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Pediatrics Perspective

Essentials for Childhood: Promoting Healthy Outcomes From Positive Experiences

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Key Words:

child abuse early childhood public health promotion collective impact

• Abbreviations:

CDC —
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
SSNRs —
safe, stable, nurturing relationships

The field of child maltreatment prevention is undergoing a transformation. Clinical practice is moving toward the promotion of factors that support optimal child development and broadening its focus to include the healthy outcomes that arise from positive childhood experiences. In January 2014, the Centers for Disease Control held a kickoff meeting in Atlanta to begin state-level implementation of *Essentials for Childhood: Steps to Creating Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships*,¹ a strategy designed to promote the development of family environments in which children thrive. We were members of a working group that advised the CDC on *Essentials*. This Perspective will highlight the new strength-based approach that guided its development.

By focusing on the key role of safe, stable, nurturing relationships (SSNRs), *Essentials* highlights the health effects of positive experiences in childhood. This emphasis reflects the evolution in the field from prevention of maltreatment to promotion of family health.

Essentials relies on 2 types of evidence that support this change. First, citing recent surveys,² *Essentials* notes that “many, if not most, [cases of abuse] are never reported to social service agencies or the police.” This realization calls for broad-based campaigns to reduce maltreatment, because narrowly focused risk-based efforts may leave out many children and families. We also know that abuse affects the growing brain³ and has lifelong health consequences.^{4,5}

Second, the ...