

Social-Emotional Needs of Children in High-Risk Contexts

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Empowering Children and Families in the Child Welfare System

- Support relationships between children and caregivers
 - Biological parents
 - Foster parents
 - Relatives
 - Other Caregivers
- Promote stable and nurturing relationships

Maltreatment and child outcomes

- Maltreatment is a significant risk factor for negative developmental outcomes
 - Not all children who are abused and neglected show negative outcomes
 - Early intervention is critical

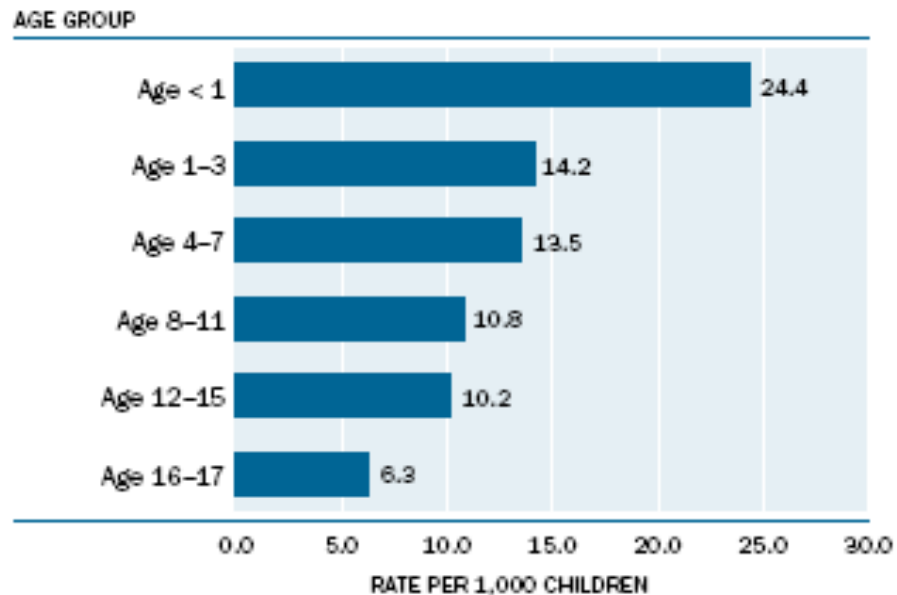
Maltreatment and child outcomes

- Children under 3 may suffer the greatest impact (Osofsky & Lederman, 2004)
 - Development progresses rapidly
 - Foundation for later cognitive and social-emotional development
 - Interrupts positive interactions that are critical for stable nurturing relationships

Rate of victimization

- Inversely related to child age

**Figure 3-3 Victimization Rates
by Age Group, 2006**



Based on data from table 3-9.

(US Dept. of Health and
Human Services, 2008)

Why infants and toddlers are unique

- Developmental Perspective
 - Behavioral and biological systems are developing
 - Early experience has more long-lasting consequences
- Relationship Perspective
 - Centrality of attachment relationships
 - Necessary for survival; biologically hard-wired
 - Quality of parenting -- intergenerational links
- Biobehavioral Perspective
 - Development at behavioral, emotional, and biological levels
 - Dysregulation seen at each of these levels in foster children

Emotional development in infancy

- Begins at birth
 - Express emotions
 - Interpret the emotions of others
 - Regulate emotions
 - Develop an attachment to an important caregiver

What Is Attachment?

- **Biological basis**
- **Regulates response to threat/anxiety**
- **How children keep themselves "safe"**
- **Schema: Parental care**



Development & Attachment

- Developing attachment bond
 - 1- to 4- months: recognition and emerging preferences
 - By 4 months: communicating preference for primary caregiver (e.g., more easily soothed, smiling more often)
 - By 7- months: the onset of focused attachment
 - Typically with one primary attachment figure
 - With mobility– seeking proximity in times of danger or threat
 - Crying or protest when separated from attachment figure

Types of Attachment

- Secure (*60- 75% of population*)
- Insecure
 - Avoidant (*15-25%*)
 - Ambivalent (*10-15%*)
- Disorganized (*10-12%*)
 - *Controlling (punitive & caregiving)*
 - *Mixed strategy*

**Strategy for
seeking
Proximity**

Early Attachment and Later Childhood Adjustment



○ **Secure children:**

- Higher levels of social competence
- View others as available and valuable
- Have more friends and display more empathy
- Are more enthusiastic and confident in problem-solving (school readiness)
- Fewer behavior problems
- Better language skills
- School readiness at age 3
- More self regulatory skills

Early Attachment and Later Childhood Adjustment



○ **Insecure & Disorganized children:**

- Engage with distrust or aggressive behavior
- Have feelings of low self-worth, sadness, & anger
- Expect negative interactions with others – “giving up” or “acting badly”
- More internalizing and externalizing problems

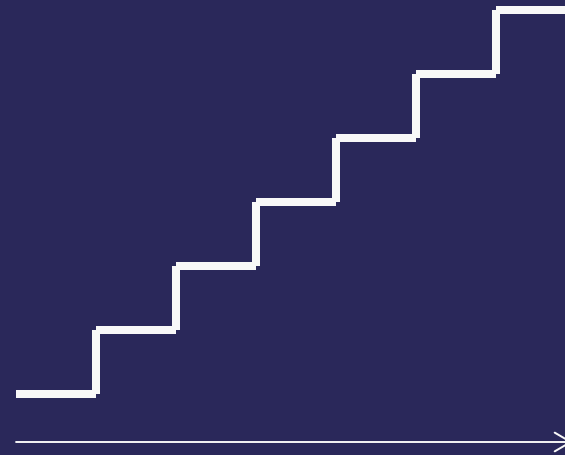
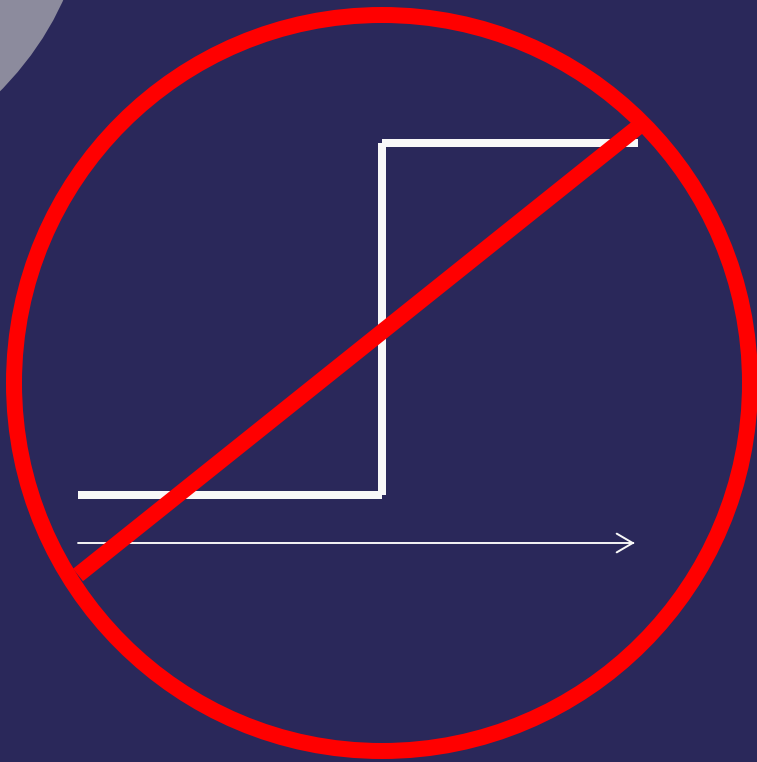
Emotion Regulation

- Ability to adapt and manage feeling states and physical arousal in response to stimuli (Cole, martin & Dennis, 2004)
- Maintain homeostasis of biological and behavioral responses to emotions
- Foundation for sharing, turn taking, dealing with anger and jealousy, focused attention, friendship (Goldberg, 2000; Zeanah et al., 2000)

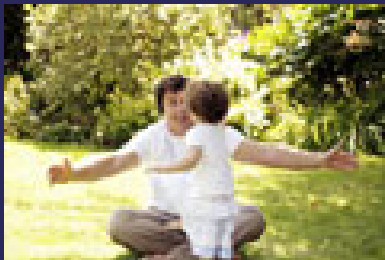
Brain Development

- At birth the brain is still developing
- Bottom-up
 - Brainstem
 - Limbic system
 - Cortex
- Experience expectant
- Experience dependent

Models for Understanding the Process of Developing Relationships...



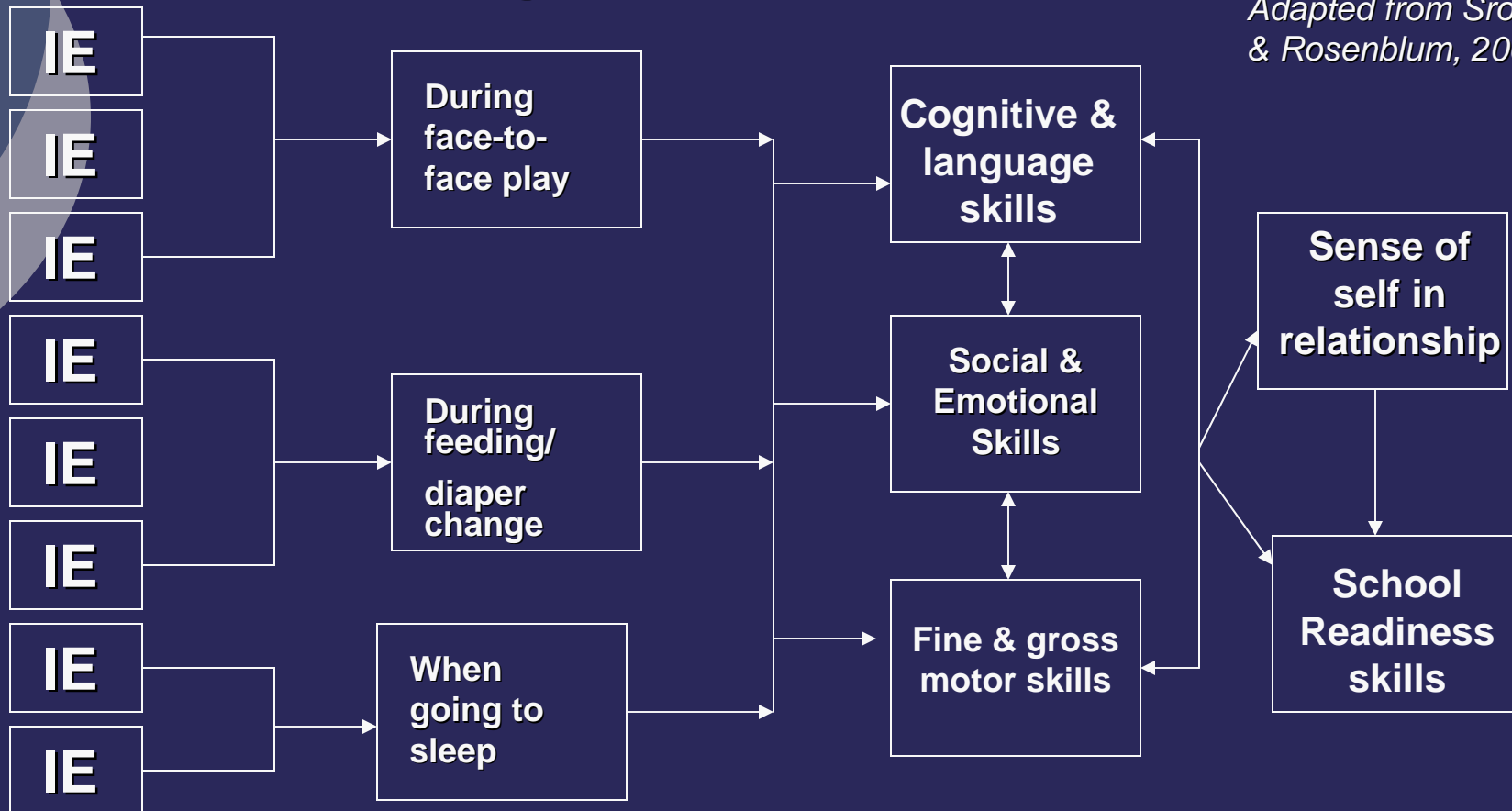
All development takes place in the context of relationships



Development and Relationships

Being with....

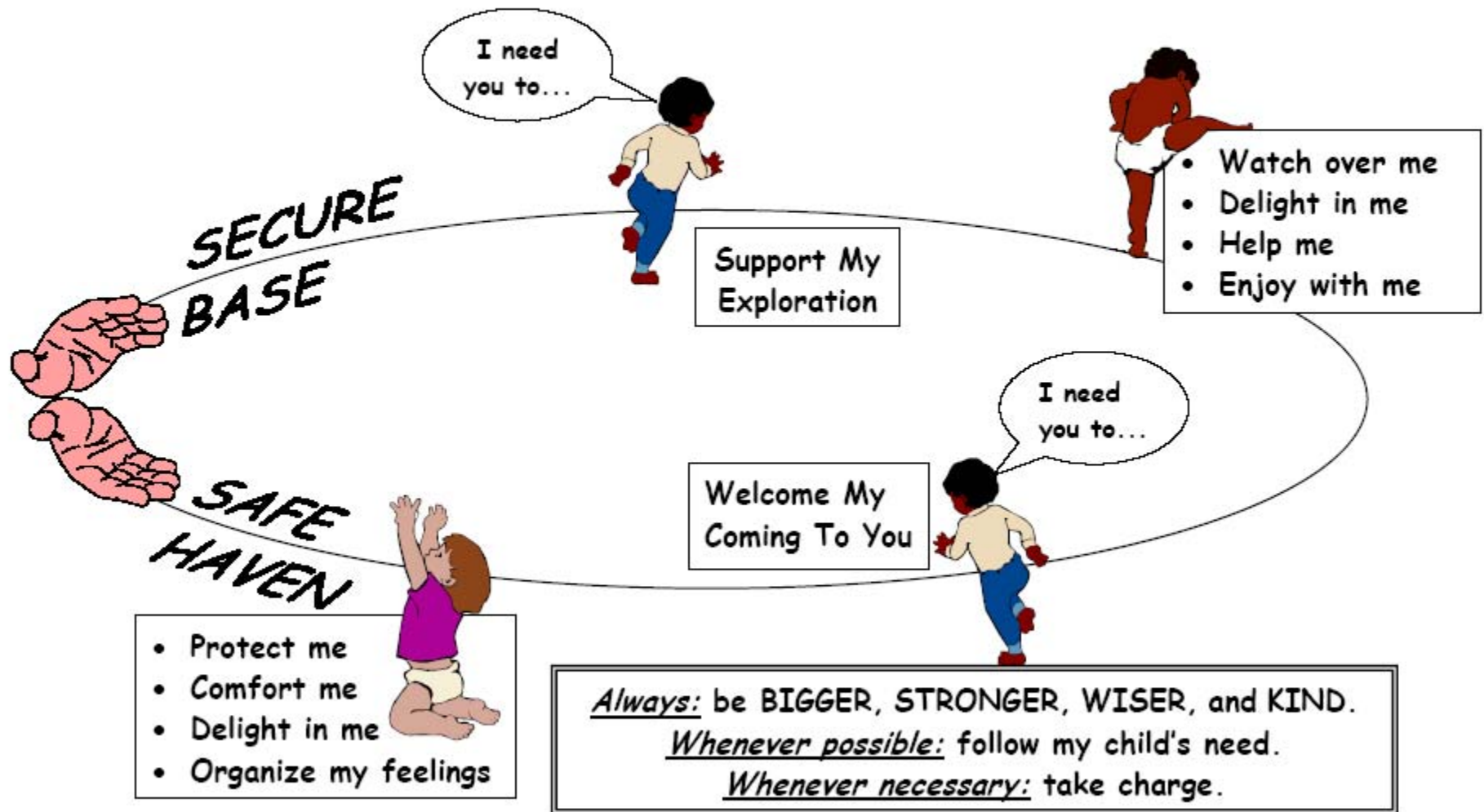
*Adapted from Sroufe, 1989
& Rosenblum, 2008*



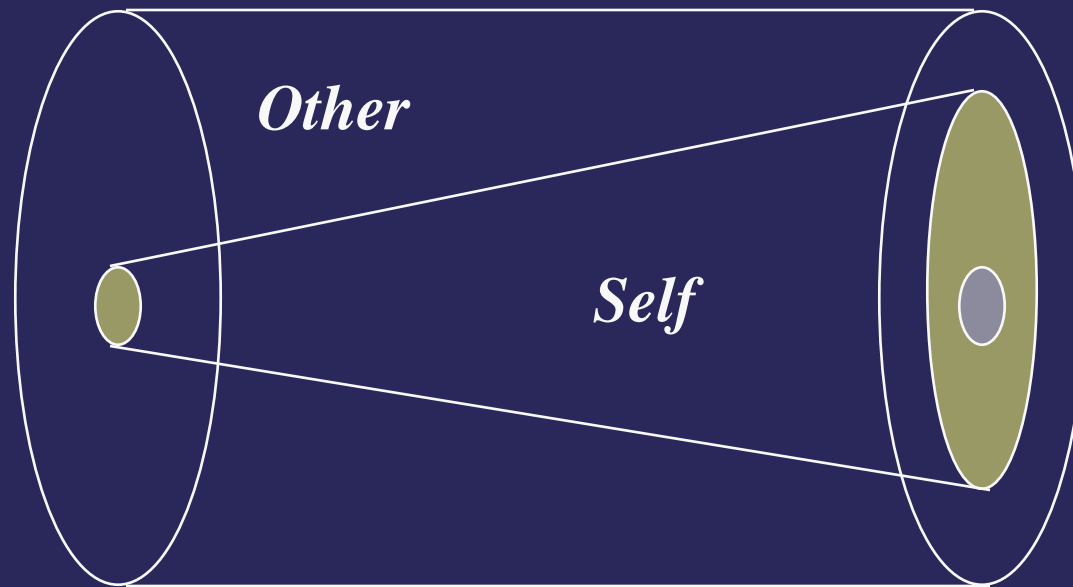
IE=Interactive Events

CIRCLE OF SECURITY

PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS

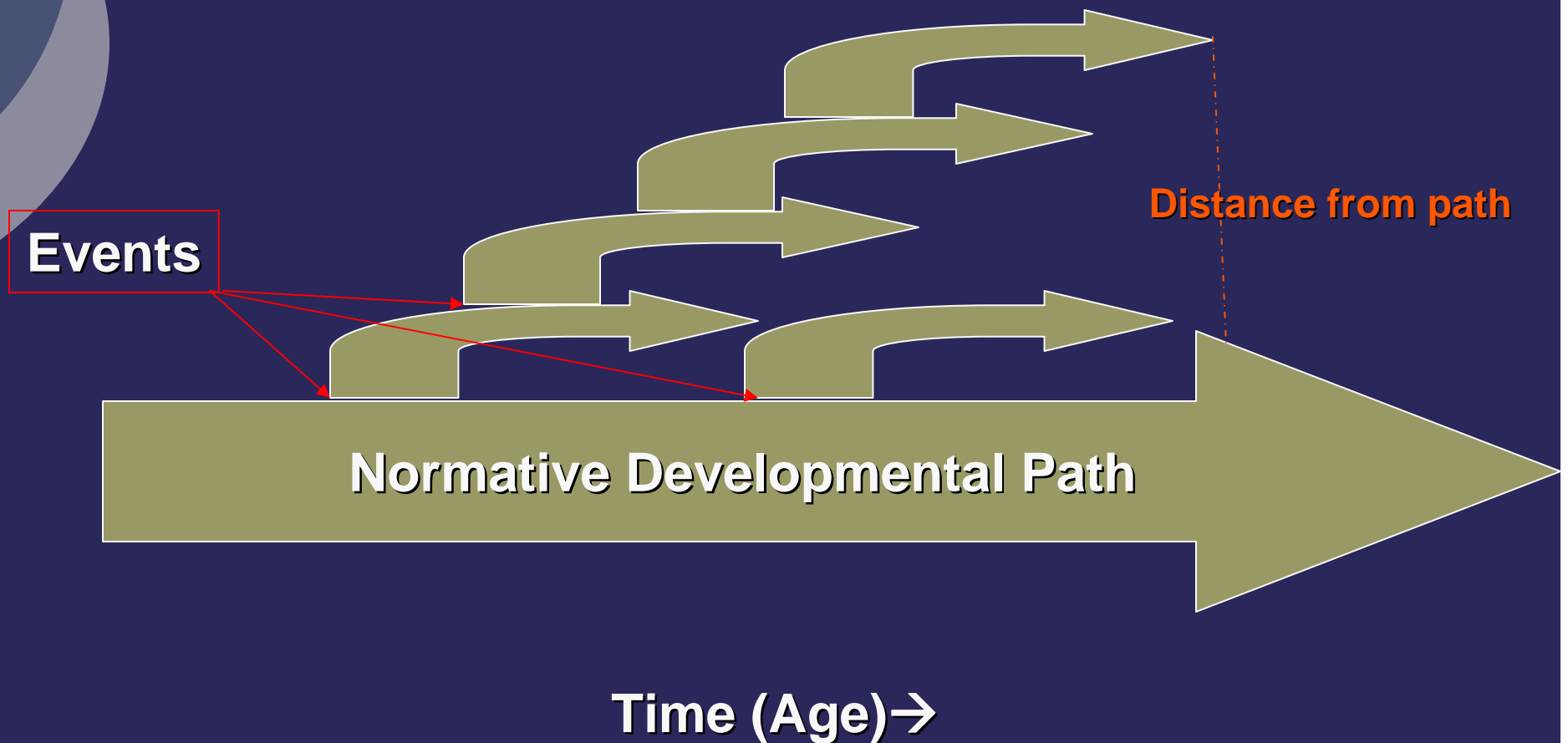


Other regulation becomes internalized as self-regulation



Development →

Early experiences tend to have greater impacts



The Power of Early Interactions

- Parent-infant interaction– the “dance” – forms the basis for evaluations of self-efficacy, worth, lovability, regulation & coping (Stern, 1989)
- Interplay between emotional development and brain development (Cook et al., 2005; Schore, 2002)

Child Maltreatment and Development

- More likely to develop a disorganized attachment
- Hypersensitive to emotional cues
- More difficulty regulating emotions
- WHY?
 - The attachment relationship is vital for providing protection and emotion regulation during times of stress and trauma

Stress Response System

- Healthy brains respond to stress by releasing hormones to activate behaviors that protect the individual from threat
 - Positive stress – helps us learn to regulate emotions and handle stress
 - Tolerable stress
 - Toxic stress

(National Scientific Council of the Developing Child, 2005)

Stress Response System

- 2 systems
 - Catecholamine/sympathetic nervous system
 - Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA axis)
- Work together to prepare the body for fight or flight and to help the body recover

Stress Response System

- Catecholamine/sympathetic nervous system
 - Releases adrenaline and noradrenaline
 - Released within seconds of stressor
 - Increased heart rate, blood pressure, sweating

Stress Response System

- Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA axis)
 - Release of cortisol – a potent stress hormone
 - Suppresses immune response, increases glucose circulating in the body, reduced fear responses to the stressor
- Cortisol – circadian rhythm

Chronic stress & the brain

- Cortisol is neurotoxic to the brain
 - Impaired memory
 - Impaired emotion regulation
 - Hyperalert
 - Blunted stress response
 - Prone to later psychopathology

(DeBellis, 2001)



Is there good news?

Protective Role of Caregiver

- Infant's stress response is buffered by responsive and sensitive caregiver
- Evidence from rodent studies
- Interventions with foster parents can positively impact cortisol patterns (Dozier, Fisher)

Evidence for the power of caregiving

- *Cross-fostering* studies in rodents
- Genetic engineering:
breed “high” and “low” stress animals
- “High stress” mother rats show poor caregiving, and vice versa
- *Stress vulnerability trait AND caregiving quality are passed on to pups*



Meaney and Szyf, 2005;
Francis, Dioro, Plotsky and
Meaney, 2002

Genetic Engineering

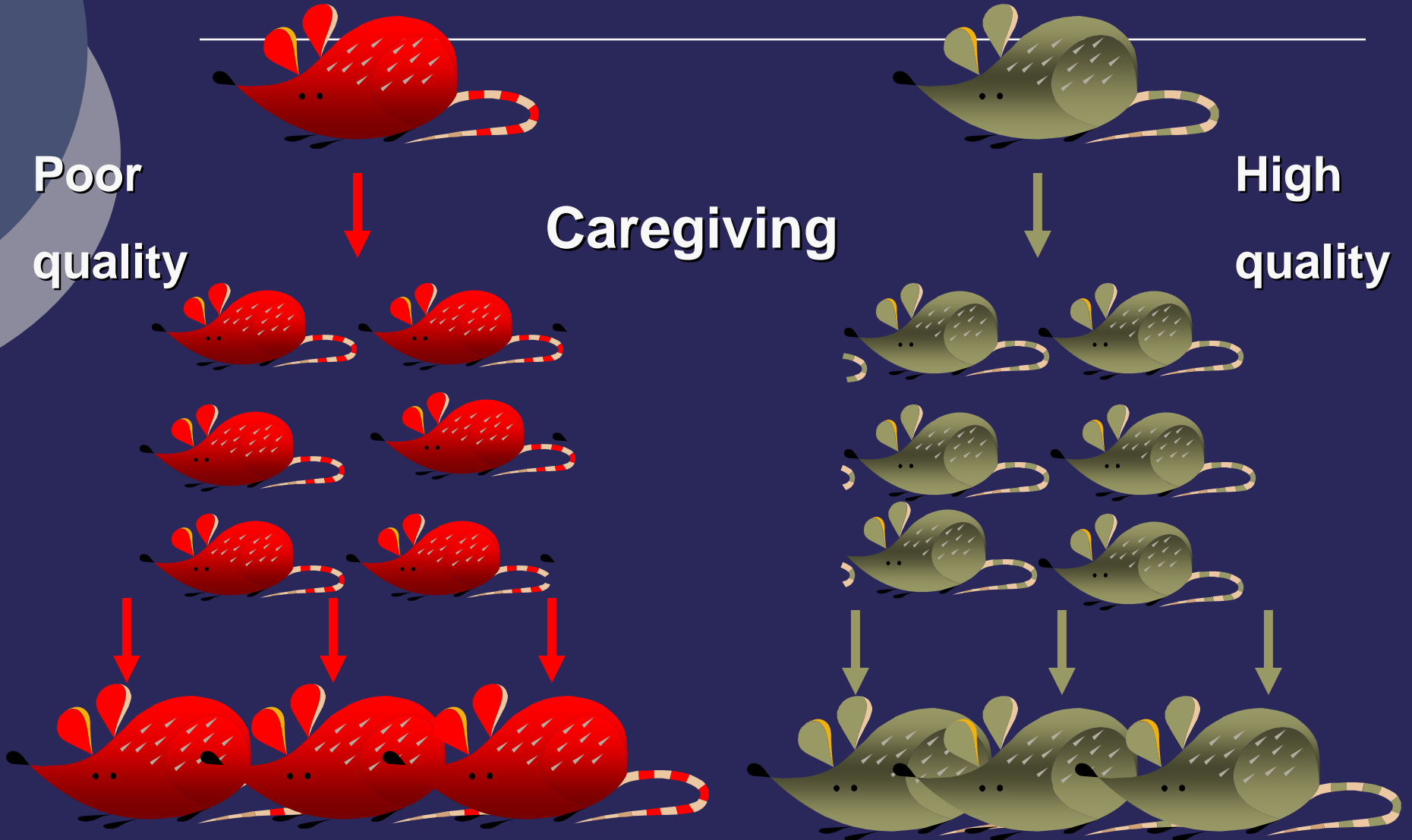
High "stress" breed

Low "stress" breed

Poor
quality

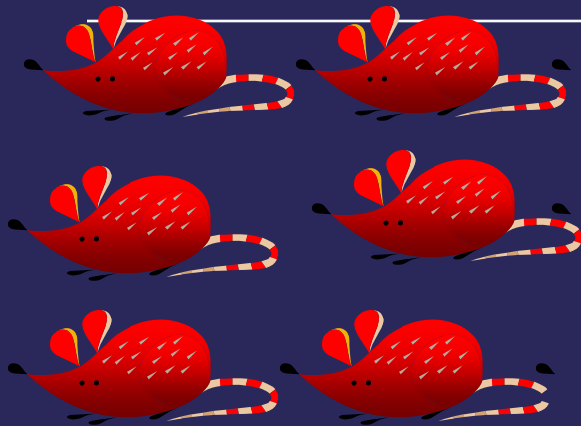
Caregiving

High
quality

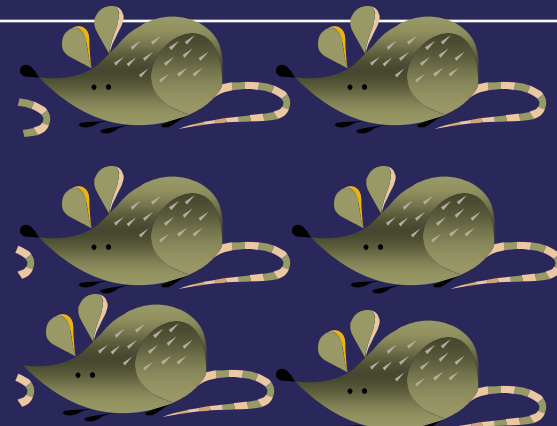


Cross-fostering studies

High “stress” breed



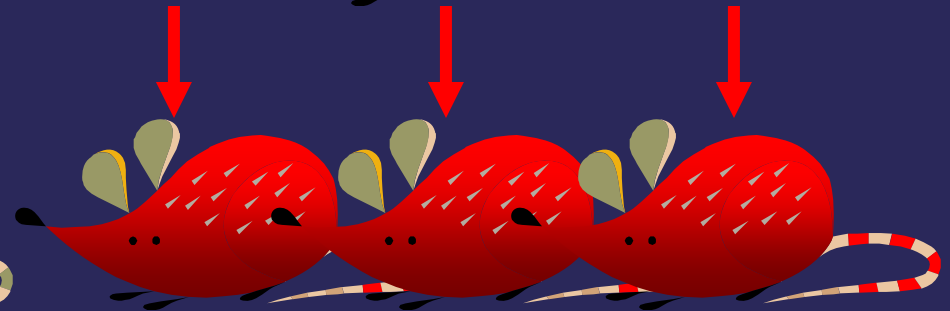
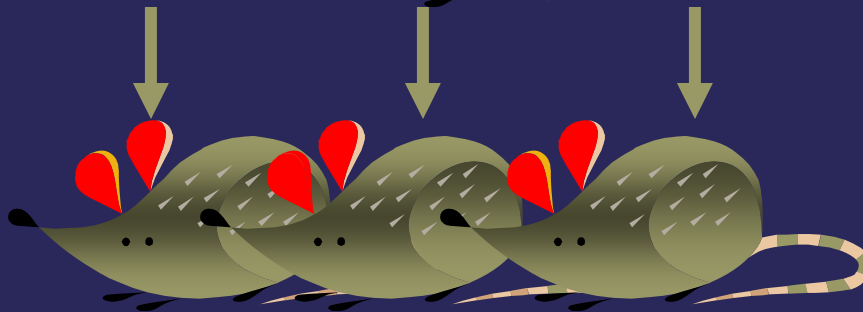
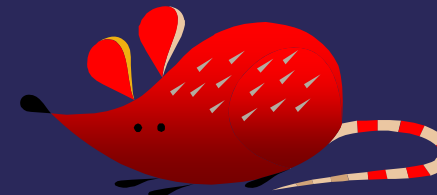
Low “stress” breed



High quality



Poor quality



High quality caregiving can turn “stress” genes off.

What makes some foster parents more successful?: The role of investment

(Ackerman & Dozier, 2005)

- Foster parent investment includes:
 - Acceptance of the child,
 - Commitment to parenting the child,
 - Sense of efficacy regarding positively impacting child

What makes some foster parents more successful?: The role of investment

(Ackerman & Dozier, 2005)

- Foster parents vary in commitment/Investment
 - Some parents see role as time-limited assistance for child in need of a temporary home
 - Others seek to adopt if possible
 - Despite emotional challenges, many foster parents are capable of high levels of acceptance and commitment
- Higher levels of investment linked with more supportive and nurturing interactions

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