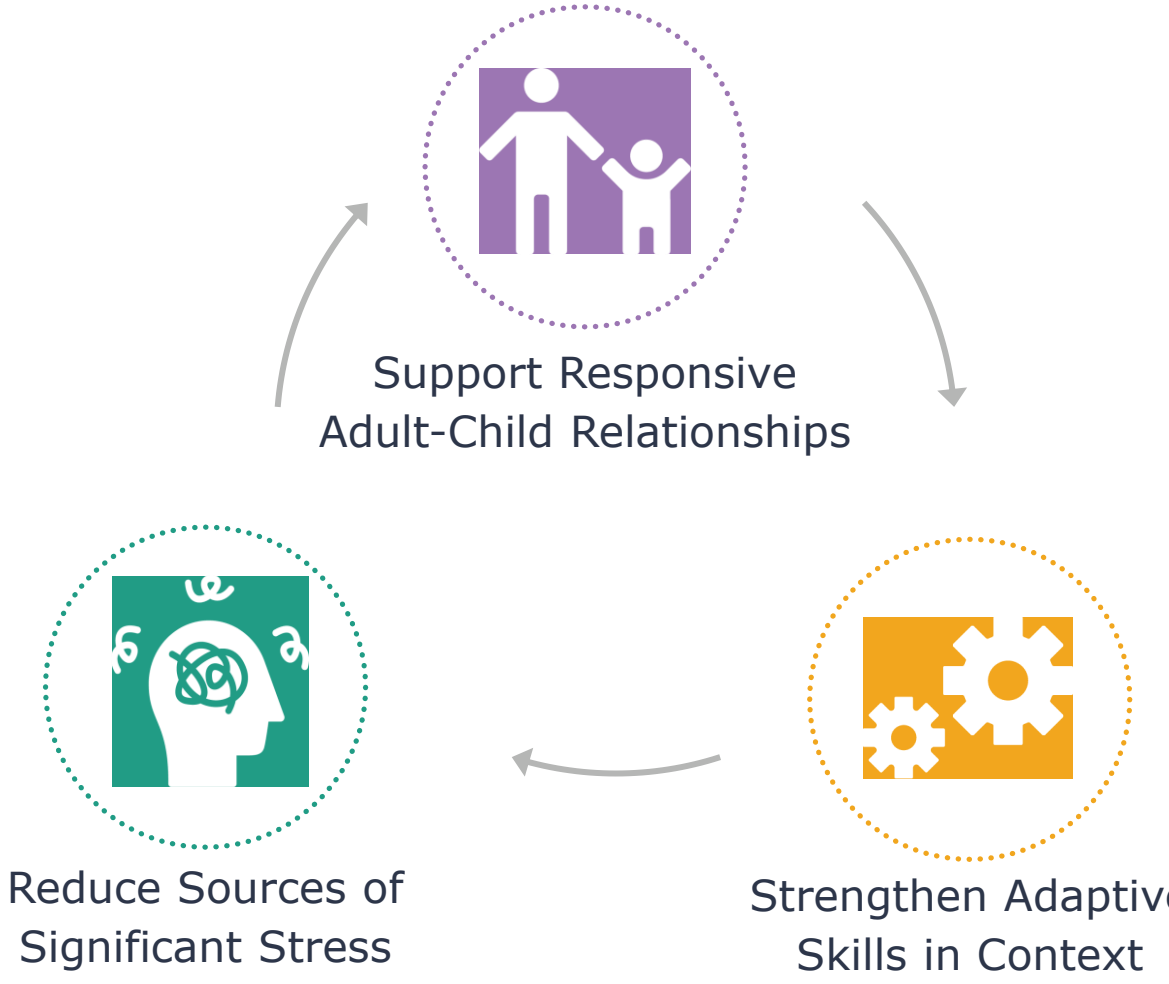
The "Actors" Shaping Resilience

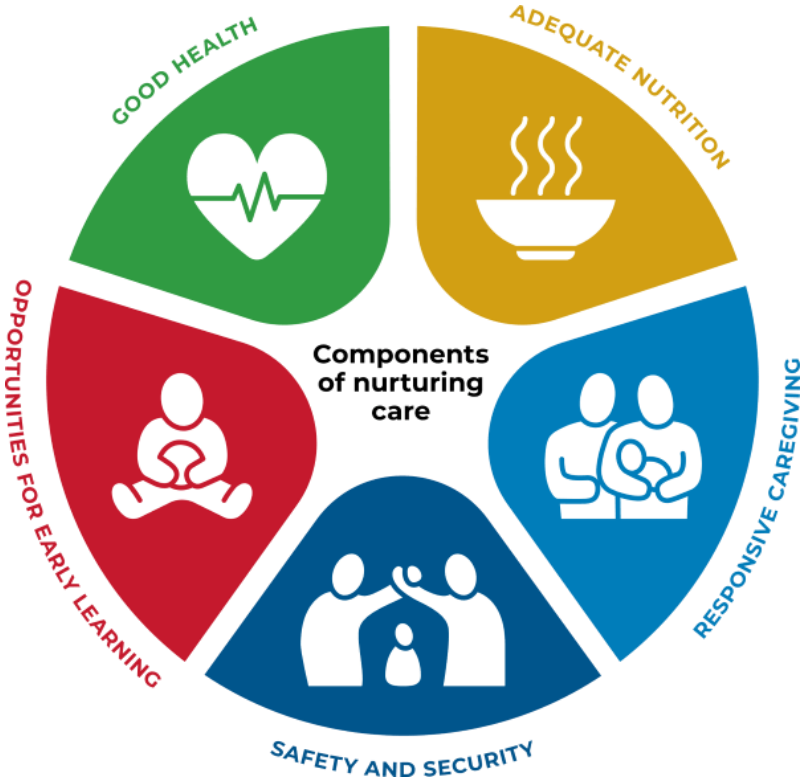


3 Science-Based Principles to Help Build Resilience



Aligning Science Principles with the Nurturing Care Framework





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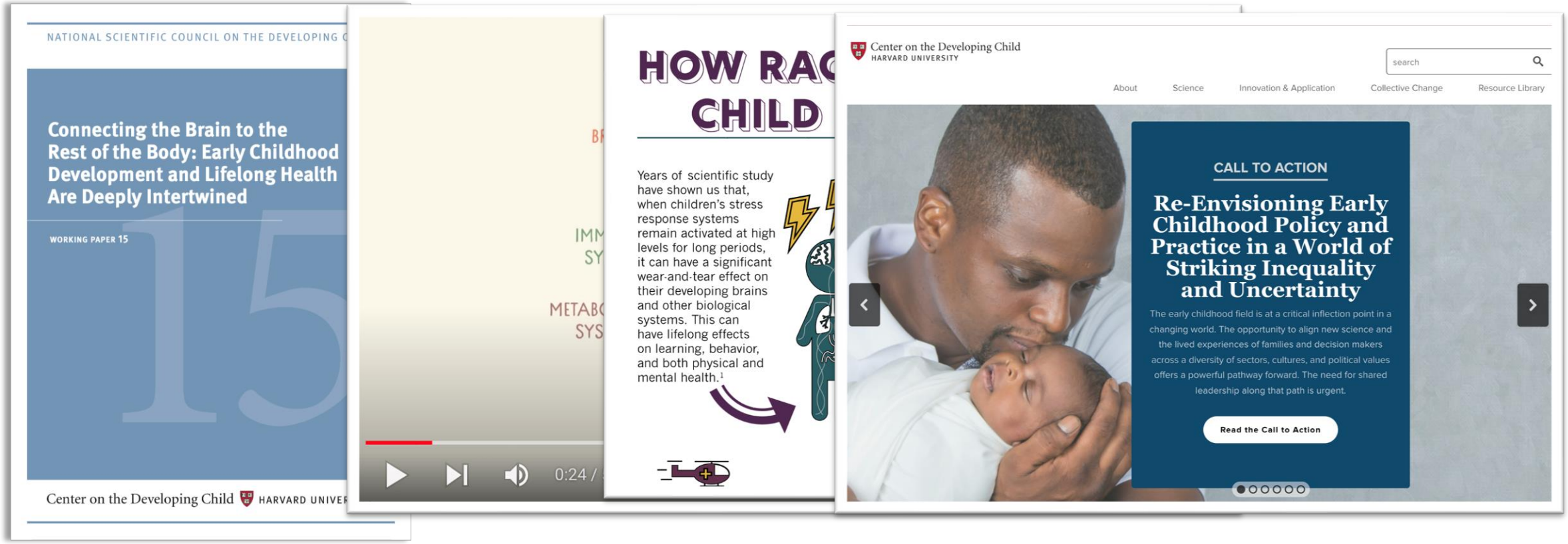

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