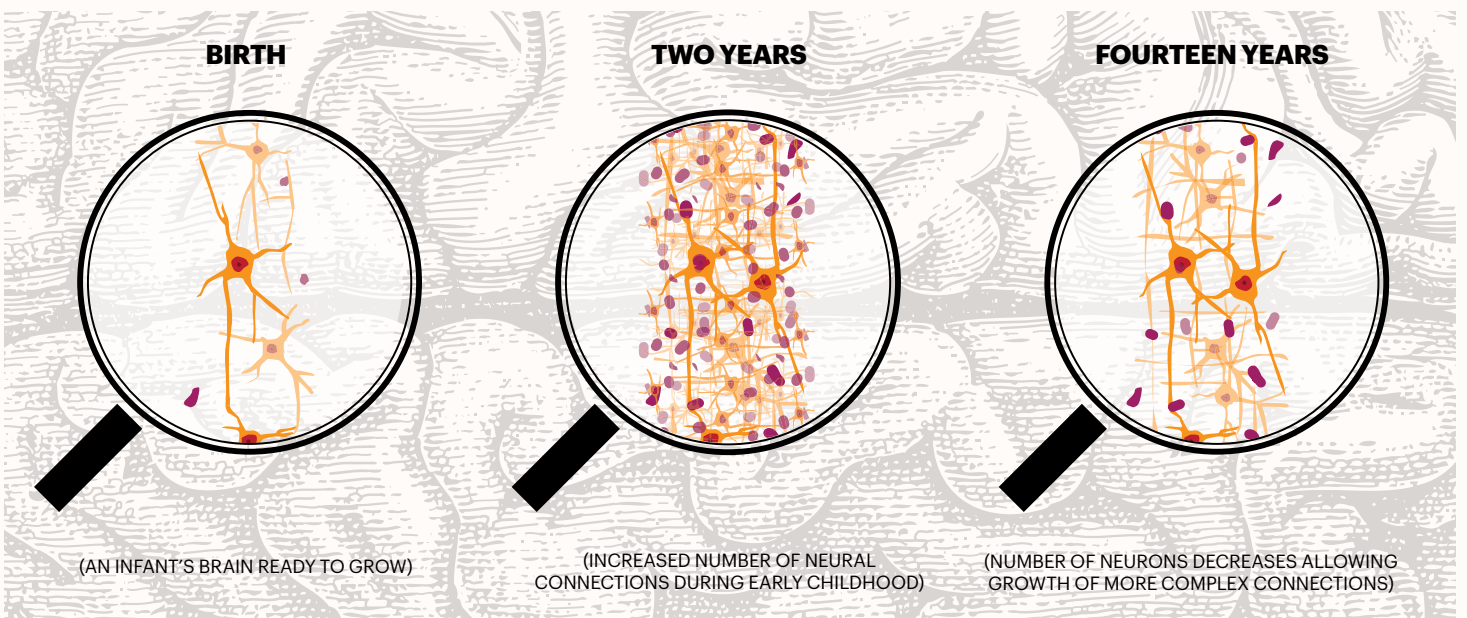


# How violence & neglect leave their mark on a child's brain

**1 in 2 children** under age 18 – over a billion worldwide – experience violence every year. This happens in every country, in rich and poor households.<sup>1</sup>

Exposure to violence while the brain is still growing leaves physical marks on the brain that can impact a person for the rest of their life.<sup>2</sup>



The brain is most vulnerable to trauma in the first two years of life – when many new neural paths are growing, and again in the teenage years – when adolescents learn complex analytical skills and mature emotionally.<sup>3</sup>

**Children who grow up in conditions of deprivation, neglect and other forms of hardship often exhibit elevated stress hormone levels which impact on the growth of the brain.**<sup>4</sup>

Adults with a wide range of issues including mental health problems, addiction, obesity, type II diabetes and coronary heart disease often had poor brain development in early childhood.<sup>5</sup>

<p><b>Violence in the Home</b></p> <p>1 billion children are subjected to regular physical punishment by their caregivers while 275 million children witness domestic violence every year.<sup>6</sup></p>	<p><b>Violence at School</b></p> <p>Slightly more than 1 in 3 students between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide experience bullying on a regular basis.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p><b>Violence in the Community</b></p> <p>One in four school-age children in the U.S., ages 6 to 17, has been directly exposed to violence involving a weapon, either as a witness or a victim.<sup>10</sup></p>	<p><b>Sexual Violence</b></p> <p>150 million girls and 73 million boys experience sexual violence each year.<sup>11</sup></p>	<p><b>War and Emergencies</b></p> <p>1 billion boys and girls are living in conflict-affected areas.<sup>13</sup></p>
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## Violence & neglect scar the growing brain

Both victims and perpetrators have elevated rates of psychiatric disorders such as agoraphobia, anxiety, panic disorder, depression, and suicidality.<sup>9</sup>

Sexual violence can lead to a range of mental health and behavioral impacts including PTSD, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior and interpersonal relationship problems.<sup>12</sup>

Child witnesses of domestic violence can develop PTSD resulting in permanent changes to their personality and their ability to interact effectively in society.<sup>7</sup>

Such exposure has been found to greatly increase the chance that a child will suffer symptoms of PTSD.<sup>10</sup>

Children living through conflict experience both dramatic traumatic events and chronic adversities. The physical effects on their brains impact their memory, problem solving and moral reasoning, emotional and creative expression, and social development.<sup>14</sup>

## These scars can be prevented

<p><b>In Uganda, SASA!</b> was found to reduce domestic violence by up to 52% and significantly changed attitudes to partner violence.<sup>15</sup> The Early Enrichment Project in Istanbul reduced the use of physical punishment by caregivers by 73%.<sup>16</sup></p>	<p>The Ma'An – Towards a Safe School campaign (Jordan) showed an average decline of 28% in physical violence and 15% in verbal violence in schools.<sup>17</sup> In Uganda, The Good Schools Toolkit has reduced the use of physical violence by teachers against students by up to 40% by introducing guidelines for teacher-student cooperation.<sup>18</sup> The 'For Safe and Enabling School Environment' program in Croatia reduced peer violence, aggression and bullying by 50%.<sup>19</sup></p>	<p>The Cure Violence health-model employs violence interrupters in 50 cities around the world and has resulted in up to 75% reduction in shootings in program areas in Chicago, and a 50% drop in homicides in Loiza, Puerto Rico.<sup>20</sup></p>	<p>Stepping Stones in South Africa produced a long-term trend in the reduction of the use of sexual violence among males and females by promoting mutual cooperation and understanding.<sup>21</sup></p>	<p>International Rescue Committee's Parents Make the Difference program in Liberia reduced physical and verbal punishments by up to 56% by introducing families in adverse post conflict and displacement conditions to new ways of coping with stress and conflict.<sup>22</sup></p>
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## Call to Action

Every girl and boy deserves a chance to grow free from the physical and psychological scars of violence and neglect. Support programs that reduce violence, poverty, and neglect in early childhood to give children their best chance at life.

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