

The CT Mirror (<https://ctmirror.org/2015/02/10/op-ed-trauma-affects-childhood-learning-profoundly/>)

## Op-Ed: Trauma also has profound effect on childhood learning

By: **PAMELA CANTOR, M.D.** | February 10, 2015

Arielle Levin Becker's series of articles on childhood trauma and its lasting effects ("[Starting Early: A four-part series,](http://ctmirror.org/2015/01/20/the-long-reach-of-childhood-trauma/)" January 20-23, 2015 (<http://ctmirror.org/2015/01/20/the-long-reach-of-childhood-trauma/>)) does a terrific job of exploring the impact of early adversity on health and behavior but stops short of describing its profound effect on learning.

A rapidly expanding body of scientific research demonstrates that adversity reaches deeper into the learning process than may be immediately evident.



(<http://ctmirror.org/about-us/#submitoped>) Children internalize adversity as stress, which can impede healthy brain development. Stress makes children inattentive, disengaged and impulsive, interfering with their ability to learn.

Any child can experience trauma of course, but children growing up in poverty experience adversity, such as hunger, homelessness, the incarceration of a loved one and violence more than most.

In a school, one child who acts out under stress can derail a classroom. Several can shut it down. If teachers, administrators and staff are not well prepared to address the volume and intensity of social, emotional and academic needs in school, the result is an unsafe, chaotic environment that stalls learning for everyone.

This is what we see in many of our nation's struggling, high-poverty schools: high levels of stress, low levels of student readiness to learn and adults who lack the preparation to help children overcome this steep challenge and set them on a path toward academic and personal growth.

Training teachers to recognize the signs of trauma and potential triggers, as well as providing trauma treatment to children on site in schools, much like the New Haven Trauma coalition is doing, is very important, but even done well will not reach all of the children impacted by adversity.

Instead, schools should be designed with a deliberate focus on the cognitive, social and emotional development of every student. Every adult in a school must be aware of how trauma and adversity impact behavior and learning, and more importantly, must learn how to address this recurring, predictable problem.

Government should incentivize and fund whole-school approaches to creating environments where adults are prepared to reduce stress and create safe, supportive and engaging classrooms where children can thrive.

All schools, but especially those serving high concentrations of children growing up in poverty, must lay a foundation for healthy brain development in order to produce significant academic improvement and an equitable public education system for all.

*Pamela Cantor, M.D., is president and CEO of Turnaround for Children.*  
(<http://turnaroundusa.org/>)

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Chances are most people watching the Super Bowl - and the ad about domestic violence that ran during the game - know someone who experienced domestic violence or sexual assault. But they might not be aware of it. "Despite the vast numbers impacted by these crimes, people are not talking about them," said Virginia Witt, director of the campaign behind the ad. So what will change that?