

Chapter Eleven — We Need To Support Every Child

And Improve Our Health Together

Far too many children in America can't read. The learning gaps in far too many of our schools are massive, and those gaps are not closing. Those gaps create significant negative consequences for children that last lifetimes.

The clear and consistent pattern is that the children who can't read drop out of school, and far too many high school dropouts end up in prison.

More than 60 percent of the African American males who drop out of high school end up in prison. That compares with less than 1 percent of White high school graduates and slightly fewer than 5 percent of African American graduates who end up in jail.

We have more people in prison than any country in the world by a wide margin — seven times more people in jail per capita than Canada — and 85 percent of the children in our juvenile justice system today either read poorly or cannot read at all.

We overwhelmingly imprison minority Americans. We

imprison almost five times more Hispanic Americans per capita than our White Americans — and we actually have more Black males in prison in this country today than the total number of Black males who were enslaved on the first day of the Civil War.

Each of those realities tells us we are facing some major difficulties that will make it very difficult to achieve intergroup Peace in American until we deal with those key issues.

We also have major differences in economic status for groups of Americans. The financial asset base for the average adult White American family three years ago was \$141,000. The average net worth for a Black family in America was \$11,000 — and the average net worth for an Hispanic family was \$13,700. Those financial gaps are also massive and they are actually widening.

Those are major differences. Ten times higher net worth for the families of White Americans is a number that is almost impossible to believe.

Health care disparities are following a similar pattern of adverse outcomes by group, with lower life expectancy levels and significantly higher chronic disease levels for minority Americans.

We need to address each of those issues going forward if we want a future of intergroup Peace in America — and we need to begin with our children. We need to make the learning gaps that handicap so many children today disappear.

We need to build a pathway to success for every child in America, and we need to start with helping every child in the weeks, months, and years when helping children has the highest success levels and the most effective results for each child from every group.

Those learning gaps that we see in our schools today are causing far too many children to have lives of economic deprivation and difficulty, and much higher rates of incarceration, and we need to take clear and intentional steps to make those gaps disappear.

Achieving intergroup Peace in America requires us to close those gaps and have a major, positive impact on those children.

We also need to address the major health care disparities that exist in too many communities --where minority Americans have significantly lower life expectancy levels, and much higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, asthma and stroke.

We also have some significant disparities in actual care delivery

That are causing minority Americans to receive less effective care in too many settings. We need to end those care delivery differences, and we need to eliminate those health care outcomes disparities as well.

We Need Trusted And Aligned Police Forces — And **Win/Win Outcomes For All Groups**

We need to make a very clear and explicit collective commitment to create win/win outcomes for all groups in America.

To create an overall win/win culture for America, we need to make major improvements in each of those areas, and we also need to have some other obvious and meaningful areas in our interactions with one another where everyone wins.

We should do the right things to help all groups to do well — and we should do what needs to be done to create win/win outcomes for people from all groups in each of those areas.

There are actually a number of key areas where we can work together in our various communities to create very real win/win outcomes for all groups of people.

Our police departments give us a major opportunity to achieve

win/win results. We can make our win/win commitment to each other a reality by having police departments in every community that clearly support protecting all of our people from every group in ways that create trust and support from every group.

That level of intergroup trust for our police forces does not exist today in too many communities. We should remedy that problem. We can't afford to have police departments in any settings that are in a state of on-going intergroup conflict relative to the communities they serve. Communities clearly can't create win/win outcomes for community members when the police department and members of the community distrust and dislike one another. That is the reality today in far too many communities, and we need to do the right things in each setting to make that reality change.

That level of conflict, stress and distrust between police and community members that exists in far too many communities does not need to happen — and we need to take steps in all settings to make sure it does not happen, and that our police in each setting act in ways that create both community-trust and the highest levels of community protection and safety.

Improving the basic levels of trust between community members

and the police will not happen in each relevant setting on its own — but there are some proven approaches that have worked in a number of settings — and we need to extend those approaches to all relevant settings. People from every group in every setting can make building that level of trust and positive interaction a goal, and can work together in open, honest, inclusive, and aligned ways to make it real in each setting.

We need community leaders, community members, and members of the police communities in each setting to understand the “Us/Them” instinctive behavior patterns and the “Us/Them” thought processes that are explained in the *InterGroup* set of books — and we need people to use that information to make conscious and intentional decisions to build a sense of trust between police departments and community members in each setting.

We need to end the kinds of situations where discriminatory and prejudicial police activities create internal community stress and distrust, and we need to have the police departments perceived by large portions of the law abiding community in each setting to be “Us” instead of “Them.”

The solutions to that problem are specific to each community because policing is a very local thing. That means the trust levels need to be built in

each setting.

We need good minded people in each setting, from all groups, committed to having each community working to create and meet the interaction goals and the win/win outcomes, for all groups, outlined in the values and visions chapter of this book. We need informed and committed people working together to make community supported police functions in each setting a reality.

That will require people in each setting doing things together in joint and collaborative, fully informed and carefully structured, community and police interactions to make those goals a reality, and to create the levels of intergroup trust that can build a foundation for intergroup success in each setting.

People who understand the power and impact of our “Us/Them” instincts need to work together to make sure no one in each setting is functioning as a “Them” and to make sure people in each setting use the right sets of alignment triggers to function as an “Us.”_

We Need To Save Our Children And Improve Our Total

Health

We also very much need to work together in every setting to save our children, and to create better health for our communities.

There are very few things we can do to provide better evidence for our mutual interest in having all groups do well in a win/win setting than helping children from every group succeed.

There are also very few things we can do that show better faith, relative to win/win outcomes for us all, than taking the steps necessary to improve health for us all, and doing what needs to be done to reduce any discrimination and disparities that might exist relative to the care we receive when people from all groups, in any setting, are receiving care.

We clearly can show good faith to one another other and we can make all of our lives better by working together in our communities to give our children better futures. We now know what needs to be done — and we need to make the clear commitment to do it.

We can also very directly make lives better for people from all groups by working together in very intentional and aligned ways to create better

health and fewer disparities, in both health and care, for all of us in each setting.

Our children should be our top priority. That should be true within each group, and that should be true between groups. We all want our children to do well, and we all should want the children from all groups to have the kind of support in the first months and years of life that will give every child the best chance of doing well.

That is not happening in too many communities for too many children today. We have far too many communities where major learning gaps exist for the children in our schools. Those gaps generally run along economic lines, and they exist in far too many settings by race and ethnic group.

We have far too many communities today where roughly 70 to 80 percent of the White and Asian American children in the schools can read and perform age-level math well — but where fewer than 50 percent of the children from the major minority groups in those schools pass those same tests.

In some communities, we have fewer than 30 percent of the American

Indian, African American, or Hispanic children who are able to read. In those settings, there is a high percentage of children who can't read, who drop out of school, and who end up on life paths that are economically disadvantaged and highly challenged at multiple functional levels.

We just went through the process, as an entire country, of measuring learning levels in our schools for the national Common Core education standards, and that testing process confirmed that the learning gaps between groups are large and growing, in far too many communities.

Learning Gaps Can Not Be Closed at 15 Years —

They Need To Be Closed At 15 Months

Schools in many communities have been working hard, for a couple of decades, to close the learning gaps in their settings, and almost all have failed. They have failed because the scientific, biological, developmental, and functional truth is those sets of learning gaps that we see in all of those schools can't be closed at 15 years. They need to be closed at 15 months.

That is actually very possible to do — but that will only happen if we do the right things in each setting to close those gaps at 15 months.

Likewise, we have a number of communities where the health status

for our minority populations is significantly poorer than the health status of White Americans. Higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and even stroke exist in far too many settings for minority Americans. Health problems create their own sets of problems for too many minority Americans.

The combination of learning gaps in our schools, plus health care disparities in our communities and higher levels of high school dropouts, combined with clear, discriminatory, and prejudicial patterns that we see, far too often, in hiring practices and promotions, have created major economic disparities that work in powerful ways against economic parity and functional equity in America.

We need to address all of those problems with the goal of solving them for each group as part of the basic strategy to achieve intergroup Peace in America, which is the core purpose of this book and the goal of the *Institute for InterGroup Understanding's* Peace agenda.

We need to do more than solve those problems. We need to solve them in ways that prove to Americans, from all groups, that we all do believe in win/win outcomes for all people, from all groups.

That can be done, but it will only happen if we understand each of the issues, and then work together in visible and clearly intentional ways to solve each issue in each setting.

We Will Create A Sense of “Us” by Achieving Those

Goals

We need leaders who understand these issues who want to help our children, and who believe in win/win outcomes for us all with enough commitment and clarity to point us and lead us in those directions.

We can and should activate every trigger on the alignment pyramid outlined in Chapter Eight of this book.

Working together to solve problems that create dangerous futures in those key areas that are important to all of us can activate our team instincts, our shared vision, our mutual trust, our sense of mutual gain for all people and our sense of being “Us” in important ways that will serve as an alignment force and as a collective motivation tool for us as a community and a people.

Win/Win Thinking Anchors That Entire Process

We will be more successful as a country when we have a culture of

health for our country, and we will be more successful in each setting, and as a country, when we create a culture of continuous and successful learning for our children.

To create a culture of Peace for America, we need to all realize this is the right time to make a collective commitment to create win/win opportunities in key areas for all of our people.

We need people to know exactly what these issues, problems, and opportunities are, so we can build solutions to the problems that are appropriate for each setting and even for each family.

People are extremely creative in solving problems in a variety of innovative and functionally relevant ways — both individually and collectively — when problems of any kind are clearly understood, and when there is a clear sense of how important and relevant those problems actually are.

We Have Inconsistent Health And Children With Gaps In Their Learning

Both poor health and learning gaps are, in fact, relevant and important problems. Today, we have inconsistent levels of health, and

people are being damaged as the result. We have significantly different life expectancies by group.

We also have far too many children who are being damaged because they are not being consistently well served by the levels of support for their learning abilities that we give each child in the first years of life.

We have major learning gaps between groups of children in America — and the consequences of those learning gaps are making life difficult for far too many people for their entire lives.

We are failing our children from the perspective of public health at several levels. We are currently not doing a good job of assuring that all children from all groups in America are getting the support, the mental exercise, and the education in the first three months and the first three years of life for each child that will give every child the best chance for success in life.

We actually can and should make huge improvements in those areas of development for our children.

We now know from fairly new and not widely shared new biological science exactly what needs to be done for each of our youngest children in those time frames.

Great new research that is being done and has been done at Columbia University, Harvard, The University of Washington, Stanford, UCLA, Berkeley, and a number of other child focused academic settings are all pointing us to entirely new levels of wisdom and science about the importance of the first weeks, months, and years for each child.

We now can understand that science at new and extremely important levels. As a key step for creating intergroup Peace and intergroup alignment in our country, we now need to share that science with all of the relevant people who should know that science.

We now need to make sure that people who are looking at the future of children and who are responsible for caring for — and educating — the children in this country understand both those issues and those opportunities.

The opportunities are huge.

We now know brains for all children, from all groups, develop and build neuron connections in the first three years of life, and we now know that those are the years when we need to support those processes in order to achieve maximum benefits for each child.

Every family in America should know that science and understand

the impact of those processes and those time frames for every child. The opportunity and problem for each child very clearly both begin at birth, and the first weeks and months of life are actually far more important than we knew, or even suspected, for each child.

There has been a growing awareness that the first three years of life are when the neuron connectivity processes create the learning readiness levels and improve or damage brain strength levels for each child — but very few people in child development policy positions or in parenting settings have clearly understood the importance of the first weeks and months for each child.

We now know, from solid new developmental science, that even the first three months of life can be functionally important for the emotional security of our children. That is important new information. It is wonderful information to have. But it is not known by enough people.

That low level of understanding about the importance of those weeks, months, and years for each child makes sense because the people involved in leading our learning efforts and thinking about our education processes did not understand, or appreciate, what actually happens for each child in those first weeks, months, and years until fairly recently.

Some of that science is, in fact, new information.

That science about the importance and role of those first weeks and months has clearly not been part of our understanding of the development processes for children until some great researchers in some great programs at Columbia, The University of Washington, Harvard, and major California Universities did the studies that made those processes and those time frames known to us.

We now know there are epigenetic processes in place in those very first weeks and months for each child that determine key areas of wiring in children's brains.

We know when children in those first days and weeks are hungry and then fed — and when children in those weeks and months are stressed and then comforted, the brain wires itself in one generically and functionally positive direction.

But if the children in those first weeks and months are hungry and not fed, and if they are anxious and stressed, and are not comforted — then the brain tends to wire itself differently at that point in the life of each child. The results of those differences in brain wiring play out in different behavior and interaction levels for many children.

We need to share that information about the importance of those first weeks and months very clearly and effectively with every new parent, and with the families of all infants and babies in America, because knowing that those processes actually happen in that very immediate time frame can have a major impact on parenting practices for each child.

Parental Leave Policies Can Now Be Science Based

Knowledge is power. Children can benefit hugely from parents knowing that information about those first weeks of life at that key point in time.

The old science told us those were minimally important days and weeks for each child — days to get simply through on the way to more important and more pleasant days. The old science was wrong.

We now need to help parents and families who still believe the old science to know what we know now, so we can use that knowledge to help every new-born child.

The new science about those early epigenetic developments also gives us very strong evidence supporting the need for well structured and supportive parental leave policies for states, employers, and educational systems. When parental leave time overlaps directly, in real time — with

the first weeks and months of life, then parental and family understanding what happens for each child in the first weeks and months can add great value to the development success for each child.

The Neuron Connectivity Levels That Happen In The First Three Years Create Brain Strength Capabilities for Life

An important sister book to *The Art of InterGroup Peace* is the book *Three Key Years*. *Three Key Years* is a sister to this book about intergroup Peace because it explains in some detail how important the first three years of life are for the brain development of our children from every ethnicity, culture, race, or economic group.

We have finally begun to understand the importance of the first three years of life for the learning readiness levels of each child.

We used to believe that education began with kindergarten. That actually is very wrong. It is, we now know, dangerously wrong. Education begins with birth and we now know the first three years of life are extremely important years for building brain strength and learning readiness levels for each child.

We now know, from excellent developmental research, the first three years of life for each child are actually the years when brains build

basic functional strength for each child. It is a very biological process._

Neuron connectivity is the key. Those very first years are the years when neuron connectivity is most important for each child. Those are the years when basic brain infrastructure is put in place that serves each child for life. Children can receive great benefit from the right levels of support to build that neuron connectivity infrastructure in those key months and years.

Exercise is the tool. Physical exercise builds strong bodies. Brain exercise builds strong brains. Interaction with adults is the most important exercise for each child's brain.

If a child has significant interaction with an adult who is talking, playing, singing, and reading to the child, then rich networks of neuron connections happen in that child's brain, and the child who has that level of adult interactions is more learning ready at kindergarten, and far better able to do well in school.

But if a child does not get those levels of basic interactions that exercise and build strong brains in those key months and years, then too many of the most important and useful neuron connections do not happen, and those children tend not to be able to read when reading is a key part of

their education.

The children who have fallen behind in those areas by the time they are 3 years old generally also do not do well on their mathematical computations, and in their reading related learning processes. Several universities have done very powerful research on the consequences to children of falling behind by 3 years old. Anyone who cares about our children should know what that research is telling us.

We now have a much better understanding of those brain development processes, time frames, and related biological science. It is the same process and the same time frames for children from every group. There are no differences by race, or ethnicity, or by any other kind of group.

That is important information to know. It is even more important to use that information to help children. We now understand the importance of those interactions in those key years, but the sad reality is that we don't do a good job of teaching that information in consistent ways to families and communities so that science can be used to help all children.

We are failing millions of children, and we are dooming far too many of our children to lives of challenge, functional deficits, academic

difficulties, and economic deprivation and failure, because we are not providing and guaranteeing those levels of direct adult interactions for every child, from every group, in those key weeks, months, and years.

All parents love their children, and parents from every group and setting want their children to thrive — and we have done a truly horrible job of teaching that key information that can help each child thrive to every parent.

All parents and families need to know that physical exercise builds strong bodies, and that brain exercise builds strong brains.

We need every family and community to know that when children's brains are directly exercised in those first key months and years, the brains that are exercised are larger, more robust and more ready to learn.

Read, Talk, Interact, And Sing Strengthens Brains

Children who have adults exercising their brain by talking to them, reading to them, interacting with them, playing with them and singing to them in those first months and years have larger vocabularies in kindergarten. Those children with that brain exercise have better reading skills in the third grade and in high school, and those children tend to have much lower rates of both dropping out of school and going to prison.

We have more people in prison than any country on the planet by a very wide margin. We imprison far more of our minority Americans. We also imprison a much higher percentage of people who can't read.

More than 60 percent of our prisoners either read poorly or can't read at all. More than 85 percent of the children in the juvenile justice system either read badly or cannot read at all.

Small Vocabularies In Kindergarten Predict Both

Dropouts and Prison

We can now predict with a high level of accuracy, by age three which children will be able to read. We can know by 18 months which children are likely to have very small vocabularies by the time they get to kindergarten.

The best predictor for who will end up in jail by age 18 is the number of words in each child's vocabulary in kindergarten.

We need direct brain exercise for each child in those first months and years of life for each child because the children who do get that exercise have larger vocabularies, read far better, and tend to stay in school and out of jail.

We need to do a far better job across all of our groups of Americans

of giving all of our children the support each child needs in those first months and years to have the best chance for both better learning skills, and increased levels of functional success in key areas of life.

We Need To Help Each Child

If we want intergroup Peace for America, and if we want a future where people from all groups do well in major areas of our lives, then we need to start by making sure all children get the needed exercise to create those neuron connections in those first key months and years for the life of each child.

We also need better schools. We have opportunities to have better schools in a number of settings. We should take advantage of those opportunities as well. We can and should also improve our kindergartens and our schools. It will be particularly important to have better schools when more children are learning ready when they get to school.

We need to make sure our schools are ready to educate all children well when children who have well exercised brains come to school ready to learn.

We need better kindergartens, and we need school systems that

are working to help all of the children who are learning ready actually learn. Improving the entire education system and building a well structured and comprehensive process improvement strategy for education can and should also be a collective goal for all of us.

But having better schools — by itself — will not fix the problems and will not significantly close the major learning gaps we see in our schools today. We need the children from every group who get to our schools to be learning ready. We all need to use this new science and we need to start by doing what we need to do to have each of our children learning ready when they get to school.

When all of our children have strong learning skills and when all of our children are appropriately educated, we will be stronger as a nation and all of the children will have much better chances for success in life.

We now know what needs to be done to make that happen — so this is the right time for us, as a nation and as communities across the country, to actually do what we need to do to achieve those goals.

As a nation — and as local communities — we need to take steps together now to resolve the major problems we face now in those areas. We need to collectively better support our children — to make lives better — for

all children and to eliminate and prevent the learning gaps we have today where children from some groups have lower average reading and lower average math skills than other groups.

When we don't help all children in those key months and years by exercising each brain, the drop out rate goes up significantly, and the likelihood of going to prison goes up to unconscionable levels.

African American males in their 30s who dropped out of high school are 60 times more likely to go to jail than a White American male. Not 60 percent more likely or even six times more likely — 60 times more likely.

More than 50 percent of those high school dropouts are in jail today. That is a very bad thing at multiple levels.

Jail is a horrible experience for the person who is imprisoned, and the functional and economic costs to society of keeping a person in jail are extremely high as well. Everyone loses.

Making the learning levels higher for every child is very clearly a win/win set of outcomes for us all, because we will all benefit when we are all better able to succeed in all of those areas of learning.

We need everyone to understand that there is key work to be done in the first three years of each child's life. That science and that opportunity is explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Those problems and those opportunities are each explained in some detail in the *InterGroup Institute* sister book *Three Key Years*. People concerned about the future of children in America should read that book. It is available and can be read on-line at *The Institute for InterGroup Understanding* website.

That book explains the problems and the biological science relevant to those first months and years, and identifies steps that can be taken by caregivers, communities, community leaders, families, and parents to help every child. We need to help every child in ways that show each of us cares about every child, and we need to do that because the life of each child can change significantly when that help is given in that time frame.

It happens one child at a time. Each child we save is a child we save. We each can make a major impact on the life of a child.

There are very few things anyone can do that can have a greater level of positive good than changing the life trajectory for a child. Sharing

this information about those key processes with a relevant adult for each child can change those trajectories.

We also need to each think about whether or not we can individually do things that make a difference — like volunteering to read to children. That is more than just a feel good opportunity. It is a highly functional opportunity. Every time someone reads to a child in those time frames, millions of neurons connect.

It might not seem like a big thing to do — but each time you read in a caring way to a child in that brain development time frame, you help millions of neurons connect that will continue to be with that child for life. Parents, family, friends, community members, and people who just want to do good things for a child should look for opportunities to either support that reading process or to actually be the reader for a child.

As we are looking to help children in that particular area, we also all need to help ensure that actual books are available to every child. More than half of the low-income homes in this country a year ago did not have a single book. We need books in every home and books in every day care setting for low-income children.

We also very clearly need to support parental-leave programs for

employers that make it possible for parents to spend key time with each child directly after each child is born.

Society needs those parental leave programs and basic interaction programs for children so we have a collective future where our children succeed and add value at multiple levels to Society, rather than having disproportionately large numbers of children who don't get that support who end up incurring major, long-term expense for the community.

We All Need To Be Healthier

We also need to do a much better job of improving population health in our communities and as a country.

We are not collectively healthy as a nation and we have significant health gaps by group that parallel and echo the learning gaps we have for our children.

We currently have significant health care disparities in this country that are based on race and ethnicity. The book *Ending Racial, Cultural, and Ethnic Disparities in American Health Care* deals with some of those issues very directly. We need to eliminate those disparities and we need to create a national culture of health to help us all avoid the need for care that too many of us have today.

The book, *Ending Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Disparities in American Health Care*, is another sister book to this book, and can also be read chapter-by-chapter, online, at *The Institute for InterGroup Understanding* website.

The book, *Don't Let Health Care Bankrupt America*, explains those racial, ethnic, and cultural disparities, as well and explains why the very best things we can do to bring down the costs of care in this country is to have people be healthier, so that people actually need less care. We very much need a culture of health for America that will let us achieve those goals.

If we create a culture of health for us all, we can help define ourselves to ourselves as people who do good things collectively to functionally improve our mutual health — with everyone benefiting from our good health.

That can actually be done. Medical science tells us that there are some obvious and achievable opportunities for us to do that work. We should do that work together in each setting because we will all benefit at multiple levels from having us be healthier as a community and as individual people.

Healthy Eating — Active Living (HEAL)

To achieve that goal, we should focus our efforts on the two key and fundamental issues that will help us achieve that goal of better collective health. We need to focus on our food, and we need to focus on how extremely important it is for each of us to functionally Walk.

Healthy eating can make a huge difference in our level of health. Active living can make an even bigger difference on our health, and the active living benefit can be achieved for a high percentage of the people in our population simply by walking. We need better collective health, and we now know the science that tells us that activity and healthy food are literally the essential keys to improving population health.

In the same way we need to collectively provide support for our children to ensure their success, we should be working together in each community, and setting, to make sure people have adequate activity levels and healthy food to eat.

Too many people are significantly overweight and even obese today. Obesity is creating a wide range of ancillary diseases that damage people's lives.

Obesity is related to our eating approaches. Obesity can be reduced by

both healthy eating, and by higher activity levels. We need more people to be healthy eaters and we need more overweight people to have higher levels of basic personal physical activity.

Healthy eating could be a shared and defining value, and it can also be something we work on together as a community in each setting, with a focus on having a positive, collective impact on our collective health.

For healthy eating, we can take direct and obvious steps to ban the most damaging food elements — like trans fats — from our diets. We can and should also take multiple and very clear steps to create better access to healthy foods for all Americans.

Too many of our inner-city communities do not have easy access to fruits, vegetables, and healthy protein sources. We need to make those foods available to all people everywhere.

Make The Right Thing Easy To Do

The key to improving population health is very much like the key for improving any key processes in life. The mantra and the guideline we should use to structure our thoughts and our strategies should be to Make The Right Thing Easy To Do.

Make The Right Thing Easy To Do is almost magical in its impact on achieving those kinds of goals. It is the Secret Sauce of Process Improvement.

The reason is simple and clear. In any process or any setting, when we make the right thing easy to do, it is much more likely to be done.

When the wrong thing is easy to do, we tend to do the wrong thing. When the right thing is easy to do, we tend to do the right thing.

Improving health is a key process where that thought process is extremely important. We need to make both healthy eating and active living easy to do, and we will be much more successful in getting people to be active and eat well.

We need to begin by helping all people to understand the basic strategies of healthy eating. We need to have a shared collective strategy in each community to improve the levels of healthy eating.

We can feel collectively good and mutually reinforcing in each setting when we work together as a community to collectively and individually achieve that healthy eating strategy for the community, and for individual members of the community.

We should take steps in each setting to make sure food stores have fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods, and we should encourage farmer's markets in communities to get good foods to all community members. We can do things together in communities to make that happen, and community leaders should act in visible ways to ensure healthy foods are available to community members.

We need people to understand the basic mathematical relationship between calorie intake and weight — and we need people to understand which foods are the healthiest foods, and which foods make healthy eating easiest to do.

We need people to eat moderately and well and we need people to be active to create the highest level of combined benefit for the improvement of our health.

Activity is essential as a health improvement tool. Activity is hugely important. We need to encourage people to be physically active. We should teach activity, advocate activity, support activity, enable activity, empower activity, and honor and reward activity.

Activity Levels Have A Larger Positive Impact Than

Weight Control

We can actually have an even bigger collective engagement opportunity for us all, and an even bigger good health reward for all of us if we improve and sustain healthy activity levels.

People generally do not know that basic activity levels actually have huge and consistent impact on our health that can even exceed the benefit of weight control for many people. Most people do not appreciate or understand the huge positive and negative impact that activity levels and inactivity levels have on our personal well-being.

People with higher activity levels have lower levels of cancer, heart attack, diabetes, and stroke. The data is overwhelming and the science is powerful and persuasive. Walking can improve health at measurable and almost immediate levels. We can cut the risk of diabetes in half by simply walking 30 minutes each day.

That science and those results are well established. Our body needs to have some daily activity levels to have all of the circulatory systems and biological interactions function well — and simply walking for at least half

an hour every day can trigger those extremely important systems into healthy functionality.

As a joint community effort, we can and should all support each other in every setting in being active by helping each other be able to walk.

Activity Levels Can Have A Massive Positive Impact On

Health — Walking Can Be Almost Magical

Activity truly is key to success in improving health. The science is clear. Disease drops when we are active. Some diseases disappear when we are active. Others are significantly reduced. Activity levels help our body function better and give us basic levels of health that can truly change our lives.

We don't need to run or pedal or dance to be sufficiently active. We don't need to run marathons or compete in biathlons or triathlons. We can simply walk — and walking can be transformational.

Walking is a very powerful and effective way of achieving needed activity levels. The human body is designed to walk and the human body needs to walk to function well.

Walking can create health miracles. Walking is actually the single most useful activity level and approach that we have for health improvement. Walking can be almost magical in its positive impact on our health.

Several key chronic diseases can be significantly reduced or even prevented entirely by walking.

More than 75 percent of the health care costs in this country today come from our chronic diseases — not from our acute diseases and accidental injuries. Inactivity levels — basically from people not walking — are a major chronic disease risk factor for Americans that are creating the majority of our health care expenses.

Urbanization Has Created Chronic Disease Epidemics

That link between chronic conditions and health care costs is true in a growing number of other countries as well. Urbanization in developing countries around the world has created massive epidemics of diabetes and significantly increasing heart disease levels in many countries. That is happening because far too many of the newly urbanized people in those countries who used to walk in the rural areas every day no longer walk at all once they move to the cities.

Those health issues are relevant to intergroup Peace in all of those settings because the health status of the people from those groups is deteriorating, and the people who live in those neighborhoods, in many countries, are from the minority populations in those cities.

Major chronic disease problems are happening in some of those settings for the first time in history because people in those countries who used to live in the rural areas, and who used to walk every day as a major form of personal transportation, now live in large urban slums and most of those people do not walk at all.

When people do not walk, several damaging diseases appear. Life is shortened when walking is reduced.

The diet for those newly urbanized people also changes from their old mixture of locally grown vegetables and fruits to a new and narrow diet of processed white foods — white flour, white rice, and white sugar. Inert people whose diet has been rechanneled to over-processed and high calorie foods have much lower health levels.

Major health problems are happening for the people in those countries, and that creates some intergroup conflict issues in a number of settings because there are often ethnic differences between the original

people who lived in those cities, and the new people who come to the cities from the rural areas of those countries.

Those are entirely different, but not entirely irrelevant sets of issues.

Walking Can Significantly Improve Health

In any case, the medical science is very clear.

The human body tends to be significantly healthier when people walk.

Walking 30 minutes a day, five or more days a week, actually does cut the rate of diabetes in half. Diabetes is currently the fastest growing disease in America. More than 30 percent of the money spent on Medicare today is spent on diabetics.

Our minority populations in this country have particularly heavy cost burdens and health burdens for both diabetes and the adverse consequences of diabetes.

The rate of diabetes can be cut in half if people walk every day.

That same daily walk can also cut strokes and heart disease by more than 40 percent.

That same daily half-hour walk can even cut prostate cancer,

breast cancer and colon cancer by more than one-third.

Walking gets the body's circulatory systems and basic biological functions to perform more effectively.

That scientific information about the collective benefits of walking for all people is included in a book that deals with *The Art of InterGroup Peace*, because intergroup Peace can be enhanced if we help each other be healthier. It is also discussed extensively in the book, *Don't Let Health Care Costs Bankrupt America*.

Economic strength for all groups is enhanced if all groups have healthier people. We can be healthier if we work together and walk together to achieve important mutual gain health improvement goals.

Peace can also be enhanced if various groups consistently walk together and if the groups in each community work together and collectively create and protect safe walking environments in every setting in a common cause to make "Us" all healthier.

We Need Collective Support For Walking

It is very much a win/win for all groups if we are all healthier. It is particularly good for Peace if we walk together, and if we create

safe walking environments in our communities, working together, because we are committed, together, to give us all collective good health.

Those walking environments can be and need to be very local strategies and community-based realities for purely logistical reasons.

It's hard to be more local. Walking is a very local thing to do. As a pure functional strategy, we need to create safe walking environments in our communities, our schools, our places of work — and we need to walk together in those settings as a commitment to our individual and collective health.

We need to all support creating a context where walking can be done daily by all of us.

We only need to walk a half-hour a day to achieve very high levels of benefits. That half-hour can be broken into two 15 minute segments and still provide the health benefits.

That science about only needing to walk 30 minutes to achieve major health benefits is good to know and understand when our strategic goal for that issue is to Make The Right Thing Easy to Do.

We should collectively make increasing activity for all of us at all income levels easy to do. We should make it easy to walk in all communities and settings, and we should reduce barriers to walking where those barriers exist.

As we look at ways that we can bring Americans together in a common cause with a common agenda that is clearly in our mutual best interest, creating a whole array of walking-friendly community and workplace opportunities that enable everyone who wants a daily walk to safely take a daily walk, can improve everyone's health.

Understanding that issue clearly, and then creating that collective agenda and those life-extending opportunities, in settings and communities, with the support of all of us can give groups of people in communities across the country a chance to work together in the mutual best interest of us all.

We can benefit and show our mutual commitment to each other by doing basic things that facilitate good health for us all. Walking is a good context for creating that level of health improvement opportunity, and walking together in safe ways can facilitate both a sense of community

and an opportunity to enjoy and celebrate the diversity that exists in each setting.

Neuron Development For Very Young Children

Helping people be physically healthier, and facilitating both healthy eating and active living is not, however, the thing we can do collectively that will have the biggest positive impact on future intergroup interactions in our country.

Children should be our first priority.

As we look at the things we can do as a nation to give us a future of shared success and intergroup Peace, we should do what we need to do to change the futures for our children.

We all love our children. We all want our children to succeed. Helping people from other groups facilitate the success of all children is a very visible, believable, meaningful, and important area where we can create an anchor for intergroup good will and intergroup trust.

That point was outlined in some detail earlier in this chapter, and it is being repeated here in some detail again, because there are very few things more important to our future as a nation, and as a people, than understanding this set of issues, and then doing the right thing in key areas

to help our children.

Helping children from all groups succeed by being learning ready when school begins is a much more important agenda than even improving our individual and collective health, and one that we ought to have as a top priority for us as a country. Almost no one in policy circles understands the importance of these issues and has a good sense of the functional fact that we have no other path that can succeed in helping us close the learning gaps we have in so many American schools.

We need success for all of our children from every group. Learning gaps should no longer be acceptable to us as a country. Learning gaps damage children, and learning gaps create futures of intergroup anger and conflict that have the ability to damage us and our future as a country.

We need to do the right things to help all children from all groups succeed. To help all of our children succeed, we need to help all of our children get the brain stimulation they need in the first months and years of life, when brain development happens for every child.

We now know the science. We now understand the functional processes. We now know that brain development for each child is a purely biological reality, and we now know the exact time frames when brain

development is most important to each child from every group of children.

We now know, for purely biological reasons, we need to give every child a basic level of stimulation and adult interaction that builds strong neuron connections, and increases learning readiness in those first months and years of life.

The science of neuron development, and the neuron connectivity processes that happen for our children are now clearly understood. Brains that get exercised in the first three years of life are stronger.

It is a purely biological process. We need all Americans to understand that science and to know clearly the implications and layers of consequences that result from that science.

That opportunity that exists in each child in those key months and years for brain development is — like the consequences of both obesity and inactivity — very fundamentally and clearly biological.

We are all biological beings. Young children — from birth to roughly 3 years old — all go through a few key years where the neurons in their brains are forming their internal connections.

We now know, from very good biological science, brain

development processes continue to happen throughout our lives, but the first three years of life are actually the most important time for supporting and enhancing brain development for each child. Neuron connectivity in those years is much easier to do, and the consequences of doing it well in those years are life shaping in extremely positive ways for each child.

Those first years of life are relatively brief, and we now understand much more clearly that the brain support received by each child in those first few months and years are absolutely crucial for the life pathways for each child. .

Science now tells us that if individual children receive the right levels of brain exercise, external stimulation, and appropriate support from adults in those very early years, that development process and that level of stimulation can give each child the neurological foundation and the brain strength that is needed by each child for a successful and productive life.

The children who do not get that stimulation in those months and years, tend to not be learning ready when they get to kindergarten, and they tend not to catch up in their years in school. The children who only have a few words in their understood vocabulary at age three tend to

have major difficulty catching up later in the education processes.

Now that we know that science, we need to apply it to every child. It is actually not that difficult to do. Providing key levels of support can be done for almost any child in almost any setting.

Reading, Talking, Interacting, And Singing Exercise Baby

Brains

The needed exercise tools that functionally strengthen the brain of each child are basic and simple. Brain exercise can be done by reading, talking, interacting, and singing to each child.

Read/Talk/Play/Sing — magical and powerful tools that strengthen brains and facilitate emotional security in children.

Just 30 minutes of reading a day can have a huge positive impact on the brain of a child. Asking each child 20 questions a day — even when the child is too small to answer the questions — can also increase brain function for a child.

Simply talking to children has a major impact on neuron connecting activity. Talking is extremely important, and has a major impact on children in those key weeks, months and years.

We need all mothers to know what an incredible and wonderful gift they are giving to their children by just talking in loving, direct, and constant ways in those first months and years. We can teach new mothers, many of whom are insecure about the value they are able to give to their children, the wonderful, encouraging, and affirming knowledge that the value those simple interactions they have with their baby is a pure gift of major biological development for each child.

Children who don't get that basic brain exercise in those first early years from parents talking, reading to them, and playing with them tend to have smaller vocabularies. Children with very small understood vocabularies at 3 and 4 years old are much more likely to not be able to read, and they are much more likely to drop out of school.

(Interestingly, the spoken vocabulary is not as important for children in those first key months as the understood vocabulary for each child, so parents should not worry if their children clearly understand what adults are saying, but simply refuse to speak, themselves, in those early years.)

We now know we need to exercise the brain of every single baby and child from every group. It is very possible to do that for each child. The techniques that create positive results for children are simple and basic.

Talking Is The Most Important Brain Exercise Tool For **Parents**

Talking is actually the single most important brain-strengthening tool to use with children. That is particularly true in the first year of life. Children at that age need caring adults talking directly to them. Talking creates major value to children.

Talking directly to a child triggers brain strength. Neurons connect by the millions, and even billions, in those first months when adults talk directly to a child. Adults who talk constantly to children, about any topics at hand, are not just entertaining and amusing the child. They are actually triggering billions of connections in the child's brain.

We need all parents to know that science, and we need to encourage parents to talk extensively, beginning with the first weeks of life when the exact words spoken are clearly meaningless to the infant who is hearing them.

We have failed badly in teaching that reality to parents in this country, and we have some settings where children are not spoken to at all.

That, we now know, is not optimal for the infant's development or

security levels.

Books And Counting Are Also Very Good For Children

Books are also very useful from a very early age. Reading clearly exercises baby brains, and reading teaches children in the first years of life the link between symbols and meaning.

Children who have been read to more extensively tend to be more learning ready when that time of learning happens in schools.

Counting also has great brain strengthening power. We tend not to teach counting to parents as a parenting tool as well. That is also a mistake for us as teachers and advisors to parents.

We should be explaining to parents that counting with a child is a good thing. Asking a child, how many apples are in the bowl, is more than just fun — it teaches quantitative thinking and basic math skills.

The counting doesn't need to be complex — but constant, fun counting for children can build stronger quantitative processes and skills. Those interactions are all extremely important to each child. The needed brain exercise stimulation to be done for each child to make sure no children actually fall behind, can simply be based on direct talking to the

child, reading to the child, and singing to the child by caring and trusted adults in each child's world.

Talk, read, interact, play, and sing. Those specific activities exercise each child's brain, and those basic exercises make each brain grow.

That is a science all caregivers, day care programs, families, and communities should understand. We need learning gaps to disappear. If the neurons of those very young children are not stimulated in those crucial and key few years — the biological impact and the brain function outcomes for each child can be very damaging for their entire lives and learning gaps will continue.

We all need to understand those issues, because they affect the entire lives of people in ways that affect everyone. The consequences of not stimulating all of our children at that age are, actually, very costly for the children, and both costly and damaging at several levels for the communities where the children who have learning problems live and function.

Early Stress Levels Can Be Reduced As Well

The issues of early support for each child extend beyond learning readiness. The early interaction issues include emotional readiness and emotional stability.

We now know we can aid the emotional stability of children at important levels by feeding and comforting them in the first weeks and months after they are born — when their brains are adjusting to whatever kind of world each child seems to be in. Emotional underpinnings can be challenging, and even damaged based on those first interactions, and emotional underpinnings can be strengthened by those first encounters.

The impact of those early weeks and months can have bigger impact when children sense early stress and when the stress levels for a child are constant. When very young children are isolated or feel threatened in any way, those children tend to experience higher levels of early childhood stress.

That stress in those first years can actually, physically damage the brain. And a condition called toxic stress can result.

Specific neurochemicals in the brain that are triggered by toxic stress can actually damage some levels of functioning for the brain.

Children who have toxic stress levels in those early years are much more likely to perform poorly in school — and they are even more likely to have health problems than the children who have had the nurturing impact of being cared for and stimulated in those early years.

Many families and caregivers do not know about the very real damage that can be done to very young children by toxic stress.

Toxic stress chemicals in the brain are created when a child is either isolated and ignored, or treated badly — and those chemicals can cause children to have both physical and behavioral problems when they get to school age.

Those children who suffer from toxic stress are also much less likely to finish school and they are significantly more likely to be imprisoned.

Toxic Stress Can Be Buffered

It is possible to do very important things to prevent toxic stress and reduce and buffer its impact. Good, new research also now teaches us toxic stress and the negative impact of those neurochemicals on a child's brain can be “buffered” in each child, if the child gets at least a half-hour per day of protective attention from a loving adult.

That seems like too little time to have the impact it does, but there is good research that tells us 30 minutes of buffer time, of positive and caring interaction with a child each day, can have a major impact buffering the damage of toxic stress for a child.

That important research shows that the half-hour of positive interaction time by a child with a loving adult can help serve as a buffer time for our children that actually keeps toxic stress chemical from damaging the infants' brains.

The read, talk, and sing time that helps exercise each child's brain can also help be that needed buffer against the damage done by toxic stress.

The data is clear. Differences in behavior and differences in capacity between children are measurable. The book *Three Key Years* explains that process and outlines what we can and should do to help each child.

Children who receive less than adequate stimulation and low levels of brain exercise in those essential early years, and who don't get that buffer against toxic stress end up with smaller vocabularies, lower reading skills, and a much higher likelihood of dropping out of school.

It is a sad reality that one of the best lead indicators and key

functional predictors for which children will actually end up in jail is the number of words in each child's vocabulary in kindergarten.

We have more than three times as many people in jail as any other Western country. We have seven times more people in jail than Canada. More than 60 percent of the people in our jails either read poorly or can't read at all. Studies have shown that the children who have small vocabularies in kindergarten end up having lower reading skills when they get to school.

As noted earlier, basic longitudinal studies have shown that the children who have lower reading skills in the third grade are 40 percent more likely to get pregnant during their school years — 60 percent more likely to drop out of school — and those children with low skills at that point in their lives are nearly 80 percent more likely to go to jail before age 18.

Two-Thirds Of The People In Jail Come From The Set Of Children With Low Neuron Stimulation

This issue is addressed at length in this book on intergroup Peace strategies because the truth today is that more than two-thirds of the children

who end up in jail come from the group of children who tend to score low on their third grade reading tests or who can't read at all, and we need to have fewer people in jail if we really aspire to creating intergroup Peace in America.

We need to recognize that a majority of the children who drop out of school before graduating come from that same set of low scoring readers in those early years, and we need to change those life paths for those children.

These outcomes that happen for those particular young people who have those sets of learning issues are not a problem we can solve with better grade schools or with better high schools.

The schools for children of that age level can't solve those learning problems for the children who did not get their needed early support and brain exercise. High school is far too late for too many of our children.

So is kindergarten and grade school. The time of high opportunity neuron enrichment is in those very first months and years of life for each child. We can't close the learning gaps at 15 years old. We truly do need to close them at 15 months.

Catching up can be very hard to do — almost impossible — for purely

biological reasons. The most opportune time for neuron connectivity — with billions of neuron connections happening — is in those first years.

When children miss that early neuron development opportunity, and when these children have lower reading skills by the third grade, then those children need much more support at that point from our schools. A number of the children who are behind at that very early point in their lives later can at least partially catch up — with great teaching and with great support from family, friends, and educators

We still need to help every child after those first years — and some children can, and do, benefit significantly on learning abilities and academic capabilities after that time — but the best time for that opportunity to build the highest levels of learning readiness for each child is gone after those first key years.

We need to do everything we can do to help individual and groups of children who have fallen behind, and many children who have fallen behind will benefit from those efforts.

We also can and should learn to create entirely new learning expectations for the students in their 20s and 30s who can't read, and we need to provide support for those students to guide them to settings, and to

economic opportunities when they are adults, which don't require the ability to read.

Currently, the only economic infrastructures available to many high school dropouts who can't read are our gangs. Our street gangs have increasing strength in far too many communities, and they tend to be the only economic infrastructure available to high school dropouts who can't read.

If we intend to reduce the power and impact of gangs, and if we want to help more people have better lives, then we need to figure out alternative economic pathways for our most disadvantaged students.

There Is No Difference By Race Or Ethnicity

Those numbers linking early learning with life success or failure are consistent for children from all racial and ethnic groups. There is no difference in the damaging functional impact of low neuron connectivity stimulation by either race or ethnicity.

There is also no difference in the benefit that children from each and every group receive from exercising their brains in those key months and years. Children from every group do well when their neurons are stimulated in those key months and years. Children from every group

perform poorly when their neurons are not stimulated at that point in their lives.

A number of studies show very clearly that minority children are more likely to have low reading skills, drop out of school, and go to jail.

Those problems are not actually either racial or ethnic. They are entirely environmental.

We Have Too Many Minority Americans In Jail

We have far too many of our minority population in jail. One-in-10 Black American males in their 30s are in jail today. More than half of the African American high school dropouts in their 30s are in jail. Less than 1-in-90 White American males are in jail. It is very difficult to create an ongoing culture of Peace, and to build full mutual benefit for all of us at a win/win level in our increasingly diverse communities, when Hispanic Americans are four times more likely to end up in jail, and when African Americans are six times more likely to be imprisoned.

We all need to understand clearly that there are multiple factors that explain why we have those disproportionate numbers of people in jail.

Economic reasons for various groups of people are a key part

of the problem. Bias in law enforcement, and bias and discrimination in

judicial rulings are both part of the problem.

The “Sentencing Project” report, given to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2013, about discriminatory arrest rates and conviction rates in the United States is worth reading by anyone concerned about those issues — to get a sense of how much discrimination exists in those areas. It is a well-done study that truly deserves to be read by anyone concerned about those issues.

That report shows city after city where the police arrest far more minority drivers, for example, for the same levels of illegal activity. Those kinds of arrest and incarceration disparities are becoming much more visible, and that visibility gives us a chance to deal with them very directly by changing the relationships communities have with their police.

The beginning section of this chapter addresses our need to do that work.

The sister books *Cusp Of Chaos*, *Primal Pathways* and *Peace In Our Time* also explain those patterns of discriminatory behaviors more completely.

Those are clearly a number of reasons why we have those major disproportionate rates of incarceration for groups of Americans. We need to

understand and recognize all of those issues. We also should take explicit steps to address the factors that we can, effectively, if we want to change those realities for America.

That proportion of non-readers to imprisonment levels is true for prisoners of all races.

Those same percentages of people who can't read being incarcerated tends to hold true for other countries where we have data. Sixty percent of the people in jail in Great Britain also read poorly or do not read at all.

Not being able to read clearly creates life challenges at multiple levels that can lead to being imprisoned for some people.

Because that is true — and because we know that fewer than 10 percent of African American males in their 30s, who graduated from high school, are in jail — and we know that nearly 60 percent who did not graduate are in jail, then pure logic points us to helping people graduate as a strategy for reducing the number of people we send to jail. Ten percent is a very bad number — and 60 percent is much worse.

The pathway to prison starts very young — because we can predict with a high level of accuracy, by age three, who will be able to read, and

the people who can't read are much more likely to drop out of school and end up in jail.

That points us to a basic strategy for *The Art of InterGroup Peace* applied to America today — reducing the number of people we send to prison. We can reduce the level of people in prison by giving all children from all groups the stimulation that each child needs to be able to do well in school.

Because that is possible to do, we should be doing it.

Economic Factors Both Create the Problem and Are Created by It

There are clear differences in parenting practices in America that have a direct link to the economic status of families. Many of the wealthier and higher income mothers and fathers have the time and the resources to focus their attention on their children in those first years and to constantly exercise their babies' brains. Their children tend to do well on all of those tests as a result of that support.

It can be much harder for low-income families to provide the same levels of support for their children.

Low-income mothers and fathers may have multiple part-time and low-paying jobs, poor transportation resources, very little discretionary income, and much less time to spend focused on their children. It is harder to do many things when income levels are low, and spending time and resources on children are clearly a problem when that reality exists for a family.

Having less available time for their children for low-income families is entirely understandable — but we need to figure out ways of helping each child because we know the consequences of not having that time for a child can be unfortunate for each child, and it shows up in the learning gaps we see in the schools.

The school performance gaps that exist widen when higher income parents can spend the time and resources to exercise their children's brains, and when lower income mothers need to spend their energy providing food and shelter to their kids and can't focus on getting those neuron connections to happen for their child.

Those problems are exacerbated by the fact that we have done an extremely inadequate and dysfunctional job of teaching those brain development realities and opportunities to the parents of America. Almost no

parents of young children in our country today know the basic science.

Intelligence Levels Are Not Set At Birth

One survey showed the overwhelming majority of people believe the intelligence level we each have is fixed and set at birth, and most people believe we each have to play the cards we are dealt at birth for our entire lives for our individual intelligence levels.

That is entirely wrong. It is bad science, and it illustrates a poor understanding of those basic brain strength-building processes. But we have not explained the actual processes to people in ways that guide parenting decisions and practices.

When parents understand the importance of brain exercise in those first months and years, then all parents can make decisions about parenting that are better informed and more beneficial for their children.

We need to be obsessive, compulsive, persistent, and extremely effective in teaching those realities to every family in America, and we need to support parents when they make decisions intended to achieve the right sets of child development support and goals for their children.

Because we have not taught those key issues to parents, we have major portions of our parenting population who are unintentionally not making fully

informed parenting decisions. We need to do far better in teaching those biological realities to all groups of parents in America.

For a whole variety of reasons, including the fact that we have not taught those biological development time frames or processes to all families, our African American children and our Hispanic children are much more likely to have heard fewer spoken words from adults in their lives before kindergarten, and each child in those groups is significantly less likely to have been read to in those essential early years where reading to a child makes the difference between a child going to college or dropping out of school.

We can correct that problem. We need to do that one child at a time. It needs to be corrected for each child in order to save each child because the process happens in those same time frames for each child.

We need to help parents from all groups understand the importance of those interactions, and we need parents and families, from all groups, talking much more to each child in those time frames, when those interactions have the most beneficial outcomes.

Talking Is The Anchor Behavior That Creates The Most

Benefit

Far too many families and parents do not know *talking* to a child is the anchor behavior that has the most positive impact on neuron connectivity in very young children. That seems too simple to be true, but it is a functional reality. Talking adds great value to children's development, and parents have not been told how much good they can do for their children, just by talking directly, in loving ways to them.

New mothers who are feeling insecure and concerned about the level of value they can give to their children in those first weeks, months, and years need to be given reassurance by trusted and credible messengers that they are giving a wonderful gift to their baby that builds brain connections by the millions, just by talking to their baby.

That is extremely important science. Simply talking to a child literally creates millions and billions of those connections, and talking to a child can be done in any setting.

Studies have shown children from lower income homes tend to hear millions of fewer words spoken directly to them than children from higher income homes. Some of those studies about higher income children having far more words spoken to them in their first years of life are widely quoted.

The truth is, those patterns of words spoken by income levels of

parents clearly exist today, but they don't need to be the reality. Talking is free. Every setting can afford spoken words. We can and should encourage people from every group, and setting, to talk constantly to their infants and babies, and to begin at birth. Each talking exchange benefits the child.

Reading Also Is A Good Brain Development Tool

Reading is also extremely useful and important for brain development for each child. Children benefit both emotionally, and in learning readiness levels, when adults read to each child. That is another area where learning gaps have group-specific differences that help create the gaps.

Several studies have shown us there are also significant differences in reading levels for children between groups of Americans as well.

Higher income Americans are much more likely to read books to their children. More than half of the low-income homes in America do not have a single book. Higher income homes average 12 books per child.

Those differences in reading levels are not dictated or mandated by the economic realities in most settings. It is possible to read books in low-income homes.

More than 30 percent of low-income mothers do read now every day to their child. We need to get that number of low-income homes that read to children to much higher levels — and we need to provide both books and reading support to low-income parents.

We need to encourage family members and other friends of families to read to our very young children — particularly in settings where parents might not be able to read, themselves. That number of non-reading adults could be up to 20 percent of the parents in some settings.

When that is true, we need to find other readers in that setting who can provide that service to each child — and we also need non-reading parents to know that simply pointing out and telling the stories from children's books to children below the age of two, can provide many of the benefits of actually reading the books to a child.

We also need to be much more effective in providing books and reading support to the day cares that take care of low-income children.

One study showed more than half of the day care settings for low-income children did not have a single book last year. We need every day care in America to have more than one book per child, and we need people in the day cares for our very young children to be both talking, and reading

to their children.

We need to make sure our day care settings do a good job of helping our youngest children. Some do that well and some do it very badly.

The horror of having children in day care settings strapped into car seats, and put in front of television sets for hours on end, creates and exacerbates significant learning readiness problems for too many children. We need families, day cares, and babysitters to be reading, talking, and playing with our children, and the results will be many more learning ready children.

If we solve our early interaction problems for more children, we can at least partially decouple school failure from race and ethnicity. Shared intergroup success for us as a nation will be very difficult until we solve that problem for those children from every group.

We need to educate every single mother, every father, and every family from every single group about those issues, and we need to figure out a range of support systems for each child — grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, community groups, day care settings, volunteers, or paid professionals — to give each child the stimulation each child needs.

Neuron Development Is Needed For Our Success As A

Nation

That information about neuron development in babies is included in this book about how we can achieve intergroup Peace in America because we should now become very clear about our commitment to win/win outcomes for all groups of people if we want to be a country at Peace with ourselves. Win/win obviously should include having us all collectively doing what we need to do to give equal opportunities and equal development advantages to all children from all groups of people.

That neuron development science is important information for us all to have as we look at the collective agendas we should now set as a core goal of our new American “Us.”

The Art of InterGroup Peace will depend on all of us being able to succeed. There is probably no other factor that has an equivalent impact on each child’s life than neuron development in those first years and alleviating toxic stress in those same years.

If we look at the relevant logistical issues and at the overall sets of consequences, there are probably very few factors that can have a greater

impact on our overall success as a nation, and as a community of successful people, than focusing on getting the right processes in place for neuron development and neuron connectivity for our very youngest children.

If we want to reduce critically important performance difficulties by group, then we need to reduce early childhood support deficits by each minority child.

We Win When All of Our Children Do Well

This is actually the epitome of a win/win issue. The potential for positive and collective impact and a win for all groups of people in America is massive.

When all children from every group have well developed neuron stimulation and connectivity levels that lead to stronger reading skills in these very early years, those children are much more likely to be successful members of the community — with the ability to get and hold jobs.

The lifetime income level difference for the children who drop out of school and the children whose early stimulation allows them to graduate from school, is roughly \$1 million in personal earnings per child.

That is huge difference. We can give a \$1 million gift to each child

who receives that neuron development support.

From a purely financial win/win economic perspective as a government investment, the children with the right stimulation in those years are much more likely to pay employment taxes as adults — taxes that can help support all of the various programs that we have and need whose funding is based on tax support. Nobel Laureate, James J. Heckman from the University of Chicago, has pointed out eloquently the economic argument for helping those children in those key years.

Several other economists have made similar arguments and made them well.

The children with the right stimulus in those first three years of life are more likely to stay in school, avoid jail, become employed, and participate in the American Dream as full players and full participants. This is important work.

The Ethical Issues Are Clear

The ethical issues are extremely clear. Now that we clearly understand that science, those developmental processes, and time frames, the ethical issues of allowing millions of children to miss that brief and

vitaly important neuron connection opportunity, and to face lives of economic and functional difficulty as the result, are painfully obvious.

More than half of all births in this country this year will be into Medicaid homes. More than half is a big number.

What does that tell us about our future? We know from some studies roughly 30 percent of Medicaid homes do read every day to their children — but we also know more than half of those homes do not read at all, and more than half of the Medicaid homes do not have a single book for the children in the home.

Now that we understand the importance of those first months and years, and the value created by reading to our children, that information about the majority of births happening today in our country into settings where there are few books, or no books, should give each of us the inspiration we need to have a positive impact for those children.

That set of issues is a major topic for the long-term success of *The Art of InterGroup Peace* — both because of the long-term win/win benefits that are created by success in this area, and because of the long-term, lose/lose consequences for intergroup interactions and for intergroup trust of continual and expanded failure for that portion of our population.

The shared win/win agenda of helping all of these children from every single group achieve their full potential ought be a unifying set of activities for us all — with collaborative approaches set up, defined, supported, and operated in ways that will lend to collective alignment and success.

We need to prove our commitment to each other at this point in our history by helping everyone's children succeed.

We need to understand that many of the challenges found by children in our country relate back to the neuron development issue — and we need to take that issue on collectively and well.

We Need To Improve Activity Levels And We Need To
Realize Learning Potentials

So the collective health of all of us and the biological development of our children's brains in the first months and years of life are two areas where we could jointly, collectively, and collaboratively transform America by having a shared agenda, a shared strategy, and a shared set of goals.

Both of those key collective goals can be achieved. We can do it in each community — and we can do it together.

We will be stronger as a nation at multiple levels when we achieve both goals in every setting.

We can create health and we can also create improved learning ability for children from every group in America.

If we could get people from every group to walk – just a half-hour a day, five days a week — we could cut the rate of chronic disease that is bankrupting America in half.

We could help our patient populations from all groups avoid the number one cause of blindness, amputations, kidney failure, and death from heart disease by getting people to walk.

Our minority populations today suffer the most today from those specific diseases. We need to eliminate that disparity and that burden, and we can do it by collectively getting people to walk.

At the same time, if we could put processes in place that can assure neuron development in those first weeks and months of life in very young children of every race, ethnicity, and economic status, we could cut the rate of kids dropping out of school and going to jail by more than half, and we could improve the learning ability for millions of children in ways that will change the trajectory of their lives.

Reading a half-hour a day to each child can have consequences for neuron development that are the equivalent of walking a half-hour a day and cutting the rate of diabetics in half.

We need to make those key and high value half-hours of collective commitment a reality.

Everyone loves their children. Giving great opportunities to all children is a perfect collective win/win goal. Both disease prevention and brain strengthening can be powerful and extremely effective collective mutual benefit agendas. In each setting, we can ask people to figure out what needs to be done to make those goals a success. Doing things together — as the alignment pyramid points out — can help us all relate to one another as an us.

We Need To Begin With A Sense Of Where We Are

Today

Putting those win/win strategies in place will have a higher likelihood of success if we have a clear sense of where we are as a nation today on our intergroup issues and interactions.

We need to start with a clear understanding of our history. Once we

understand the impact of our intergroup instincts on our thinking and our behaviors, our history makes a lot more sense and our current status is also easier to understand and address.

That is the topic of the next chapter of this book. Where are we now and how did we get here?