Communicating about Parenting- Lessons from FrameWorks Institute and *Made to Stick*

Public Health Communications Training #2

El Dorado County Public Health Department, May 2022

Colleen Bridger, MPH, PhD

COLLEEN BRIDGER CONSULTING

Innovative Solutions for the Common Good

FrameWorks 101—Review

Three questions:

#1 How do we get people to think about our issues?

#2. How do we get them to think about our issues in such a way that they will want to solve them through public policies?

#3 How do we get them to think about issues in such a way that they want to solve them through Public Health public policies?

FrameWorks 101—Review

FrameWorks Research shows us:

- People use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world.
- Incoming information provides cues about where to “file” it mentally.
- People get most information about public affairs from the news media which, over time, creates a framework of expectation, or a dominant frame.
- Over time, we develop habits of thought and expectation and configure incoming information to conform to this frame.

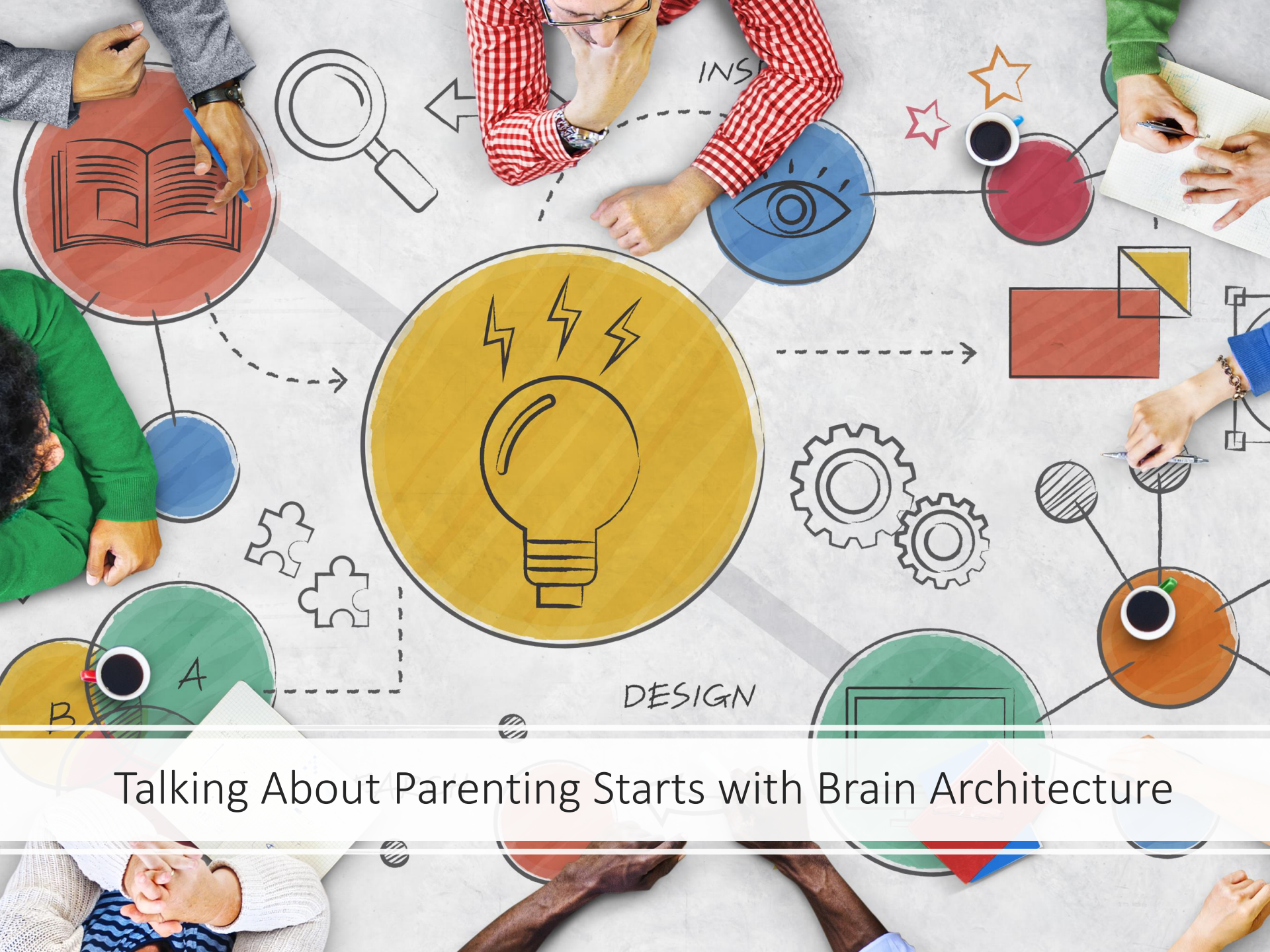
Frameworks 101—Review

Strategic Frame Analysis teaches that communications is storytelling; but the stories we tell must be thematic and contain:

1. Values, that orient the audience to the big idea or to "what's at stake" and "what this is about";
2. Simplifying Models, that concretize and simplify complex scientific explanations of how things work;
3. Reasonable tone;
4. Reinforcing visuals and
5. Effective Messengers; who weave together thematic stories that explain the link between cause and effect.

In Summary - to frame an issue:

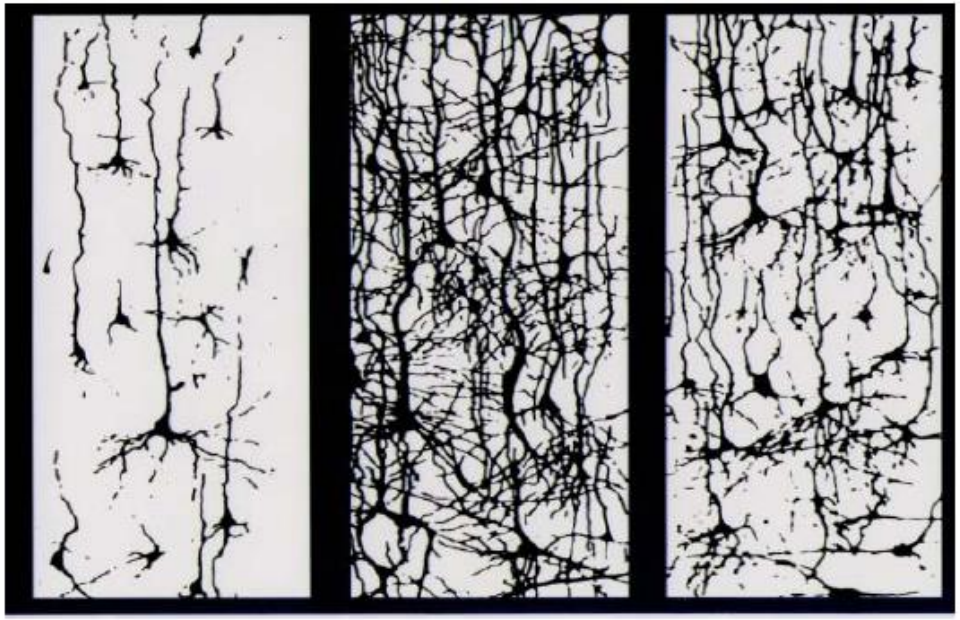
- **Know** the opposition – and the opportunities – by understanding how people think and feel about this issue
- **Make** deliberate choices when presenting information: what to emphasize, what to explain and what to leave unsaid
- **Trigger** certain ways of thinking and bypass others – it's very hard to argue against a feeling or belief once it's activated
- **Show** why it matters by aligning solutions with people's ideals of what's desirable and good
- **Show** that change is possible, not that problems are insurmountable
- **Give** your audience ways to think differently instead of meeting them where they are



Talking About Parenting Starts with Brain Architecture

Brain Architecture

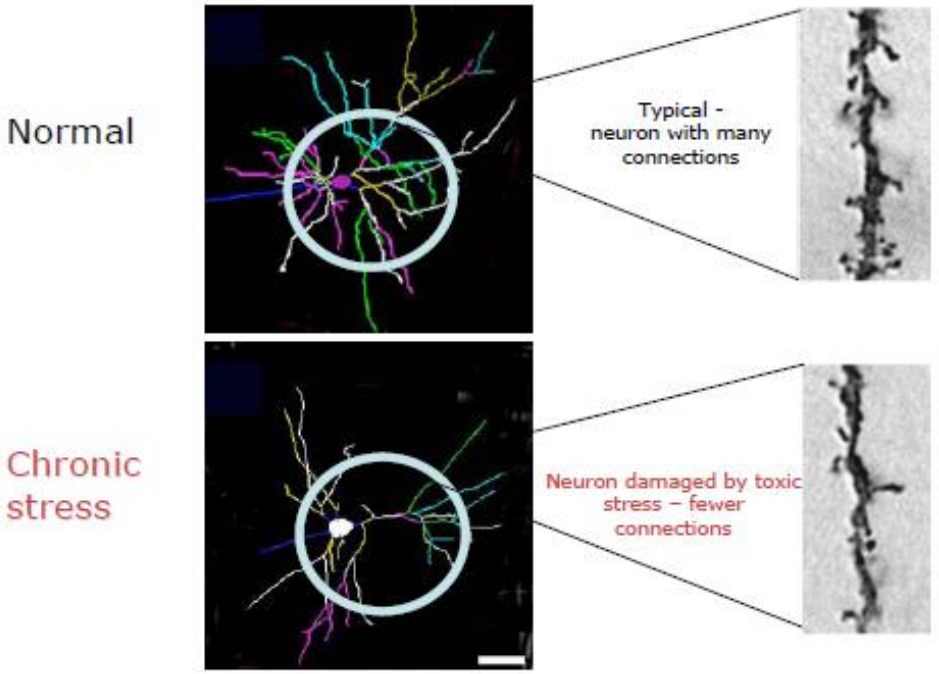
Experience Shapes Brain Architecture by Over-Production Followed by Pruning



birth 6 years 14 years

Toxic Stress

Persistent Stress Changes Brain Architecture

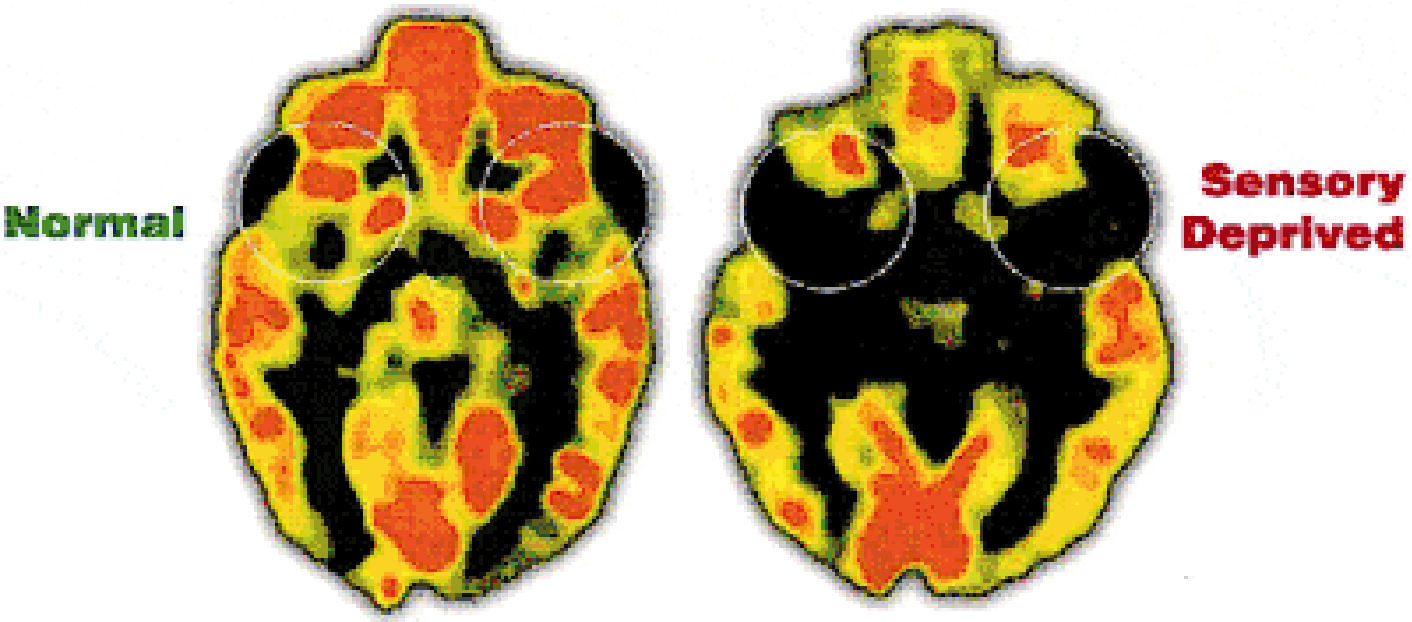


Prefrontal Cortex and Hippocampus

Source: C. Nelson (2008)
Bock et al Cer Cort 15:802 (2005)

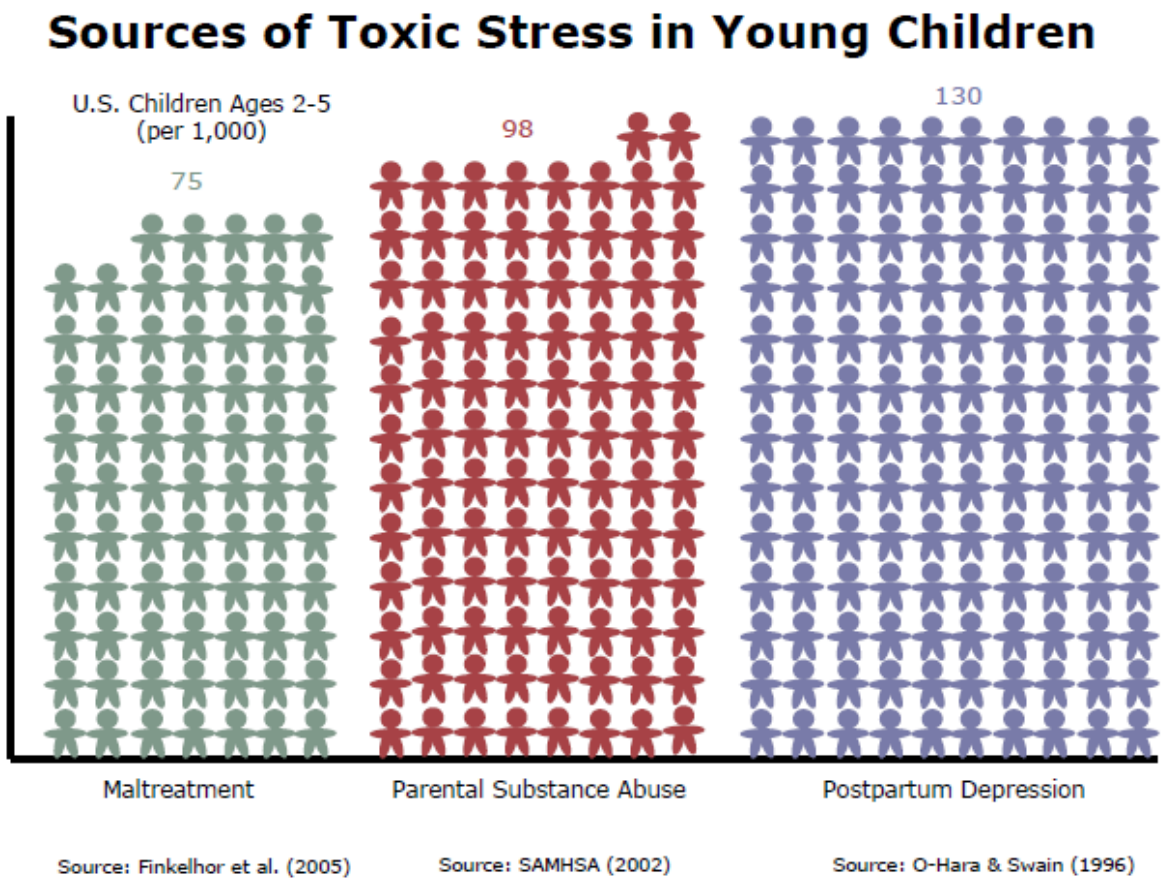
Toxic Stress

Normal vs. Deprived Brain of a Three Year Old Child

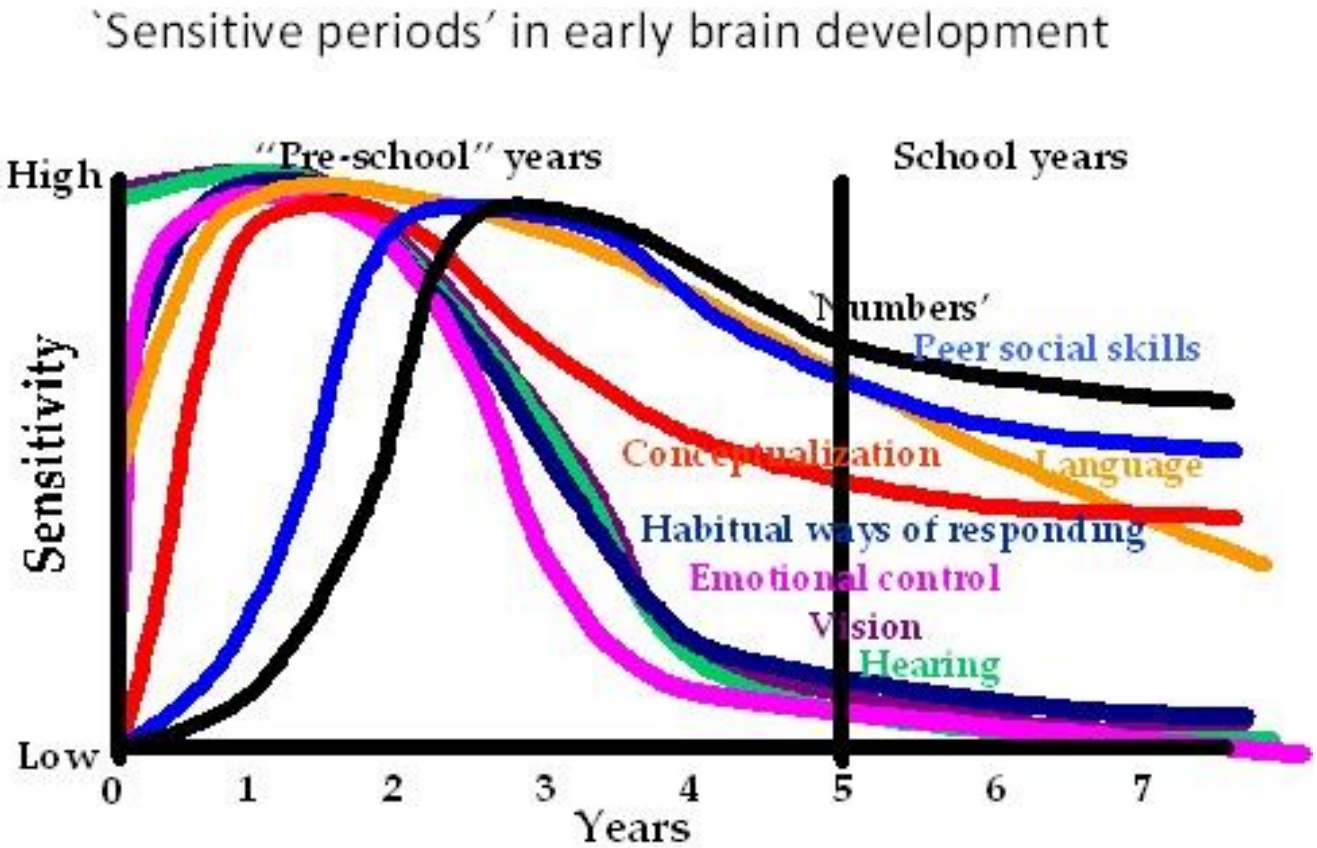


Source: Neweweek, Spring/Summer 1997 Special Edition: "Your Child: From Birth to Three", pp. 30-31.

Toxic Stress



Early Childhood Matters

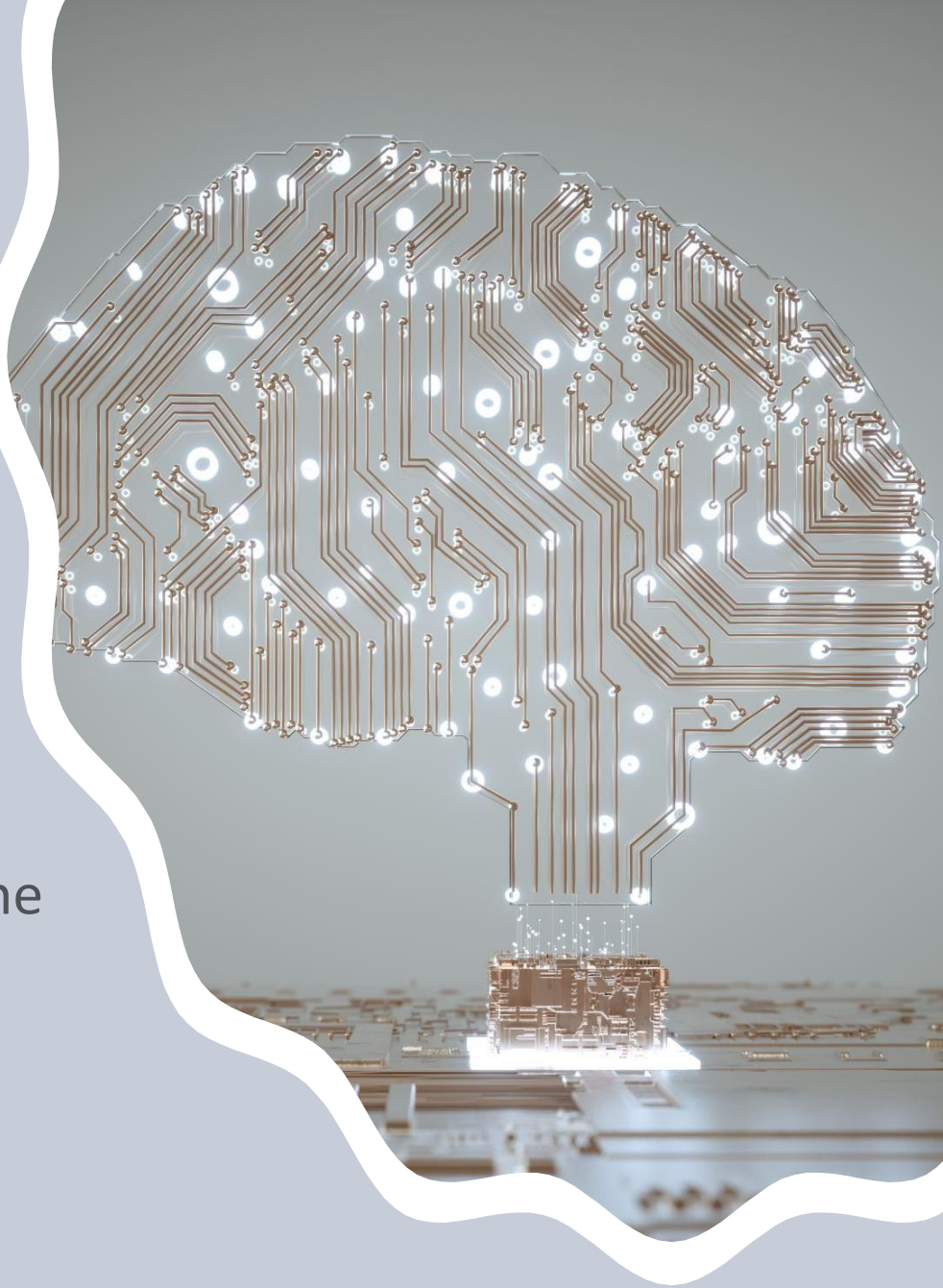


Graph developed by **Council for Early Child Development** (ref: Nash, 1997; *Early Years Study*, 1999; Shonkoff, 2000.)

Strategic Frame Analysis – Simplifying Models

- Brain Architecture
  - Solid foundation
  - Getting it right the first time

- Toxic Stress
  - Toxic chemicals that damage the developing architecture
  - Can be mediated with support



Strategic Frame Analysis - Values

Prosperity: As we look for ways to keep our country prosperous, we need to think of the connection between child development and economic development.

Ingenuity: When we invent and replicate high quality programs for young children, we can solve problems in early childhood development and show significant long-term improvements for children.

Responsible Manager: Addressing problems before they get worse is the responsible way to manage our society's future.

Made to Stick
Simple
Unexpected
Concrete
Credible
Emotions
Stories

Simple

Components

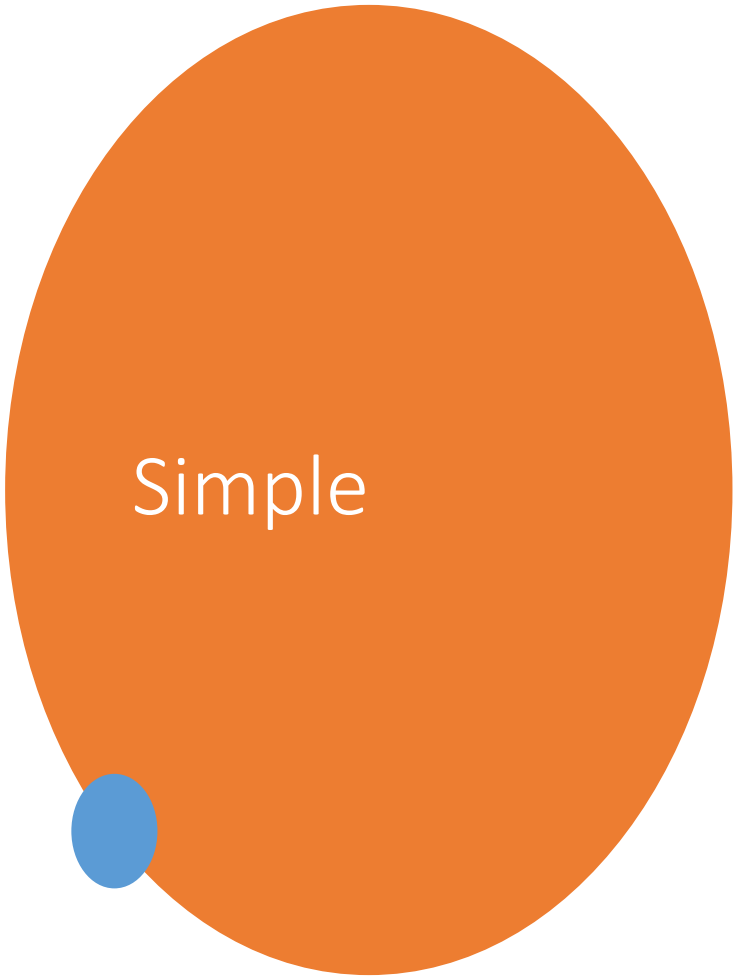
- Core
- “If you say three things you don’t say anything”
- Curse of knowledge
- Analogies

Example – School Readiness

Simple?

School Readiness

MMSR defines school readiness as the state of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences. As a result of family nurturing and interactions with others, a young child in this stage has reached certain levels of social and emotional development, cognition and general knowledge, language development, and physical well-being and motor development. School readiness acknowledges individual approaches toward learning as well as the unique experiences and backgrounds of each child.



School Readiness

A child who is healthy, rested, curious, friendly and able to follow simple instructions is ready for school.

Unexpected

Components

- Get people's attention
- Gap Theory
- The big red X
- Consensus vs. Disagreement

Example – Importance of School Readiness

Unexpected?

Why is School Readiness Important?

The latest research on early childhood, brain science and the readiness of children for school has taken on a new focus and new urgency. Our centers are providing agencies and programs an opportunity to collaborate for the purpose of ensuring readiness of all children. Children's success in school prepares them for success in life.

Unexpected

Why is School Readiness Important?

Because states build prisons based on the number of 8-year-olds who fail reading tests.

Concrete

Components

- Say what you mean vs. “idiopathic cardiomyopathy”
- Make it real (brown eyes or blue eyes)
- Velcro theory
- Abstractspeak

Example – Parenting

Concrete ?

Parenting Support

Good parenting is hard work and all parents struggle at some time. Parents need support to give their children the best start in life.

Concrete

Parenting Support

The skills that children start to develop when they're very young like problem solving and planning couldn't be more important. Parents help build these skills and by supporting them we help children develop a strong foundation for their brain architecture

Concrete

The Importance of Early Brain Development

The vast majority of human brain development occurs between the ages of zero to three years. Due to this, it is of great importance that parents attempt to stimulate their child's mind from, or even before birth. The reason for this is as follows: "At birth the human brain is still preparing for full operation. The brain's neurons exist mostly apart from another. The brain's task for the first three years is to establish connections with other neurons. These connections are formed when impulses are sent and received between neurons. Axons send messages and dendrites receive them. These connections form synapses. As a child develops, the synapses become more complex, like a tree with more branches and limbs growing."

Concrete

The Importance of Early Brain Development

Take 5 minutes to come up with a more concrete description of the importance of early brain development.

Framing Parenting – The Big Idea

The big idea on an issue is what we say it's *really* about. Why an issue matters--and *what's at stake if we do nothing**

We can change the big idea of parenting with a child development or "Brain Architecture" frame

This frame avoids criticizing or judging parents. It grounds our story in what effective parenting is really for – children, and their healthy development

Big ideas guide thinking

The child development frame:

Focuses on children and what they need to thrive, rather than blaming or evaluating parenting

Establishes the importance of interaction with parents and caregivers to child development, rather than assuming that young children simply grow

Helps people to see that circumstances shape options, rather than assuming that good parenting comes naturally to individuals

Framing Parenting – The Big Idea

By framing parenting as a child development issue that matters to all of us, we prime our audience to see how they have a role in creating change

Example:

‘The skills that kids start to develop when they’re very young couldn’t be more important. Our children need us to get this right – and parents need more support.’

This doesn’t assert a moral high ground. It instead establishes our shared – and unmistakable – grounds for action

Primary Metaphor: Navigating Waters

To develop in a healthy way, children need life to be on an even keel. But for families experiencing poverty and stress, raising children can be like sailing in rough waters. Just as we provide lighthouses and safe harbors, we can help parents with support like counselling, quality childcare and financial support.

Shows:

Effective parenting needs skill and practice

Is influenced by a range of factors – and not just how someone was parented

What effective parenting looks like at different times – and that it's important in the early years.

COLLEEN BRIDGER CONSULTING

Innovative Solutions for the Common Good

Questions?

Colleen M. Bridger, MPH, PhD