



The Safe, Stable, Nurturing Families Framework

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McMillenHealth
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Brief increases in heart rate,
mild elevations in stress hormone levels.



Serious, temporary stress responses,
buffered by supportive relationships.



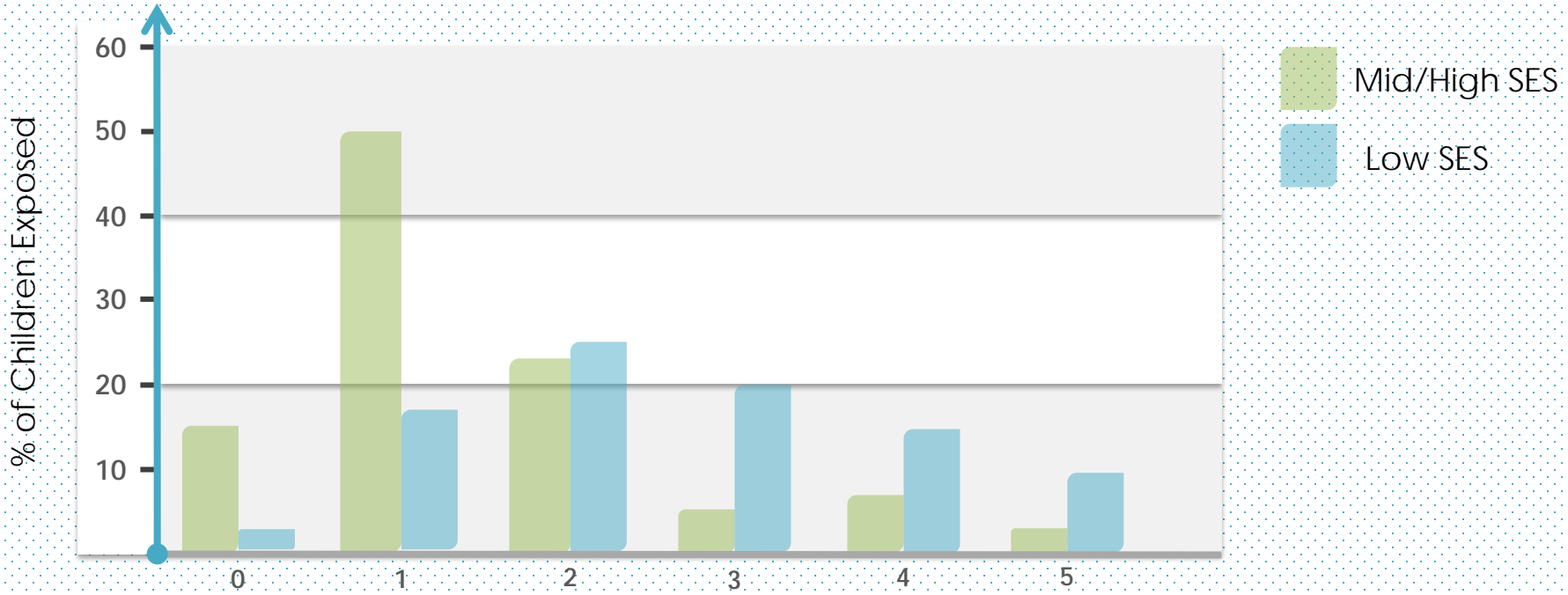
Prolonged activation of stress
response systems in the absence
of protective relationships.

What are stressors?

A teal pencil is positioned vertically on the right side of the image, pointing downwards. The word "STRESS" is written in a light teal, hand-drawn font on a white surface. The pencil tip is touching the letter 'S'. The background is a light teal color with a subtle pattern of small white dots.

Poverty
Drug/alcohol abuse
Incarceration
Mental illness
Food/housing insecurity
Physical/emotional abuse
Unsafe environment
Physical illness
Divorce/break up
Poor maternal education
Job loss

Toxic Stress



“Children subjected to such stress may lack crucial coping skills and experience significant behavioral and academic problems in school.”

Teaching with Poverty in Mind by Eric Jensen



What is toxic stress?

Prolonged activation of the stress response systems in the absence of protective adult relationships.

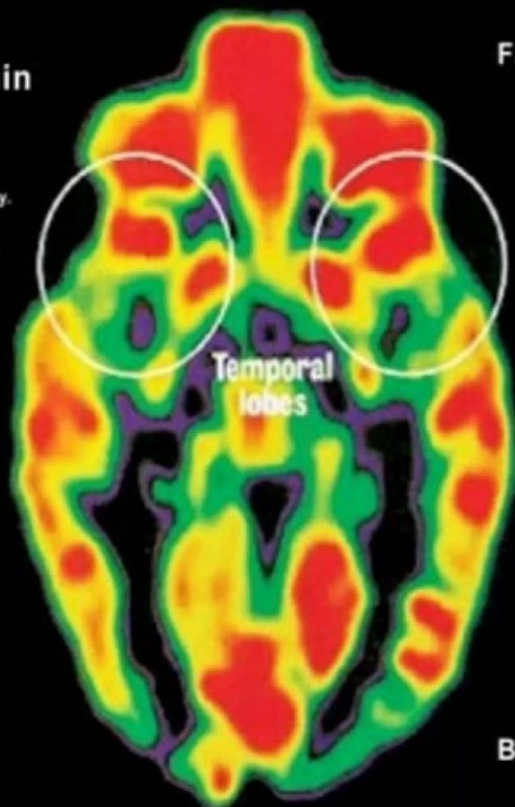


Effects of toxic stress on children

Toxic stress weakens the architecture of the developing brain, which can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

Healthy Brain

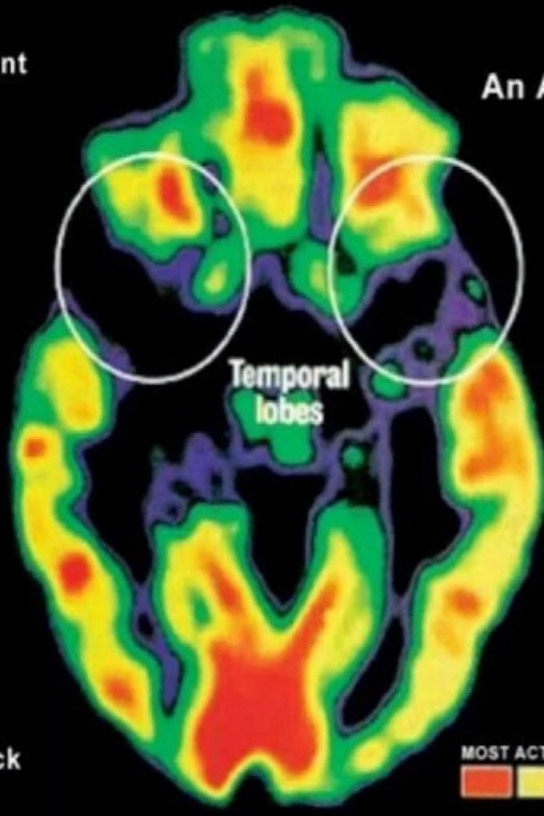
This PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.



Front

An Abused Brain

This PET scan of the brain of a Romanian Orphan, who was institutionalized shortly after birth, shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top), which regulate emotions and receive input from the senses, are nearly quiescent. Such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems.



MOST ACTIVE LEAST ACTIVE

TYPICAL BRAIN

CHILD AFFECTED BY
CHRONIC STRESS

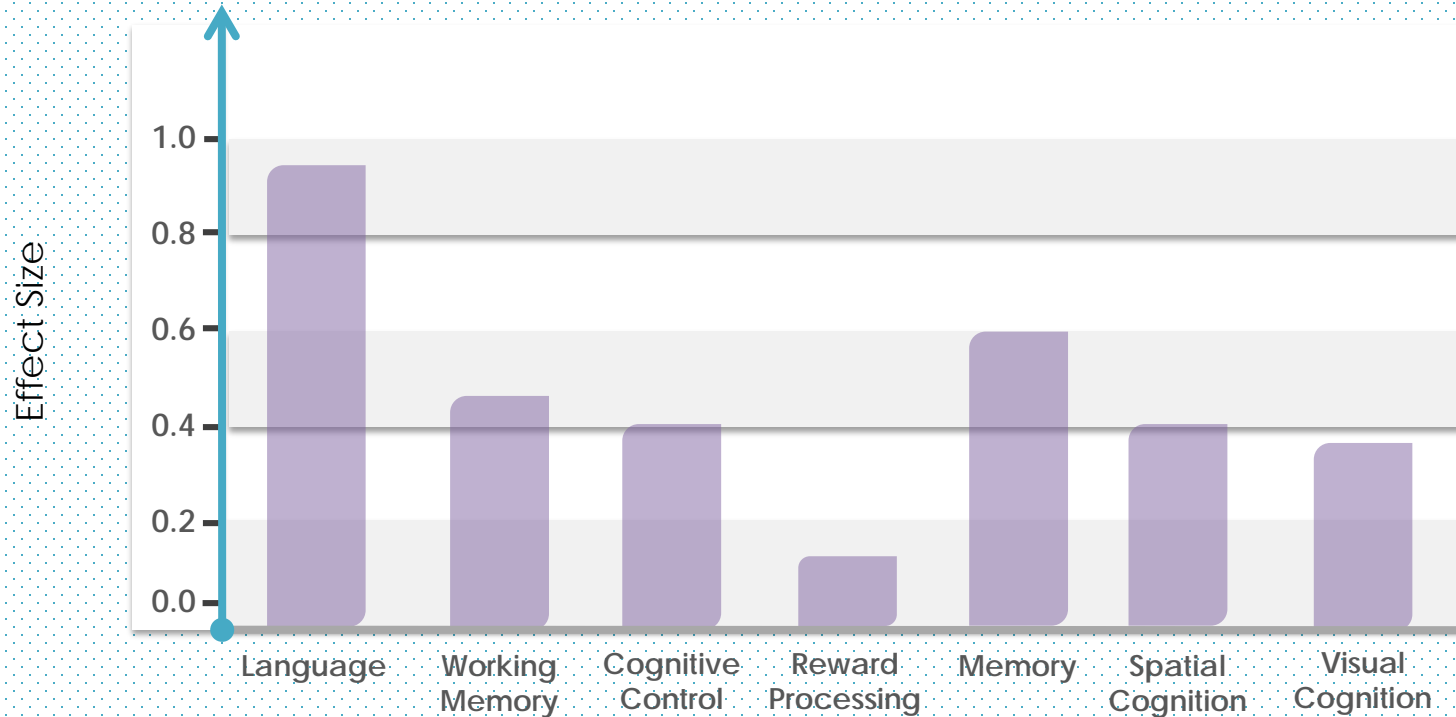
Impairs the connection of brain circuits and can result in a smaller brain.

Sustained high levels of cortisol can create lifetime damage to the hippocampus, which is responsible for learning and memory.

High levels of cortisol can suppress the body's immune system, creating high levels of infection and chronic health problems.

The effects of childhood stress on health across the lifespan, US Dept of Health & Human Services/CDC

Brain Differences



Note: Effect-size differences are measure in standard deviations of separation between low- and middle-income 5-year-olds.

Effects of Toxic Stress

- **Is linked to over 50 percent of all absences**
(Johnston-Brooks, Lewis, Evans, & Whalen, 1998).
- **Impairs attention and concentration**
(Erickson, Drevets, & Schulkin, 2003).
- **Diminishes social skills and social judgment**
(Wommack & Delville, 2004).
- **Reduces motivation, determination, and effort**
(Johnson, 1981).
- **Increases the likelihood of depression**
(Hammack, Robinson, Crawford, & Li, 2004).
- **Reduces neurogenesis (growth of new brain cells)**
(De Bellis et al., 2001).

Health effects of toxic stress on adults

Unplanned pregnancy
Heart disease
Depression
Drug abuse
Alcoholism
Addiction
Suicide
Tobacco use
Liver disease
STIs

A person wearing a light-colored button-down shirt is holding a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook is white with a grid pattern and has the text "What can we do?" written on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The person's hands are visible, with dark nail polish. The background is a solid, light blue color.

**What can
we do?**

Preventing the effects of toxic stress in the next generation

Research shows that, even under stressful conditions, **supportive, responsive relationships** with caring adults as early in life as possible can **prevent or reverse** the damaging effects of toxic stress response.

From www.developingchild.harvard.edu



How can we reduce the effects of toxic stress?

Start early! (prenatal/infancy)

Focus on developing safe, stable, nurturing relationships in a child's life.



**Safe, Stable,
Nurturing Families**

Help parents/caregivers understand that their most important role is to:

- Keep their child **safe**
- Give them a **stable** environment
- To **nurture** them (NOT the same as loving them). This is action, not feeling.



Safe

Stable

Nurturing

Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships

Safety: The extent to which a child is free from fear and secure from physical or psychological harm within their social and physical environment.

Safety

- Prenatal care
- Basics like car seats, safe sleep, and baby proofing
- Are children in safe housing
- Are the adults around them safe
- Is their childcare safe
- Is there a plan if they aren't in a safe environment
- Teaching safe talk is important

Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships

Stability: The degree of predictability and consistency in a child's social, emotional, and physical environment.

Stability

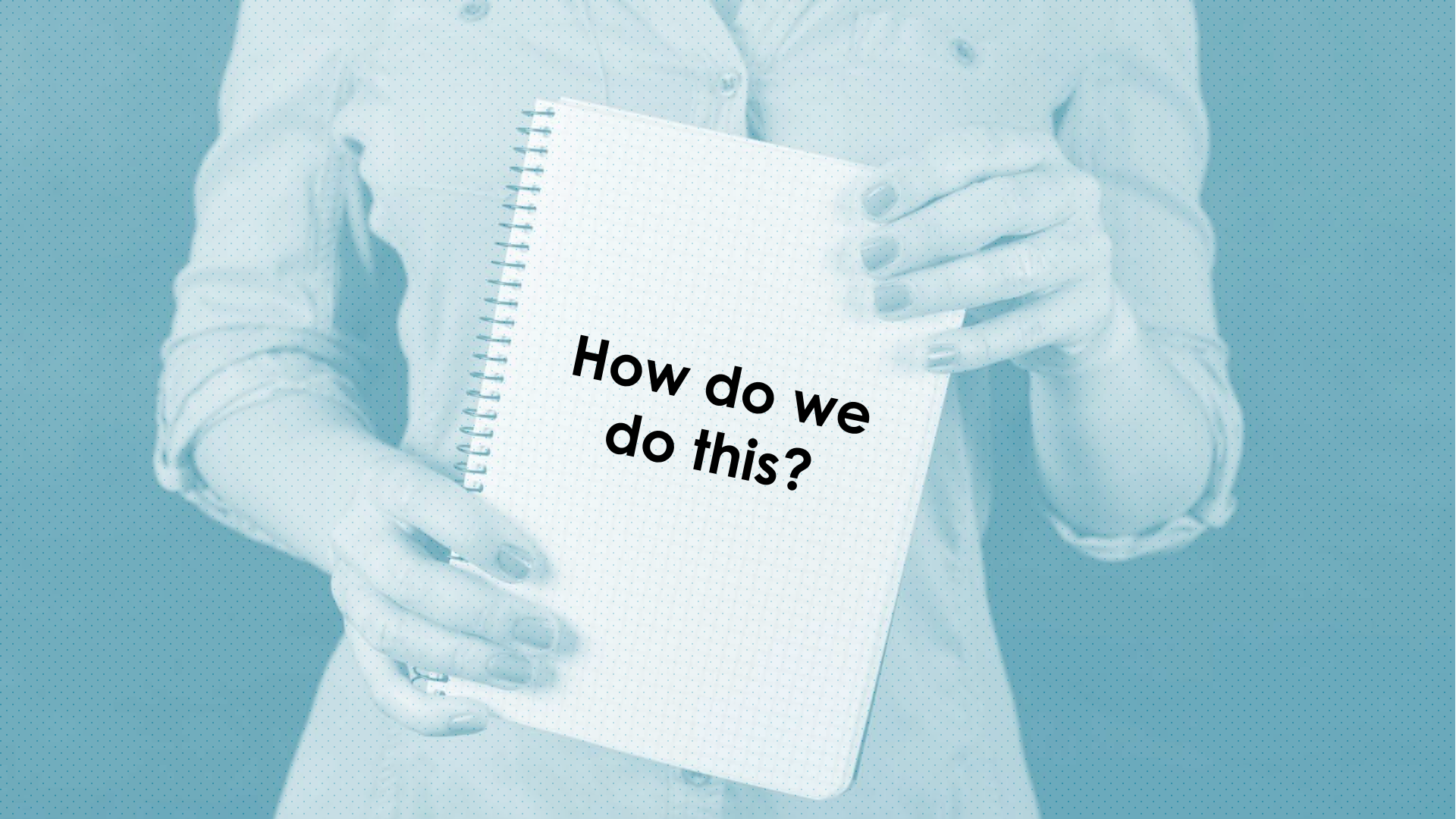
- Is there a daily schedule, regular bedtime
- Is childcare stable
- Do parents/caregivers discipline in a consistent way
- Stable employment
- Can child trust parents to be predictable
- No frequent moves, people not moving in and out of the house

Safe, Stable, Nurturing Relationships

Nurturing: The extent to which a parent or caregiver is available and able to sensitively and consistently respond to and meet the needs of their child.

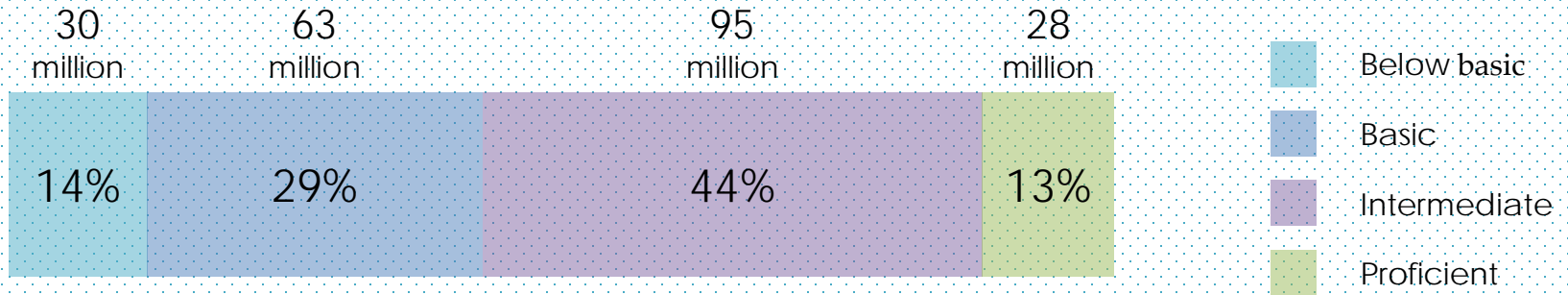
Nurturing

- Provide physical affection (with no strings)
- Comfort child physically when upset or hurt
- Quickly respond to child's physical needs
- Quickly respond to child's emotional needs
- Encourage and praise children
- Do parents show the child they enjoy their company
- Is nurturing consistent

A person wearing a light-colored button-down shirt is holding a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook is white with a grid pattern and has the text "How do we do this?" written on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The person's hands are visible, with dark nail polish. The background is a solid, light blue color.

**How do we
do this?**

Literacy Rates

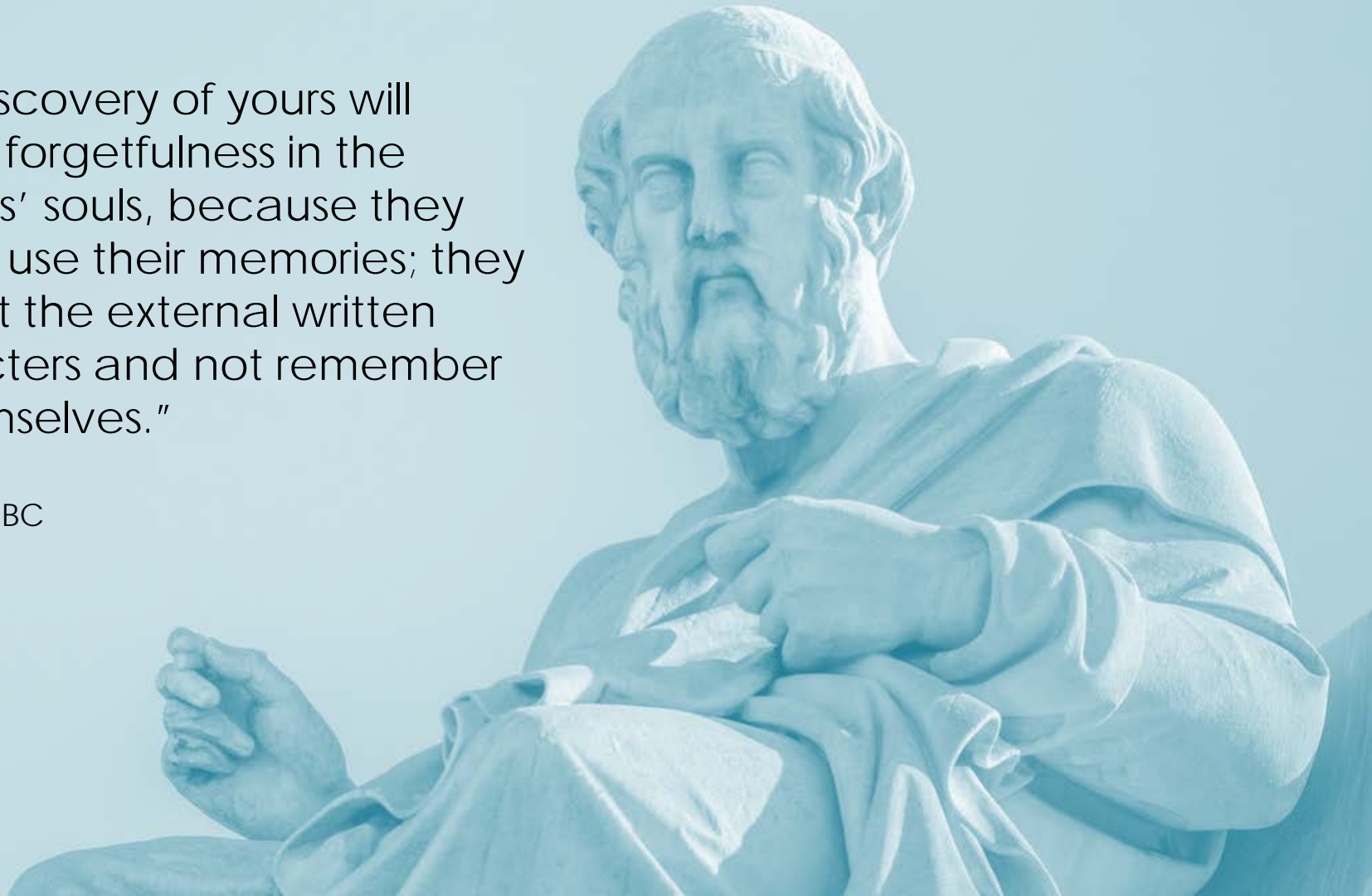


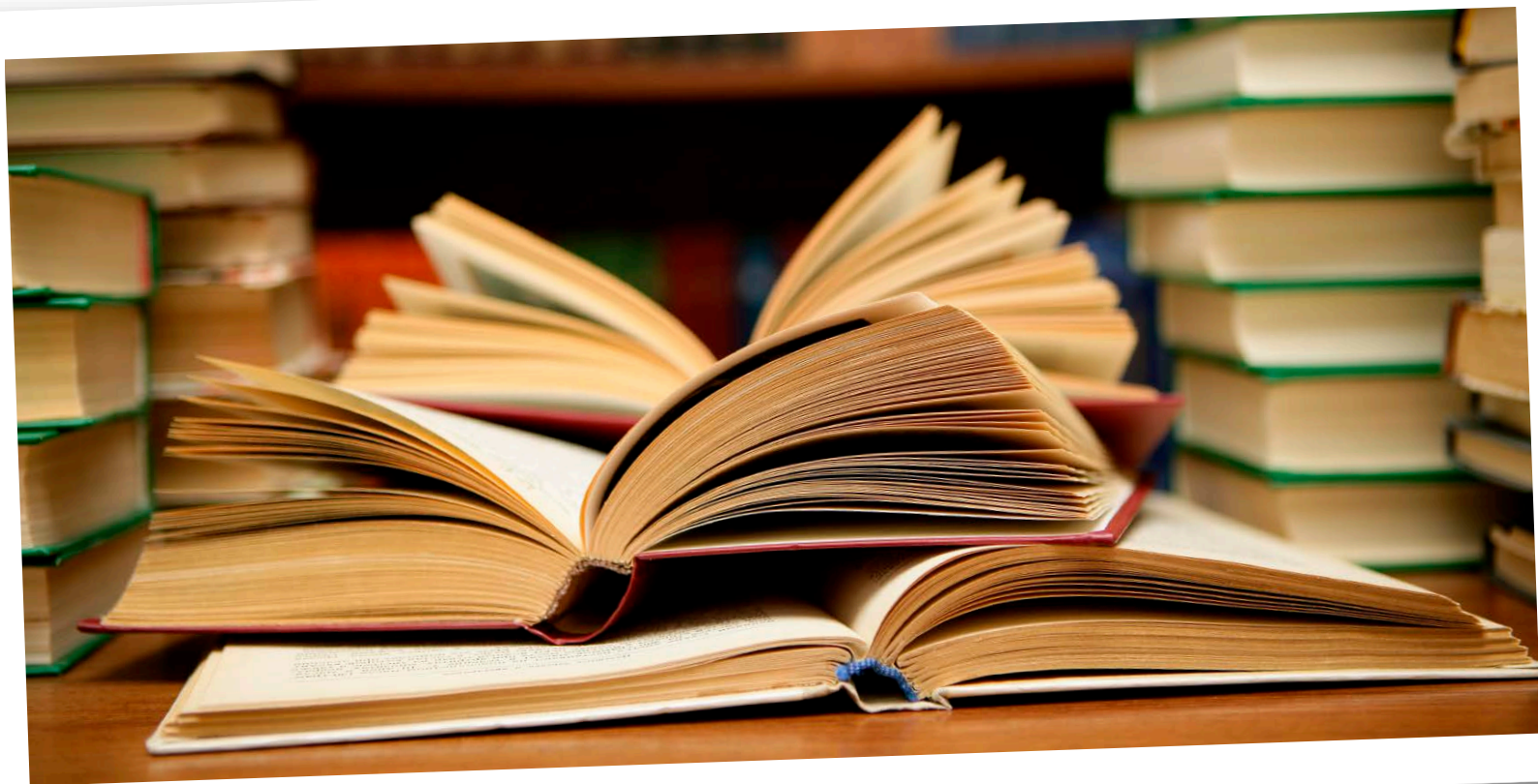


- **300 hours of video** are uploaded to YouTube **every minute**
- YouTube gets over **30 million visitors per day**
- Each month, **80% of 18-49 year-olds** will watch at least one YouTube video
- More than half of YouTube views come from **mobile devices**

“This discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust the external written characters and not remember of themselves.”

Plato, 370 BC





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Babies Love

GETTING STARTED
Pregnancy: Weeks 1-12



**Gearing up for
Change Badge**
Watch the videos below
to earn this badge!



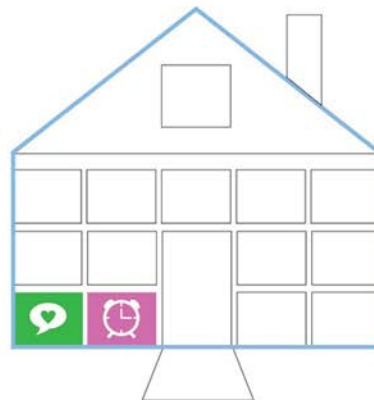
**Prenatal care: what you need
to know!**



Read more

[» Next Page \(1/5\)](#)

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My Home

Keep up the good work! Each time
you complete an activity, you will
earn a badge for your home.



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