

What We Know

Our society is experiencing an explosion of knowledge that both reinforces and reveals how young people learn and what they need to thrive.

Emerging cross-discipline science findings from neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and more, contribute to a powerful body of work informing learning and development. These sciences validate what families and professionals have long known about the critical nature of relationships and learning conditions; and now brings new urgency and evidence to our work.

This converging set of information illuminates the optimal human development periods—in early childhood and adolescence—when we must act with intention and care. Now we have the evidence that with the right context and right relationships, we can rewrite the script for opportunity, especially for youth and young adults experiencing adverse circumstances.

A Moral Imperative to Use Evidence to Maximize Potential

We now have the knowledge we need to progress in how we support human development in childhood and adolescence. And our rapidly changing society demands we maximize potential for each young person.

Relationships are the fuel for brain development. They shape the developing mind, buffer the effects of stress and ignite learning processes. The moment is now to reach young people experiencing trauma and reshape their future trajectory.

Equitable Conditions for Learning are Essential

Young people's experiences in all contexts matter. The science findings tell us that adversity doesn't happen to children, it happens in their brains and bodies in reaction to experiences that they have. But the effects of adversity can be reversed. Science findings confirm that developmentally rich experiences can be healing. This creates an imperative to design environments that correct for the impact of stress and drive healthy learning and development.

Key Findings for Equitable Solutions:

- **Every young person has great potential to thrive, given the right conditions.**
- **Teen and young adult years are as critical to brain development as early childhood years.**
- **The processes of learning and development are complex, ongoing and unique to the individual. They are also accelerated when integrated across multiple domains—cognitive, social, emotional, physical.**
- **Agency and engagement support deeper learning.**

Key Findings for Equitable Solutions:

- **Trust and belonging are key to creating environments that optimize potential. Relationship-filled trusting environments allow people to show who they are—their talents, their interests, how they learn and what they need—making personal pathways more possible.**
- **When needs are met, assets recognized and built upon and conditions for learning optimized, people are able to more fully engage in building skills and acquiring knowledge in the scaffolded, intertwined way that learning happens.**
- **Meaning making is a primary function of how our brains work. Learning and development build on what came before and we draw meaning from our experiences, contexts, and culture.**