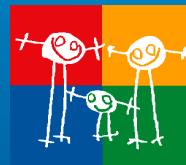




# Children and Adolescents' Mental Health – Finnish perspective

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Lasten ja naisten toimialue  
Pirkanmaan sairaanhoitopiiri

# Highlights

Recognizing the intergenerational nature of mental health and substance abuse problems and finding ways to break this cycle is a key starting point for preventive work and activities.

Active cooperation and national influence are needed here.

Special attention to supporting children when parents are in mental health and/or substance abuse services

Many everyday stressors threaten mental well-being. For example, poverty, bullying, loneliness, and environmental disturbances should be recognized as factors affecting mental well-being and causing disorders among people of all ages. The welfare area can also influence these phenomena.

Report of the Multi-Service Committee of the Pirkanmaa Welfare Area on the organization of adult psychiatry and substance abuse services in the Pirkanmaa Welfare Area



# Psychological Development of Children and Adolescents

## Special features

- High brain plasticity
- The first 3 years are a period of rapid brain growth and formation of neural networks
- During adolescence, new modifications occur in neuronal networks

# Psychological Development of Children and Adolescents

## Interaction between Parent/Adult and Child Builds Brain Health

- Parental sensitivity, i.e., the ability to detect and respond to the child's needs
- Parental structuring ability, i.e., the ability to organize the environment to support the child's development

Sensitive periods: certain experiences are essential

The quality of interaction experiences affects development

(Keunen ym 2017, Mill ym 2017, Paunio ja Lehtonen, 2016, Kerr ym. 2019)



## Parenting Can Be Challenging...

**First-time parents:** “everyday life feels like being in porridge...”

Parents burdened by **life events**

Parents without a **social support** network

Parents with **mental health** problems

Parents with **substance abuse** problems

Parents who were themselves child protection clients or otherwise **traumatized** as children

Struggling with **financial difficulties and disadvantage**

Risks often accumulate



# Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Can lead to lifelong deficiencies in:

Learning

Social skills

General health

Mental health

The more ACEs, the greater the risk

Source: Shonkoff et al. 2012

# ACEs: Levels of Stress

**Toxic Stress:** Intense, frequent, or prolonged stress response without protective adult care

- Prolonged cortisol exposure leads to damage to cells and their connections
- Amygdala – tendency towards anxiety
- Prefrontal cortex – difficulties in self-regulation, learning difficulties
- Hippocampus – difficulties in working memory and learning

**Source:** Thomason and Marusak, 2017



# Perinatal Mental Health

## Depression during pregnancy

- Prevalence 12-15% of mothers
- Increases the risk of child behavior disorders by 5.5 times (Pihlakoski et al. 2009)

## Postpartum depression and anxiety

- Prevalence 12%-20% of mothers (Tamminen 1990, Ahlqvist 2017)
- 10% of mothers experience anxiety related to baby care (Matthey 2008)
- 5-9% of fathers report poor mental health during the perinatal period (Mäntymaa et al. 2002; Matthey 2003; Luoma et al. 2013)



## Results of our 30-year longitudinal study

Even mild parental depression affects parenting: increases the risk of child behavior and mood disorders

(Luoma et al. 2001 , 2004, 2018, Puura et al. 2013, 2019)



# Disorders in Young Children

- Study with 3-year-olds (Hannesdottir, Sourander et al. 2000)
  - Clinically significant problems in about 26%, including
    - Behavioral problems/aggression/destructiveness about 11%
    - Anxiety/withdrawal 6%
    - Sleep problems 3%
    - Somatic complaints 3%
- Clinically significant behavioral and emotional symptoms observed at age 3 continued in 30% of the studied children (Pihlakoski et al. 2012) in follow-up until age 12

# Mental Health of Children and Adolescents

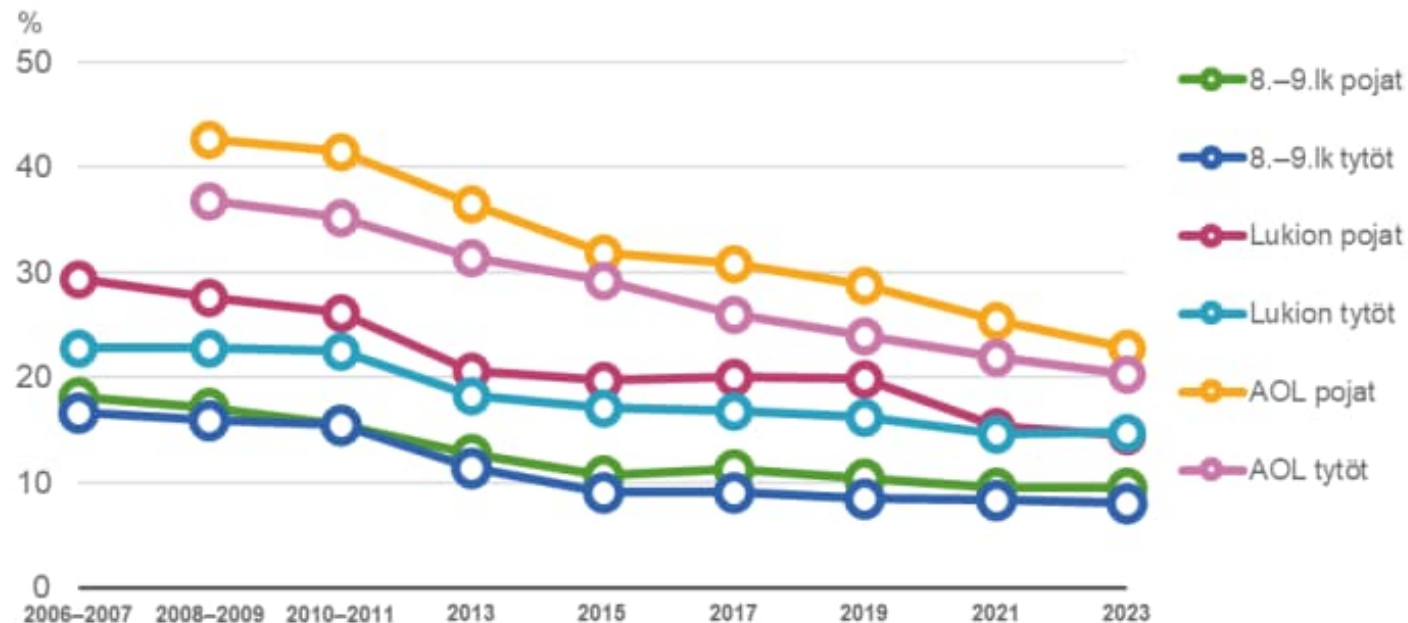
Mental health problems at some stage in about 20%

Mental health-related assessment and treatment visits in healthcare in 2020 in Finland

- 9% of 7–12-year-olds
  - 15% of 13–17-year-olds
  - 18% of 18–22-year-olds
- 
- Source: THL Statistical Report 21/2022, 3.6.2022

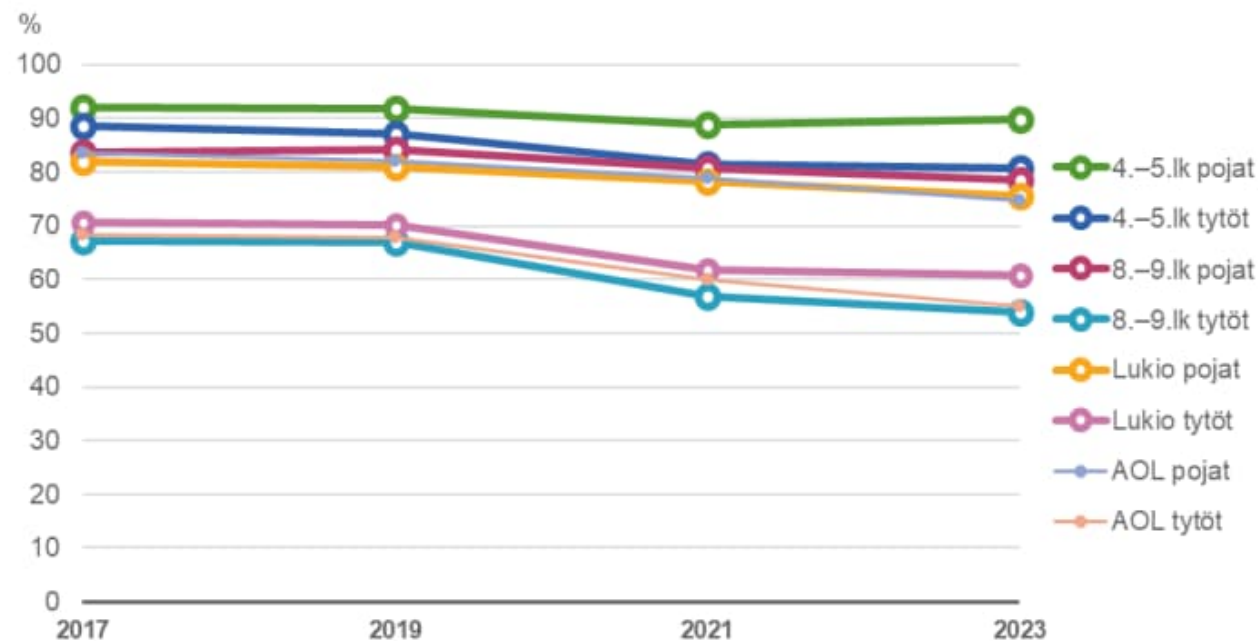
# Good news: binge drinking has decreased

**Kuvio 12. Tosi humalassa vähintään kerran kuukaudessa olleiden nuorten osuus sukupuolen ja kouluasteen mukaan vuosina 2006–2023, %. THL, Kouluterveyskysely.**



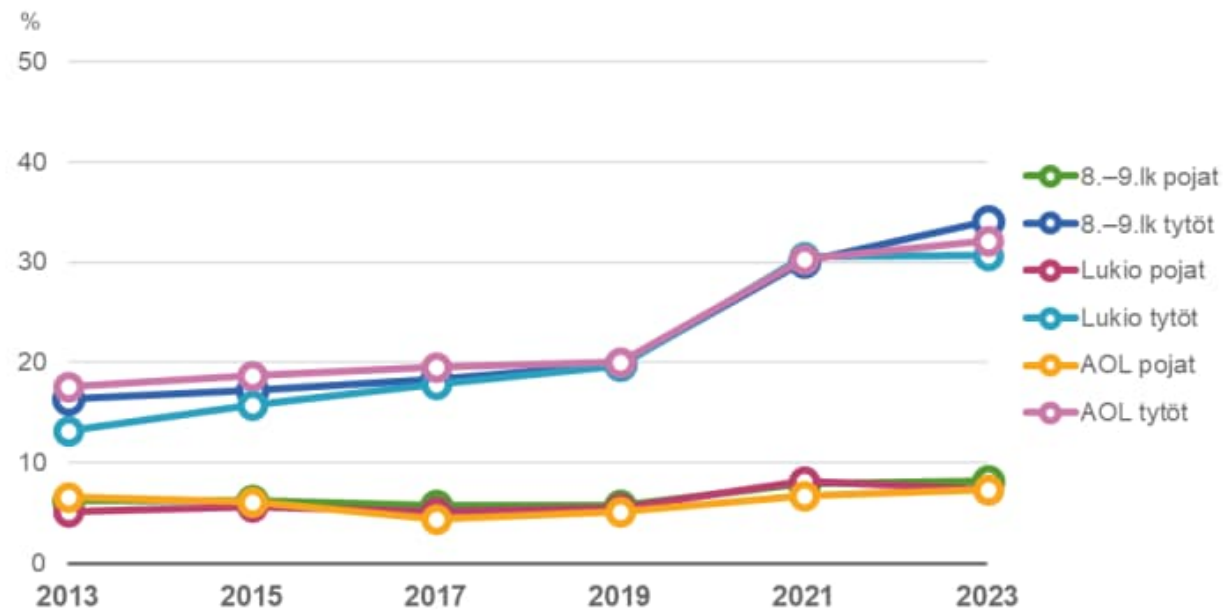
# Children and young people's satisfaction with life has decreased

Kuvio 2. Elämäänsä tyytyväisten lasten ja nuorten osuus sukupuolen ja kouluasteen mukaan vuosina 2017–2023, %. THL, Kouluterveyskysely.



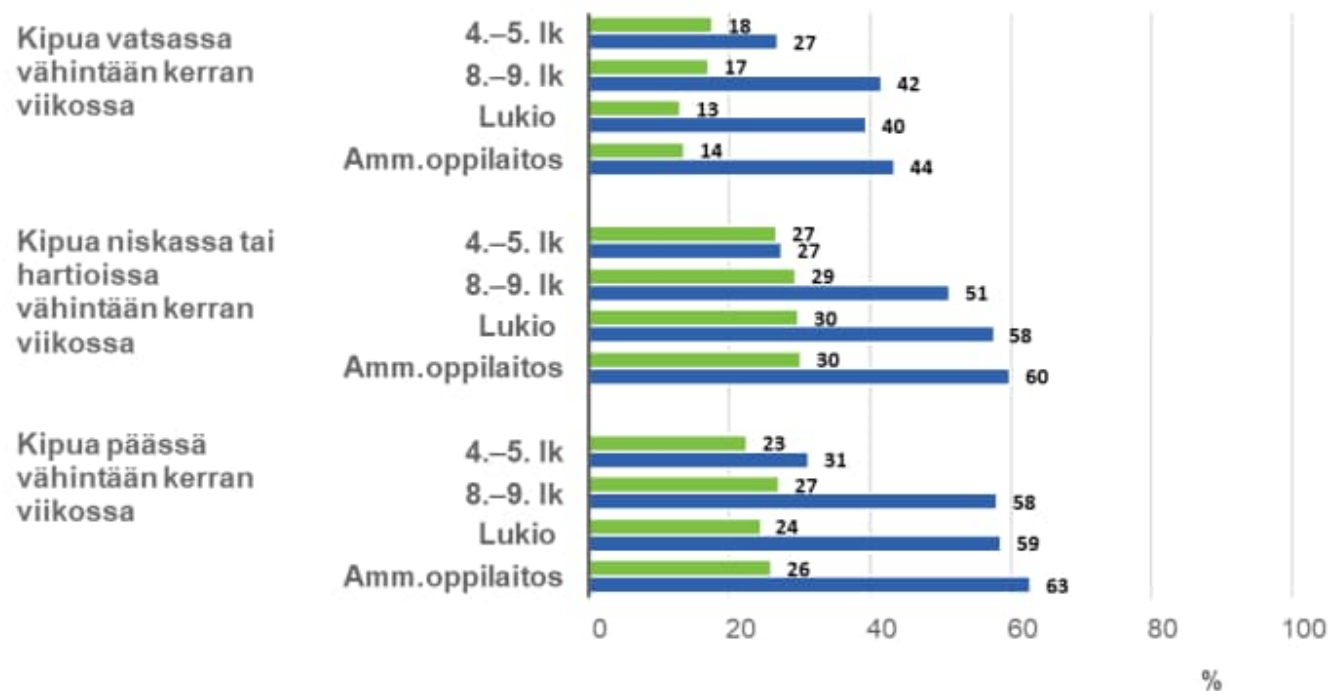
# The anxiety in the young has increased

**Kuvio 3. Kohtalaista tai vaikeaa ahdistuneisuutta kahden viime viikon aikana kokeneiden nuorten osuus sukupuolen ja kouluasteen mukaan vuosina 2013–2023, %.**  
THL, Kouluterveyskysely.



# Children and adolescents' recurrent pains

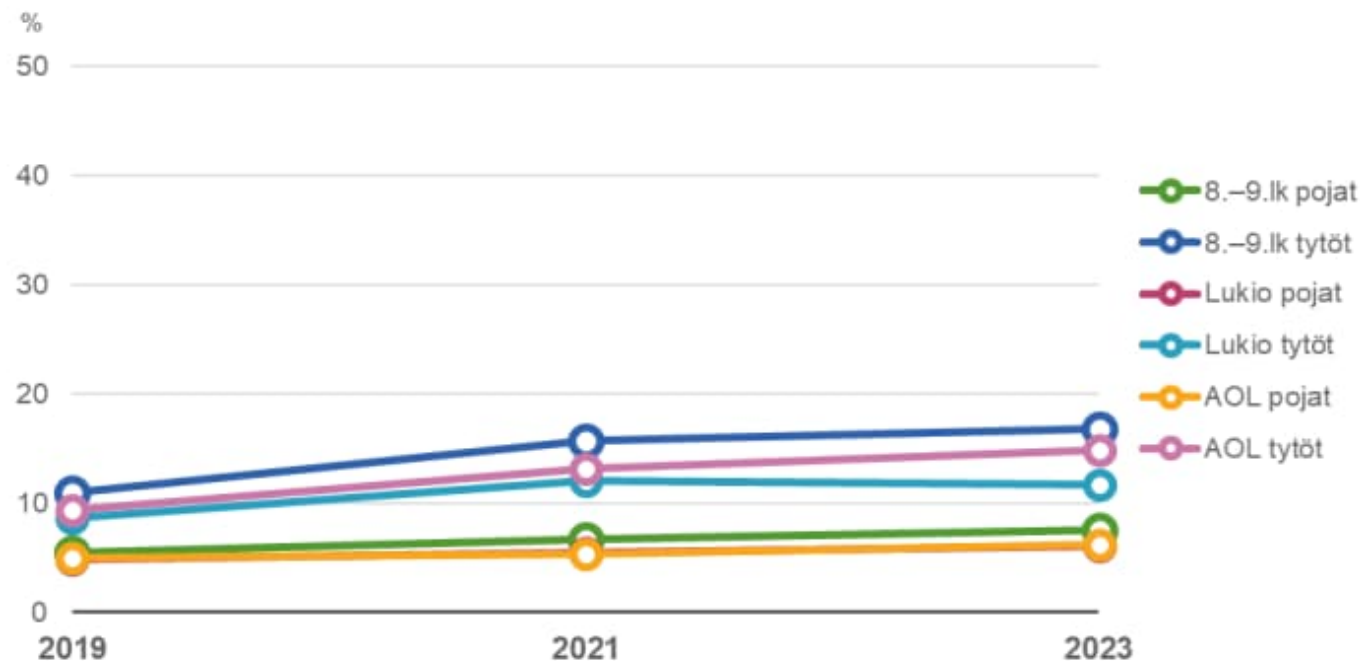
Kuvio 5. Kipua vähintään kerran viikossa kokeneiden lasten ja nuorten osuus sukupuolen ja kouluasteen mukaan vuonna 2023, %. THL, Kouluterveyskysely.





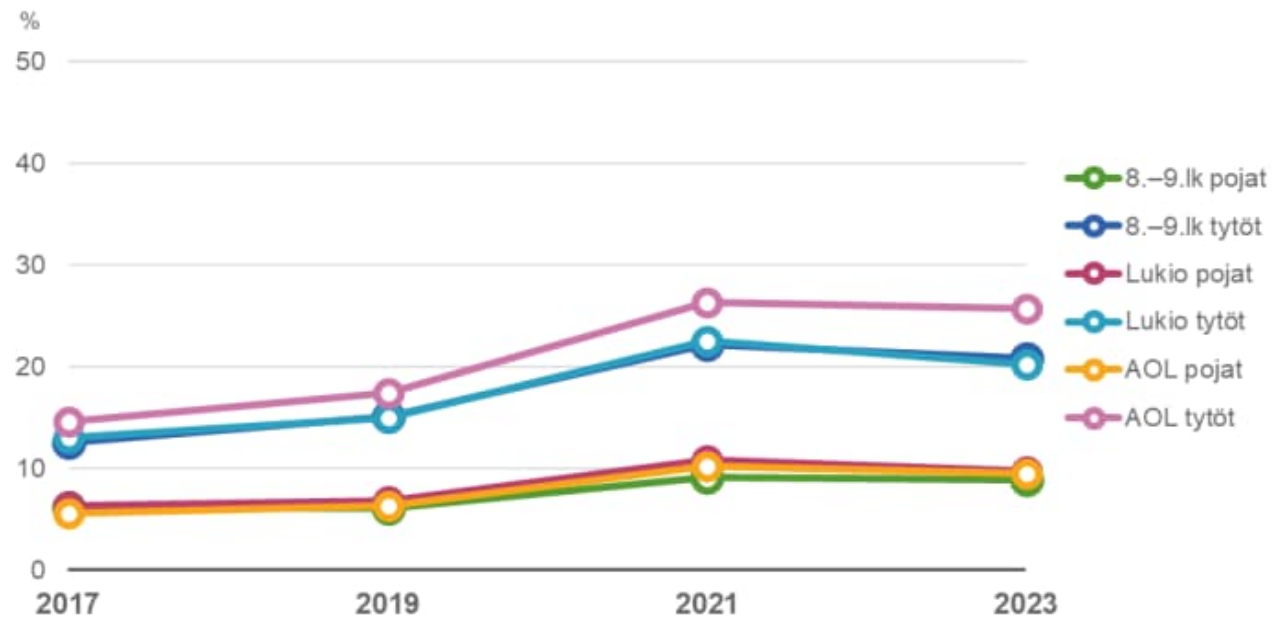
# Reasons for distress: lack of participation

Kuvio 7. Osallisuuden erittäin heikoksi kokeneiden nuorten osuus sukupuolen ja kouluasteen mukaan vuosina 2019–2023, %. THL, Kouluterveyskysely.



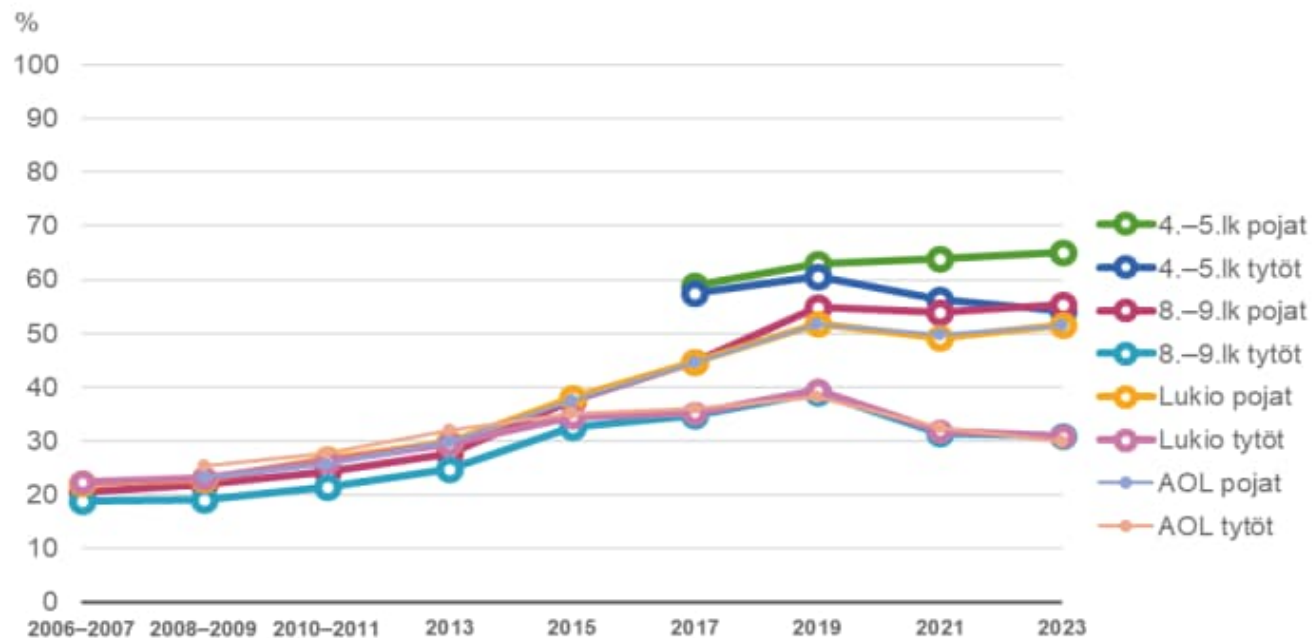
# Reasons for distress: loneliness

Kuvio 8. Itsensä yksinäiseksi tuntevien nuorten osuus sukupuolen ja kouluasteen mukaan vuosina 2017–2023, %. THL, Kouluterveyskysely.



# Reasons for distress: Poor communication with parents

**Kuvio 9. Keskusteluyhteyden vanhempien kanssa hyväksi kokevien lasten ja nuorten osuus sukupuolen ja kouluasteen mukaan vuosina 2006–2023, %. THL, Kouluterveyskysely.**



# Reasons for distress

## Child neglect and abuse

- Affect development of the brain and mind (Nelson ym 2019)
- Associated with mental health problems in adulthood (Gilbert et al, 2009)
- Through epigenetic inheritance, increases the risk for abusive parenthood (Suderman et al 2012)

## Parents' substance use (Dunn et al 2002)

## Disadvantage (Russell ym 2008)



# Reasons for distress: smart devices

## Parental smart device use

- Reduces the parent's sensitivity to baby's messages (Golen & Ventura 2015) and the amount of reciprocal interaction (Radesky et al. 2014)
- "disconnected parenting" – here but absent
  - *The child has 2 options:*
    - *Passive submission*
    - *Bad behavior to get attention*



# Reasons for distress

School bullying and cyberbullying (Schneider et al. 2012, Turner et al. 2013, Kim et al. 2018)

Problems created by social media (Turner et al. 2015, Kelly et al. 2018)

Pandemic – or fear of a new one

Climate crisis

State of the world

# Protecting factors

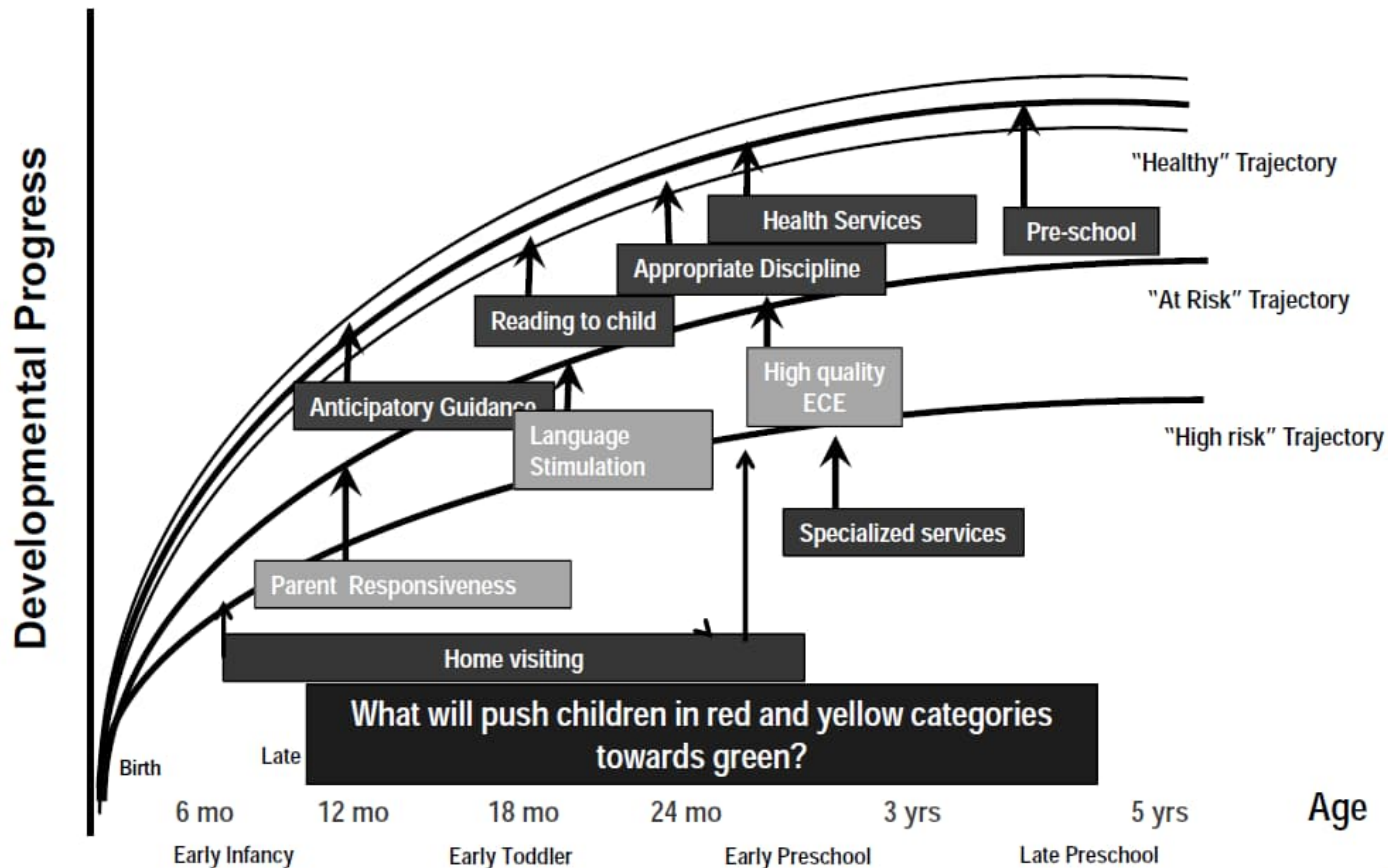
## Mental flexibility (resilience)

- Individual tolerance and capability, temperament
- Positive experiences gained from social relationships, i.e., Positive Childhood Experiences (Narayan et al. 2018)
- Shared joyous experiences with a parent (Mäntymaa et al. 2015)

Protective factors act as a “buffer.”



# Strategies to Improve Developmental Trajectories



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# Finnish mental health services for children and adolescents

## Universal services: Prevention and treatment of mild problems

- well-baby clinics 0-6, school health care 7-18

## Treatment of mild/moderate problems

- mental health services at primary level

## Treatment of moderate and severe disorders

- Child and adolescent psychiatric services

# What could supporting children's and young people's mental health be?

## Easily accessible services

- Home help for exhausted parents during the perinatal period
- For parents of young children who have difficulties or concerns related to the child's development or upbringing – enhanced support from the well-baby clinic

Good enough services for parents suffering from mental health or substance abuse disorders, especially during the perinatal period

# What could supporting children's and young people's mental health be?

Prevention of domestic violence and school bullying: presence of adults

Quality of early childhood education: development of children's emotional education

Quality of teaching – the relationship between teacher and students, emotional education

Afternoon hobby opportunities – reducing the effects of poverty

Good integration of immigrant families

New methods for treating anxiety and depression in school-age children and adolescents

# Body as a support for the mind: VR applications for managing stress and anxiety

Sovelluksen suunnittelu ja toteutus 1.7.2021 – 31.12.2022

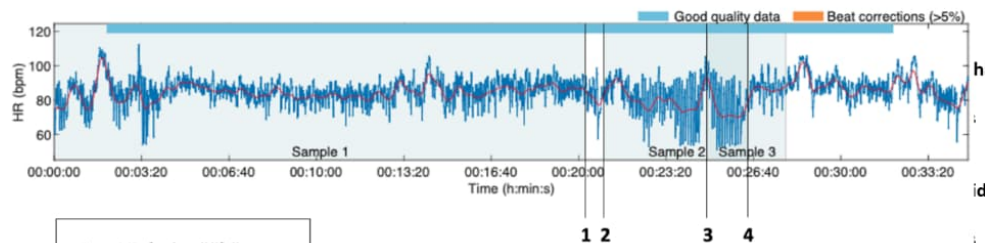
Yhdistää 360 videokuvattua luontoympäristöä

Animoitu "hengityspallo" – laajenee uloshengityksessä, supistuu sisäänhengityksessä

Animoitu hahmo antamassa hengitys tai rentoutusohjeet lapselle/nuorelle

Käyttö VR-laseilla tai isolla näytöllä

## Syvähengityksen vaikutus sykevälivaihteluun (HRV)



1. VR-lasit päähän
2. Harjoitus alkaa
3. Toimenpide
4. Harjoitus loppuu

Kommentit: "Oli helpompi olla kanyloitavana lasien kanssa. Kuva oli vähän sumea. Voisi jatkossakin käyttää lasia kanyloinnin aikana."



# Kiitos!

