

Parents' early childhood trauma can lead to behavioral health issues in their own children

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OP-ED

A new study reveals that severe childhood trauma and stresses early in parents' lives are linked to higher rates of behavioral health problems in their children. It is alarming that despite overcoming hardships that were experienced in childhood, these adults are likely to find the effects and cycle of adverse childhood experiences repeated in their children. Generation after generation.

The landmark University of California study brings to light the critical importance of youth mentoring in breaking this vicious cycle. The next step in this study on adverse childhood experiences will evaluate why our work in mentoring is so necessary, and how resilience factors, such as the support of mentors or teachers, diminish the effects of childhood hardships. Some of the usual ways that adverse childhood relationships affect kids are through long-term health issues, social dysfunctions and criminal behaviors. It is clear that one of the best mitigators of high adverse childhood relationship scores is a trusted friend and counsel, i.e. a mentor.

During the past 60 years, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami has transformed the lives of more than 65,000 children in Miami-Dade through one-on-one mentoring relationships that provide life-saving guidance and support.

Many of our youth come to us from single-parent households living below poverty level. At the start of their journey with us, children are dealing with academic and personal obstacles that limit their pathways to bright futures. Thanks to the support of mentors and donors, these same children evolve into young leaders in our community and the world through the sheer power of one.

As president and CEO, I am thankful for this kind of social-science study that reminds all of us to defend and invest in our children's potential through our time, talent or treasure. Our youth do not need to be "fixed," they are full of hopes, dreams and the potential to reach their goals.

We are fortunate to witness these successes time and time again.

There is the example of a Little Brother who suffered the tragic loss of his dad. Through the help and mentorship of his Big Brother, he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees, along with being a two-time national football champion and two-time Super Bowl champion.

There is the example of a Little Sister whose mom was incarcerated, felt helpless and considered suicide. She was matched with a Big Sister and just recently walked across the stage at her high school graduation to receive a full-ride scholarship to college.

The cycles of adverse childhood relationships end here. Their stories are ones of resilience, empowerment and success.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is doing this every day. The power of one can change everything for our kids, and their kids – our future. When we assist our children, they, in turn, will make a life-changing impact for their families, schools, our community, and the next generation.

As I recommend to everyone, think about the mentors you've had in your life. How did they inspire you? What resources did they give you access to? How did they influence the course of your life? And think about how your experiences and knowledge can help guide a child right here in Miami. But don't think about it for long. The gains of mentorship are twofold, benefiting both the mentee and the mentor.

There are many children right here waiting to be matched. They are worth our investment. Contact Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami to start your journey today in changing the life of a Little.

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