

**THE RAISING
OF AMERICA**
EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION

EPISODE 1: THE RAISING OF AMERICA SIGNATURE HOUR



**Discussion
Guide**

EPISODE 1: THE RAISING OF AMERICA SIGNATURE HOUR



The Raising of America: Early Childhood and the Future of Our Nation

The Raising of America is an ambitious documentary series and public engagement campaign that seeks to reframe the way we look at early child health and development. It illustrates how a strong start for all our kids leads not only to better individual life course outcomes (learning, earning and physical and mental health) but also to a healthier, safer, better educated, more prosperous and equitable nation.

Learn more about each episode in the series at raisingofamerica.org:

- Ep 1: The Raising of America
- Ep 2: Once Upon a Time
- Ep 3: Are We Crazy About Our Kids?
- Ep 4: Wounded Places
- Ep 5: DNA is Not Destiny

Get Involved!

Check out the hundreds of public engagement partner organizations at raisingofamerica.org/partners and join the campaign (raisingofamerica.org/join-campaign) to change the conversation about what we can—and should—do to give all our kids a strong start.

This guide was developed by Faith Rogow, PhD, Insighters Education Consulting with Larry Adelman and Rachel Poulain at California Newsreel. Designed by Shannon K'doah Range and Alisha Saville.

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The Raising of America Signature Hour

SYNOPSIS

Episode 1: The Signature Hour (60 minutes) kicks off the documentary series *The Raising of America: Early Childhood and the Future of Our Nation*.

This episode asks:

Why are so many parents and caregivers increasingly stressed? How is this hurting our babies' and toddlers' chances to build the strong foundation all kids need to thrive? What are the consequences for the nation's future? And what might we do to change things?

The studies are many, they are strong and they are persuasive: investing in the well-being of our youngest children—and the people who raise and care for them—pays off in a big way for children and for society. So why, despite the evidence, does our nation do so little for young children and their families? How might we do better?

This opening episode of *The Raising of America* series translates the science into popular terms, interweaving discoveries from neuroscience and economics with the stories of families struggling to provide the nurturing environments all babies and young children need to build a strong foundation for future learning, earning, and mental and physical health. It illustrates how workplace and public policies, along with economic and racial inequality, are pushing many parents and caregivers to the edge.

Parents are working to provide the safe, stable and responsive relationships and experiences all babies and young children need to thrive. But they are

battered by stagnant wages and long work hours, lack of paid parental leave (the U.S. is the sole advanced economy not to guarantee paid family leave by law) and costly yet often poor quality childcare.

Studies show that when parents are squeezed for time, money and resources, their children pay the price. Stressors on parents can drip down on babies and young children and literally alter their developing brains. The result? Greater risk for behavioral and learning problems as they grow up, even increased susceptibility to chronic disease as adults.

But child well-being isn't all that's at stake. As today's children grow into tomorrow's neighbors, workers, citizens and leaders, the future health and prosperity of the nation hang in the balance.

American history reveals we've made decisions in the past to make young children and their families a greater priority, and we can again. The Military Childcare Act, for example, passed in 1989 makes it that today some of the best childcare in the country is provided by the U.S. military, all of it affordable.

The Raising of America links our individual aspirations to a language of social connectedness. Perhaps preschool teacher Aiyauna Terry, embracing her young students, sums it up best:

This is the future right here. Invest in their parents. Invest in these children. They're not going to fail you, but we can't fail them now.

THEMES

The Signature Hour is appropriate for audiences interested in:

Brain development	Parenting
Child care	Psychology
Child development	Political economy
Early childhood	Public health
Economics	Public policy
Education	Racial justice
Family	Social change
Family policy	Social justice
Health & wellness	Social problems
Human development	Social work
Labor & employment practices	Sociology
Life-course	Toxic stress
Mental health	Work-life balance
Minimum wage	Working mothers
Neuroscience	Workplace policy

FILM CHAPTERS

1. 00:00 – It All Begins in Infancy
2. 04:28 – 700 Synapses Per Second
3. 08:23 – Serve and Return
4. 11:56 – The Growing Squeeze on Parents
5. 16:04 – Paid Parental Leave?
6. 21:44 – Parental Stress, Infants’ Brains
7. 28:58 - Searching for Childcare
8. 34:48 - A Federal Role?
9. 39:07 - Stealing Time: Work and Family
10. 42:42 - Segregation and Disinvestment
11. 44:49 - 1 in 4 Born into Poverty
12. 52:21 - Invest in Us

BY THE NUMBERS

700

Number of brain connections (synapses) babies make every second during the first years of life

26th/29

U.S. ranking out of 29 nations for the well-being of children across multiple dimensions

40%

Percentage of new mothers in the U.S. who return to work by the time their infants are 3 months old

23

Number of places the U.S. has dropped in high school graduation rankings since 1970

75%

Percentage of young people 17-24 who are not qualified for military service in 2012 because they are overweight, too poorly educated or have a criminal record

0

Number of months of paid maternity and paternity leave in the U.S. guaranteed by federal law

\$10,000

Average cost in dollars for center-based childcare – per child, per year (2010).

14

Number of months of paid maternity and paternity leave in Germany guaranteed by federal law

1 in 4

Percentage of children 0-5 living in poverty

25%

Percentage of all U.S. jobs which pay poverty level wages or less for a family of four (\$24,250 in 2015)

22nd/45

U.S. ranking among 45 nations in quality of childcare.

10%

Percentage of child-care centers in the U.S. which are accredited

40%

Percentage of U.S. five-year-olds not ready to learn when they enter kindergarten

\$19,600

Annual median wage for U.S. childcare workers in 2013, less than the poverty level for a family of three

1

Number of rich nations that do not guarantee workers any paid vacations, holidays, or sick leave by federal law — the United States

FILM PARTICIPANTS

In order of appearance

FAMILIES

Tina Bruno

Mother of Aiden and Cara

Johely and parents, Nehemias and Karla Calixto

Ann Waterman Roy

Lives in Boston and wishes to spend more time with her four-month-old daughter Sylvie, but must return to work because she has used up available sick leave and vacation days from her job and has no paid maternity leave

David Linhart and Yaminette Diaz-Linhart

Parents of son Naham and daughter Nikha; Yaminette works full time while David is finishing school. They are searching for quality childcare for Nikha.

Jodelice Rolon

Sends her son to the high-quality child development center at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base.

Mehrdad and Margaret Barikbin

As members of the military, they have access to childcare at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base that is high-quality and affordable.

Erica Burks-Cummings and Leroy Campbell

Parents of daughter Danayah, they live in Boston's Mattapan neighborhood. She worked as a nurse and he a mechanic and driver, working more than 100 hours a week between them.

Ashley Walker

Mother of Amelia and London, she was first thrust into poverty when she left a physically abusive husband. Ashley's second daughter was born pre-term. She was fired from her job when she couldn't return to work after the 12 week limit (without pay) allowed by the Family and Medical Leave Act.

PROVIDERS AND EXPERTS

Renée Boynton-Jarrett, MD, ScD.

Pediatrician and researcher
Boston Medical Center
Founding Director, Vital Village

Jack Shonkoff, MD

Director, Center on the Developing Child
Harvard University.

john a. powell

Director, Haas Institute for
a Fair and Inclusive Society
University of California-Berkeley
Professor of Law

Judith Lichtman

Family leave advocate
Attorney and past president
National Partnership for Women & Families;

(cont. →)

FILM PARTICIPANTS (CONT.)

PROVIDERS AND EXPERTS (cont.)

James Heckman

Nobel laureate
 Henry Schultz Distinguished Service
 Professor of Economics
 University of Chicago
 The Heckman Equation

Edward Tronick

Chief of Research, Child Development Unit
 Professor of Psychology
 University of Massachusetts-Boston
 Conducted the classic “Still Face Experiment”
 with Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and colleagues

Robert Dugger

Investment banker and economist
 Co-founder of ReadyNation, a business-
 oriented child-advocacy group
 Former partner of Tudor Investment
 Corporation, a hedge fund
 Former Policy Director of the
 American Bankers Association

Arthur Rolnick

Senior Fellow
 Humphrey School of Public Affairs
 University of Minnesota
 Former Economist and Vice President
 Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis
 Minneapolis Fed & ECD, Human Capital
 Research Initiative & ECD

Ellen Bravo

Executive Director
 Family Values @ Work
 A national network of coalitions advocating
 for family-friendly workplace policies

Cory Burghy

Researcher
 University of Wisconsin-Madison
 Studying the impact
 of parental stress on children

Marilyn Essex

Professor of Psychiatry
 University of Wisconsin-Madison
 School of Medicine and Public Health
 Director, Life Stress and Human Development
 Lab
 Co-Director and Principal Investigator
 Wisconsin Study of Families and Work
 (20-year longitudinal study of how parental
 stress during pregnancy and the early years can
 leave lasting imprints on the developmental
 paths of their children)

Aiyauna Terry

Early Childhood Teacher, Boston
 Ellis Memorial Child Development Center

Major General Vincent Coglianesse

Commanding General
 Camp Pendleton (2011-2013)
 United States Marine Corps

1. Facilitating a Productive Dialogue

How will you facilitate dialogue around a new story of early childhood?

The prevailing way of talking about children and families in the U.S. focuses on parents. Are they making the right choices? Are they really trying to do the right thing for their children? If parents only “knew better” or had the grit, discipline and determination to make the right choices, their children would do better.

But families don’t live in a bubble.

Your role as a facilitator is to ask questions that help participants:

1. Process information

Why are the early years so important for brain development? Where does the U.S. rank among rich nations in terms of child well-being? What do studies by economists tell us about investing in the early years?

2. Reflect on their experience

In what ways does your socio-economic status affect the choices you can make? What are the types of things that affect your day-to-day that are beyond your control? How would it be different if you had or didn’t have a young child? What are the hardest parts of being a parent? (NOTE: This question allows you to gauge the content to which audience members connect individual parenting behaviors to larger social conditions. Your role is to strengthen that connection. For more, see “Beware Conversation Pitfalls” in the Action Toolkit.)

3. Interpret and find meaning

What do you think is going on for parents and children who are thriving compared to those who are not? Why is it that we are the richest country in the world and yet 1 in 4 children are born

(cont. →)

into poverty? Who benefits when families are cut adrift and left to fend for themselves? Why, when we know so much, do we do so little?

4. Decide what kind of action they want to take

Who do you want to engage in this conversation? How might you engage them? What can you do in the short term? In the long-term? What would make the U.S. one of the best places to raise children?

Ultimately, how can you facilitate a conversation that asks: What can we—as a group, a community, a state, even the nation—do better to assure the safe, secure and nurturing relationships and environments which all babies and young children need to thrive?

SIX GUIDING QUESTIONS

Consider how you can weave the following six questions into your discussion about *The Raising of America*.

1. How does what surrounds us shape us?

We are born with most of our 86 billion brain cells (neurons), but those cells are only weakly connected together. Our experiences during the very first years of life literally wire brain cells together and shape the architecture of our developing brains. They create a strong or weak foundation for future emotional, intellectual and social health and development.

Safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments help build strong foundations. They are the most powerful protective forces in a young child's life.

2. Why is blaming parents the easy way out?

Parents find themselves increasingly squeezed for time, for money and for resources. Too many are cut adrift without living wage jobs, social supports, secure, affordable housing, high-quality child care and paid family leave which impede their efforts to provide the nurturing environments all children need.

(cont. →)

These hardships can also trigger anxiety and sleepless nights, making it even harder to be the parents they want to be. And because of attunement between baby and parents, when parents are stressed by circumstances beyond their control, that stress can ‘drip down’ on their babies, altering the wiring of their developing brains with enduring consequences.

3. How might the best parenting programs have nothing to do with parenting at all?

Each of us has finite reserves of self-control and attention, what Sendhil Mullainathan and others call “psychic resources.” When our attention is drained by uncertainty and worries about work, juggling bills, neighborhood chaos or fear and anxiety about the future, fewer psychic resources are available to respond attentively to the often subtle emotional cues of babies and young children.

Everything that improves the economic security, safety and peace of mind of parents improves parenting—and increases children’s chances for growing into healthy, compassionate and responsible adults. These include living wages and reliable hours, secure housing, high-quality childcare, paid family leave, safe neighborhoods, flex time, desegregation and social inclusion, an end to mass incarceration, better transit...and hope.

4. Why are young children one of the most prudent investments any nation can make?

To predict how our nation will fare tomorrow, we only need look at how our youngest children are doing today—and the numbers show we are falling behind.

Many studies suggest that investments which improve a child’s, her family’s and her neighborhood circumstances in the earliest years of a child’s life help put that child on a strong developmental path—better learning, earning and mental and even physical health.

This in turn improves the well-being and prosperity of the nation. Today’s children are tomorrow’s families, friends, neighbors, workers, citizens and leaders.

(cont. →)

5. Why do we all stand to gain when all babies get a strong start?

Parents across the board report being plagued by chronic anxiety: Will my children have enough? Can I keep them safe? Can I provide what they need to succeed? Will they feel my love and learn to love in return?

In our fend-for-yourself society, even affluent families fear not having enough—while middle and low-income families, increasingly stressed for time, money and resources, struggle every day to be the parents they want to be for their young children.

If we as a community, a state, a nation can better assure the conditions that improve all children's chances to realize their potential, our children and grandchildren will benefit from living in a healthier, safer, better educated, more prosperous and more equitable nation. And when we make the needs of young children and their families a national priority, anxiety and fears for our own children can give way to a sense of hope and possibility.

6. How can we make change?

The conditions and policies that make parenting so stressful in the U.S. aren't natural or etched in stone. They are the result of decisions we, as a body politic, have made—and can make differently.

The U.S. has a long history of social movements which have tackled inequities and driven social change. There are many things we can do—large and small—to improve social conditions for families with young children. We've done it before; we can do it again.

These elements of a new conversation are interwoven throughout the Post-Viewing Questions below which are organized into four sections: The Science of Early Childhood; The Squeeze on Parents; Policies, Structures and Power; and Why, When We Know So Much, Do We Do So Little?

You'll also find an Extension Activity which uses the debate format to introduce elements of the new conversation and reframe the way we see early child health and development.

GENERAL FACILITATION TIPS

A successful film screening allows participants to:

- Watch purposefully and critically
- Reflect on what they've seen
- Consider new information and how it affirms/conflicts with preconceived ideas
- Bring viewers' attention back to their own situation and how they might tackle inequities
- Learn from others in the room
- Turn their attention back to their own experiences and communities and consider how they might tackle inequities

Your job as facilitator is not to lecture but to encourage participation and keep the discussion focused and flowing. Be prepared to accept reactions to the film without judgment. If people feel that you are fishing for particular opinions, they are less likely to engage.

At the same time, participants will look to you to keep the discussion from wandering. If necessary, gently guide discussants to consider how their personal experiences or concerns reflect larger systems, structures and policies.

Be sure to preview the film yourself prior to the screening and discussion so you won't be processing your own reactions while trying to guide the group. You can also read the transcript of the episode, available at www.raisingofamerica.org.

Finally, plan in advance how you will deal with logistical issues, from arranging for the best possible audio for the screening to creating a strategy that ensures everyone who wishes to speak has an opportunity to be heard.

For more facilitation tips including: "Ensure a Productive Discussion" and "Avoid Conversation Pitfalls," see the Action Toolkit. Click on the Take Action menu tab at www.raisingofamerica.org

2. Pre-Viewing Activity

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

On the following page is a multiple choice quiz that you can use to get your participants thinking about the information and ideas before seeing the film.

Ask your audience members to complete it prior to watching the film and then set it aside without revealing the answers.

After screening the film, invite participants to look at the quiz again to compare their original answers with the facts in the film. Discuss any differences. Which surprised them the most?

Alternative Use

An alternate way of using the quiz is to go through the questions collaboratively.

Rather than distribute the quiz to participants, read the questions aloud. Have participants write their answers on large pieces of paper so everyone can see them. Pause between each question and have everyone hold up their guesses, so they can see if there is much variation in the room.

You can discuss different opinions but do not reveal the answers until after the screening. This should be done in a spirit of curiosity rather than judgment. Assure the group that there will be plenty of time to talk about the answers after viewing the film.

ANSWERS
1.D—2.D—3.A—4.D
5.C—6.D—7.B—8.C

(cont. →)

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

- How many neural connections between brain cells does a baby make every MINUTE in her first two years of life?
A) 50 B) 850 C) 2200 D) 42,000
- In 1970, the U.S. had the highest high school (and college) graduation rates in the world. What is the U.S. ranking today (2014)?
A) 1 B) 5 C) 13 D) 23
- Canada offers parents 9 months of paid family leave. In Germany it is 14 months and in Hungary, more than 2 years. How many months of paid family leave are U.S. parents guaranteed by federal law?
A) 0 B) 3 C) 6 D) 12
- How does the U.S. child poverty rate compare to 35 developed nations? (1 = best; 35 = worst)
A) 3 B) 7 C) 16 D) 34
- What percentage of new mothers return to work before their infants are three months old?
A) 12% B) 23% C) 40% D) 51%
- Has the 2014 federal minimum wage (adjusted for inflation) increased, decreased, or remained about the same since 1968?
A) Remained the same B) Increased by 12%
C) Decreased by 12% D) Decreased by 34%
- What proportion of jobs in the U.S. pay poverty level wages or less (\$24,250 for a family of four in 2015):
A) One in two B) One in four
C) One in six D) One in eight
- In 2012, what percentage of youth ages 17-24 were unfit for military service because they couldn't pass the physical test, the cognitive test, or had a criminal record?
A) 27% B) 45% C) 75% D) 87%

3. *Post-Viewing Discussions*

These questions are designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of groups, settings, ages and experience. Rather than trying to cover them all, select the prompts and follow-up questions that best fit your situation.

A) OPENING PROMPTS

1. What single word best describes how the film made you feel?
2. What was surprising, stood out to you, or made you pause and say, “I need to think more about that”?
3. What are three things from the film you wish everyone in your family or community knew? What do you think might change if everyone knew it?
4. If you could guarantee that political, business, and community leaders would watch this film, what would you want their “takeaway” to be?
5. How is this film similar to or different from other media you have seen, read or heard on this issue? In what ways does it confirm or challenge ideas you held?

B) THE SCIENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

1. Where does the U.S. rank internationally when researchers measure the well-being of children?
2. Where does the U.S. rank when it comes to high school and college graduation rates? What does early childhood experiences have to do with high school and college graduation?

3. Dr. Boynton-Jarrett observes that, “Third grade reading level is actually a very strong predictor of high school graduation. Well, third grade reading level is predicted by the number of words you know when you’re two or three years old. So what predicts the number of words you know when you’re two or three years old? We can track that back to the enrichment of your environment at the very earliest moments of your life...the very earliest stages of your brain development.”



- What might an “enriched” environment for an infant consist of?
- What do parents need to provide an enriched environment?
- What larger societal conditions can enhance or decrease parents’ and caregivers’ capacity to do so?

4. The film tells us: “A baby’s brain connections aren’t built on automatic pilot. They are reinforced by characteristics of your environment and by experiences that you have, especially through the exchange of small everyday interactions between an infant and her caregivers like ‘serve and return’.”



(cont. →)

- What is “serve and return”? Give an example.
 - What kinds of experiences and environments build strong brain connections? What might get in the way?
 - If infants don’t consciously remember, how does early experience become imprinted in the brain and body?
 - How might unreliable or inappropriate responses to a baby’s cues over time alter brain architecture? What are some possible consequences?
5. Dr. Renée Boynton-Jarrett says, “The more practice [a baby has] activating those circuits, the stronger they become. It’s a use it or lose it phenomenon.” What does she mean by that?
6. What did researchers learn from Edward Tronick’s “Still Face” experiment about what happens when “serve and return” is disrupted or absent?
7. Dr. Jack Shonkoff explains how poverty can result in toxic stress: “It’s the pile up: low education on top of low income on top of exposure to violence. The cumulative burden of all of those forces creates a sense of chronic crisis, chronic activation of the stress system, what we call toxic stress.”
- What is the stress response? What triggers it? What’s the difference between positive stress and toxic stress?
 - How does experiencing toxic stress affect the developing brain?
 - What are some enduring consequences of experiencing toxic stress?



(cont. →)

- How might the chronic stress which parents experience during pregnancy and the first years of their child's life drip down, get 'under the skin' and leave a lasting biological imprint on their fetus and young child? How might it affect the child's own stress reactivity as he or she grows up?
- What social conditions or forces increase the risk of a young child experiencing toxic stress?
- Do you know anyone who has experienced early life trauma or toxic stress?

8. Jack Shonkoff says, "The development of the brain is laid down in the early years well before children start school, even before they start talking. Everything starts from the bottom-up. Beginning from the moment of birth, 700 new synapses or connections between brain cells are being formed every single second in all parts of the brain...that are responsible for everything from being able to regulate your feelings, to begin to learn language, to begin to understand how to interact with other children, to begin to solve problems..."



- What does science tell us about early childhood as building a "base" or foundation for future social, intellectual, and emotional development?
- What aspects of the environment are invested in the child being strong, resilient, confident and capable?
- As you look around your community or neighborhood, how would you answer that question? Name some community assets which support healthy child development.

(cont. →)

C) THE SQUEEZE ON PARENTS

1. Dr. Boynton-Jarrett says, “The stressors in the lives of parents affect attachment, they affect the ability to engage in serve and return; they affect the ability to provide and meet all the needs of the child.”
 - Why would stressors on parents and other caregivers affect their capacity to be sensitive and responsive to messages and cues from their babies and young children?
 - How does adversity and stressors on parents affect their ability to provide safe, stable and nurturing environments for their young children?
 - How can parental stress during the early years leave enduring effects as their children age?

2. The film notes that a variety of stressors are now regarded as normal for many parents in America: economic insecurity; work hours crowding out time with kids; no access to affordable, high-quality child care; racial exclusion and disinvestment from many segregated neighborhoods of color, etc.



- What are some other stressors on parents?
- Why are so many stressors regarded as “normal,” just part of life?
- How might the stressors parents face be shaped by class or race?
- What are some stressors low-income parents face that affluent parents don’t?
- Who or what is generating those stressors? Who do you think benefits from parents being squeezed?

3. Economist Rob Dugger says, “Parents. They’re the beginning of the process. We do not invest enough in parents.” What does he mean by that? What kinds of investments is he talking about?

4. Upon returning to the workplace after having her second child, Ann Waterman Roy says, “I am going to miss my baby. I’m a little bit more of a human being in this last month so I get to be actually awake and aware of the fact that I’ve got this amazing little thing who’s starting to smile, and giggle, and coo. I’d love to spend more time with her.”



- Do you think moms should have time off after giving birth? Why?
- What are the eligibility requirements under the Federal Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for moms who want to take time off after the birth of their baby without the risk of getting fired?
- Among developed nations, where does the U.S. rank in terms of providing paid maternity leave? How might the availability of paid leave affect parental stress?
- How did Ann compensate for the lack of paid maternity leave?
- Are you (or friends and relatives) in a position to take family leave as currently designed or offered? If not, what would have to change to make leave viable for you and your family?

5. Yaminette and David are just starting life as a family, raising their son Naham and daughter Nikha. Yaminette shares that, “With Naham, our first, we’ve consistently paid more for childcare than for rent. With Nikha, my name’s on the waiting list [...] we were told we’re around number 40.”



(cont. →)

- Among developed nations, where does the U.S. rank in availability, affordability, and quality of child care? What are the links between availability of child care and parental stress?
- Prior to watching this film, did you know that the U.S. Congress passed a bill guaranteeing quality, affordable childcare to every family that wanted it (the Comprehensive Childcare Act, or CCDA) in 1971?
- If President Nixon hadn't vetoed the bill, how might the childcare landscape and the choices available to Yaminette and David be different today? For millions of families in America?
- Science tells us experiences in early childhood create the foundation for life-long learning, earning and mental and physical health. How might the U.S. as a nation be different if all children in the last forty years had access to high-quality early care and ed?

6. Economist James Heckman notes that child care can't just be a warehouse where children are parked for eight hours a day; it's important to provide a high-quality environment with skilled staff.



- Based on the scenes from Boston's Ellis Early Education Center and at Camp Pendleton, what characterizes "high-quality" care?
- The film notes that only one in ten U.S. child care centers is accredited. What factors do you think explains the scarcity?

7. Erica Campbell explains how common employment practices make family life hard: "I do rotating nights, so I'm on nights this week, so then next week though I'll be on days." Her husband often works a split shift (working morning and evening hours with a break in the middle).

(cont. →)

- How do precarious, unpredictable, or split-shift work schedules affect caring for children?
- If such schedules aren't good for children and add to workers' stress, why are so many people subjected to them? Who benefits?
- What are the connections between wage stagnation and workplace demands, corporate profits and increased levels of parental stress?
- How might employers benefit by providing reliable schedules and higher wages?

8. Dr. Boynton-Jarrett says, "Parents are working really hard to care for their children, to support their families, to be engaged and productive citizens and members of the community. At the same point in time, it can be like the dice are loaded against them."



- How are the dice loaded against parents? Who or what is loading the dice?
- Why do you think the media generate many stories about "good" or "bad" parents, and so few about the social conditions and forces which help or hinder parenting?
- What percentage of U.S. children are born into poverty? How does this rate compare to other developed nations? Insofar as the U.S. is wealthier than most every country with lower child poverty rates, what do you think might explain the difference?

9. Researcher Cory Burghy expresses the experience of stress from young children's (mostly subconscious) perspective when she says: "Why is mom upset? Why are mom and dad yelling? Do I have any food?" She explains, "When all of those things start to pile up, that's when you start to hit that point of toxic stress where you have all of these things going on that you don't

(cont. ...)

really have any more cognitive or physical energy to deal with anything else.”

- What did you learn from Ashley’s story about how the “pile up” functions in real life?
- In what ways might the economic insecurities facing parents contribute to toxic stress in children?
- How might that stress show up in children’s behaviors?
- How might toxic stress affect children’s future learning, earning and mental and physical health?

10. Ashley’s daughter London struggles with what Ashley calls “hypersensitivity.”

- How might this be connected to the stressors in her life?
- How might an understanding of the relationship between early life toxic stress and hyper-reactivity, depression, impulsiveness and other behaviors change the way care providers or teachers or even law enforcement might respond to young people who have endured trauma in early life?



11. Boynton-Jarrett says, “Parents are juggling, shifting, trying to balance a variety of competing demands that there just don’t seem like there are easy or reasonable solutions. It leads to a level of tension and stress. Is this what we’ve decided as society, that this degree of tension, these complex trade-offs, are the norm, to be expected, just a part of raising a child?”

- Why do we accept these “complex trade-offs” as the norm? Who benefits?
- If they are not “normal”, what’s producing these stressors on parents?
- What are the consequences of accepting these stressors as “normal” for prospects for change?

D) POLICIES, STRUCTURES AND POWER

1. Economist and former investment banker Robert Dugger says, “Our policies actually actively discourage parents from being able to take care of their children when they’re very young. They may instinctively want to do it, but we don’t make it easy for them.”
 - What does he mean? What are some examples?

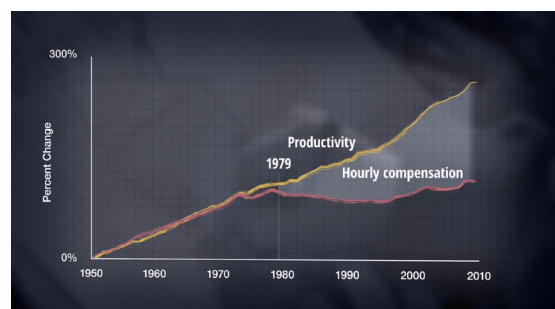
2. According to the film, most women work and 40% of new mothers return to work by the time their babies are three months old.
 - What protections does the federal government offer new mothers? Fathers?
 - How does current U.S. family leave policy actually deter new parents and caregivers from spending time with young children?
 - What are the consequences for babies—and their mothers?

3. Recalling the fight to pass the FMLA in the 1980s, Judith Lichtman says, “We eliminated the idea of going for paid leave, not because none of us wanted paid leave; but because it was so beyond what people thought politically, realistically we could get.”
 - What is it about the U.S. that made paid family leave politically untenable?
 - In your view, why do all other developed nations guarantee parental leave but the U.S. doesn’t?
 - What will it take to change family leave policies in the U.S.?



4. What was the Comprehensive Child Development Act (CCDA) and why didn't it become law? How might the country be different today if high-quality affordable childcare and early ed were available to any family who wanted it for the past four decades?
5. The film provides evidence that wages for average Americans have stagnated over the last forty years. At the same time, the cost of essentials (like housing and education) has substantially increased while corporate profits have skyrocketed.
 - How does this pattern affect young children?

6. A graph in the film indicates that wages increased in tandem with labor productivity until the late 1970s. Since then, productivity continued to rise but wages flattened.
 - What changed? Who has captured most of the gains from increased productivity since then? What are the consequences for families with young children?



- What changed? Who has captured most of the gains from increased productivity since then? What are the consequences for families with young children?
7. Former investment banker Robert Dugger explains that American corporations focus their decisions on short-term results. He concludes that this causes business and political leaders to “make the wrong decisions, very consistently; the wrong decisions for the lifetime success of our American kids.”
 - Why do corporations have a short-term view?
 - Provide examples of decisions which reflect the needs of corporations to maximize “short-term results” which might conflict with the public good?
 - What does corporate decision-making have to do with opportunities for child development?

(cont. →)

- How might business leaders be persuaded to consider the long-term impact of wages, practices, and working conditions on American families? What would have to change? What about politicians? Other civic leaders? Community-based groups? Parents?
8. Robert Dugger says, “We talk about people should be able to succeed on their own... But we make it very, very difficult for most of our population because the set of workforce policies we now have in place are a crushing burden on parents.”
- If tomorrow you could make one change to employment policies that would make life better for your children (or the children in your care or community), what would you change and why?
 - What arguments might be used against you? How would you counter them? Who might be your natural allies?

9. Ashley says, “Everybody thinks that you get state assistance, well you’re just lazy and you don’t want to work. That’s not the case for the majority and that’s sure not the case for me.”



- Given its inaccuracy, why do you think the stereotyping of people in need of public assistance as “lazy” persists? What kind of public assistance do wealthy people receive?
- How might Ashley’s economic situation affect the chances of her children having a secure and nurturing environment?
- Why do you think so many are quick to blame parents for making “wrong” or “irresponsible” decisions rather than address how the dice are loaded against them?
- How does this impact the policies and programs enacted to support low-income families with young children?
- Given what you learned about how the developing brain gets wired together, how might living in a household with domestic violence increase the risk for a baby or young child’s future emotional health and well-being? Learning?

E) WHY, WHEN WE KNOW SO MUCH, DO WE DO SO LITTLE?

1. Marilyn Essex says, “When you understand that those first few months or that first year of life when the mother needs to provide that very sensitive care taking, to not provide with policy what women need to choose how to do that for themselves is saying that you’re gonna not pay careful attention to these children.”



- What’s the risk to our nation if we continue to ‘not pay careful attention’ to our youngest?
- Where will we be in 10, 20, 30 years? What do we risk losing?

2. If as Dr. Renée Boynton-Jarrett says, “We as a society value productivity; we value engagement and civic participation. We value education.”

- What do these values have to do with the early years?
- What changes in family and work policies might better align us with these values?

3. john a. powell says, “We’ve made public problems into private problems, without resources. So you have to fix everything yourself.”



- What does he mean? Can you give examples of public problems expected to be overcome privately, by personal resources, rather than by community, state or national endeavors?
- What are the sources of this belief in “fend-for-yourself” parenting (and the corollary belief that if children aren’t doing well, it must be the parents’ fault)? Who benefits?

(cont. →)

- Do you often feel anxious and cut adrift as a parent? Or know parents who do?
 - How does this “fend-for-yourself” / “personal responsibility” belief influence public opinion when it comes to laws and regulations affecting how our nation’s wealth is used?
4. Can you give examples of public problems or challenges that have been addressed by public or government actions? If capitalism conveys value with money, then what values are being conveyed by the poverty level wages paid to childcare staff entrusted with the care and development of our babies and toddlers (median wage of \$19,600 a year in 2013)?
- Increasing the compensation and training of childcare workers would increase the cost of childcare, already alarmingly expensive for most families. What’s a way out of this conundrum? How might we pay and train staff better yet make childcare affordable?
 - Why might California inspect cemeteries more often than child care centers?
5. John A. Powell says, “We know that if we take the same poor family and expose them to high opportunity areas, the kids will do better.”
- So, why don’t we? What’s a “high opportunity” area?
 - Identify and discuss a few changes that improve socio-economic conditions and opportunities in low-income communities of color.
6. Robert Dugger says, “When you invest in all kids, all families you get on a higher growth path, a growth path which provides more opportunity, more revenues and enables a sustainable economy to generate the kind of jobs and growth that we need.”



(cont. →)

- Why then, do you think we aren't investing? What will it take to impel change?
- When it comes to local, state and national child, family and work policies, who's at the table making decisions? Who's left out? Who decides?

7. Economist James Heckman explains that “For each dollar invested [in early childhood programs like high-quality preschool] you get back somewhere between 7 to 10% per annum [per year] over the lifetime of the child, which is a huge rate of return.”



- In your view, why hasn't this economic argument persuaded elected officials to invest enough public funds to ensure high quality services and education for all young children?
- What else do you think they need to hear?
- If investments were made in effective programs that improved outcomes for young children yet did NOT pay for themselves financially, would you still approve of them?

8. Why is it considered ‘common sense’ that government should help assure a favorable investment climate for corporations but radical that it should help assure a favorable development climate for our youngest children?

9. Jack Shonkoff asks: “What could we be doing to strengthen the capacity of everyone who interacts with children to be able to provide more of what they need?”

- Instead of blaming parents, how can we strengthen families?
- Instead of blaming communities, how could we strengthen the capacity of this community to provide a safe and nurturing environment to raise children in?

(cont. →)

- Instead of blaming government programs, how could they do a better job?
- What kind of role could business play to help support the family life of the people who work for them?”
- How might you answer each of these questions?
- What role could/should each of the groups he mentions play in strengthening families?
- Who else could/should play a role?

10. Dr. Boynton-Jarrett reminds us that “the capacity of the brain and the human spirit to continue to thrive and develop is beyond what many of us could predict.” She draws hope from the brain’s ability to heal.

- What gives you hope?
- What is your vision of a community, a state, a nation which is the best place in the world for young children to be raised?
- What would it look like to make the success of every child a national priority and bring your vision to fruition?



F) EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Tweet Fest

Jot down a “tweet” describing the most important message(s) of the film. Invite volunteers to share what they wrote (and, if they wish, to send their tweet). Discuss whether there is consensus about what the main message is or why people may have had different ideas about the main message.

2. Identifying Priorities for Change

Break into small groups. First, brainstorm and write up a list of changes that would improve young children’s chances in your community or region, e.g. affordable, high-quality early care, affordable housing, parenting classes, etc. Then discuss and identify your top three priorities. Have each small group report their priorities to the larger group. Can the larger group agree on a consensus list?

3. Community Research

Identify and research organizations in your community or state working for changes that can improve the conditions for young children and their families. Which ones seem promising or potentially transformative?

4. Organize Film Screenings

Organize a screening and discussion of *The Raising of America* with a group of neighbors, at your place of worship or public library, for school volunteers, fellow parents, staffs or constituents of a NON child advocacy organization (e.g. a union, an affordable housing group), city council or school board members, a women’s organization, a father’s group, or others. Reference the Action Toolkit at www.raisingofamerica.org for tips.

5. History Project

Research an historical conflict between the pursuit of private profits and the well-being of children and their families, and laws passed which made the public interest a priority. What arguments were made against them? How were those arguments overcome? Are there any similarities between the arguments made then and now?

(cont. →)

SPECIAL EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Debate: Changing the Conversation

The conventional narratives, or models, about how child development happens are deeply imprinted, reinforced daily by the media, politicians, health campaigns, and around the water cooler. For many, they are held as ‘common sense.’

In this exercise, half the participants will raise six common default models (Stories) of child development and the forces shaping it, while the other half will respond, using evidence and information drawn from what they learned from the film to reframe the issue.

There are six Stories to be debated (below). Hand out the prompts for each Story or write them on a board.

FORMATS

Option One

Divide the room into six tables or groups. Assign each table / group one of the six Stories respectively below. Then ask each table or group to further divide itself, half into Team A and half into Team B. Team A first makes their argument starting with the prompt below, and then Team B responds. After five minutes, tables can report back the strong points made by each side to the entire group.

Option Two

Divide the group into Team A and Team B. Then subdivide the two teams into six clusters, assigning each cluster one of the six Story prompts below. Ask each cluster to discuss their Stories among themselves, and then to assign two of their members to represent their Team as Debaters. The Debaters will then present their respective Stories to the entire group. Each team has two minutes to make their argument, and then 30 seconds to rebut the other side’s case.

DEBRIEF

Afterwards, discuss how each story made your group feel. Which felt hopeful? Blaming? A sense of possibility or new ways forward? Stagnant? A sense of community? A sense of isolation? Relief? How might the way stories ‘feel’ impact whether you take action, or what kinds of action you take?

SIX STORY PROMPTS

1A

What happens in early childhood doesn't matter much. After all, babies don't remember what happens before age 3.

1B

The latest science shows how what surrounds us shapes us.

2A

If parents made the right choices and showed the grit, knowledge and determination it takes to be good parents, their children would do better.

2B

Blaming parents is the easy way out. Parents' efforts to provide the safe, stable and nurturing environments children need to thrive are impeded by forces often beyond their control.

3A

We should be teaching parenting skills so they can be better parents.

3B

The best parenting programs may have nothing to do with parenting at all.

SIX STORY PROMPTS (CONT.)

4A

We can't afford to spend more money on initiatives for children. Government can't do anything right.

4B

Young children are the most prudent investments any nation can make.

5A

I have so much going on. Who has time to worry about other people's kids?

5B

We all stand to gain when all children have the opportunity to succeed.

6A

What can we really do? The problem is too large.

6B

Change is possible. We've done it before, we can do it again.

Background & Resources

LEGISLATION MENTIONED

COMPREHENSIVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT ACT

Passed by Congress in 1971, but vetoed by President Nixon, it offered universal, high quality child care, preschool and other services for children (birth to age 5) to any and every family in America that wanted them.

MILITARY CHILD CARE ACT

Passed in 1989, the Act improved the availability, management, quality and safety of child care provided on military installations by linking fees to family income, increasing worker pay, improving staff training and resources, hiring additional staff and requiring accountability.

FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

Passed in 1993, the FMLA guarantees “eligible employees of covered employers unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave.”

It entitles eligible employees twelve workweeks of leave in a 12-month period for “the birth of a child and to care for the newborn child within one year of birth; or the placement with the employee of a child for adoption or foster care and to care for the newly placed child within one year of placement.”

To qualify, employees must work for a company employing 50 or more employees, and have worked an average of 24 hours a week or more for that employer for the past 52 weeks. That leaves 40 percent of the workforce not eligible for family leave. Of those who are, almost three million don't take the full parental leave because they can't afford to take unpaid time off.

FEATURED STUDIES, PEOPLE AND PLACES

Ellen Bravo, Family Values @ Work

www.ellenbravo.com

www.familyvaluesatwork.org

Renée Boynton-Jarrett, Vital Village

www.vitalvillage.org

Robert Dugger, ReadyNation

www.readynation.org

Marilyn Essex

Wisconsin Study of Families and Work; Life Stress & Human Development Lab

Learn more about the two-decade long University of Wisconsin studies examining how parental stress affects babies' early years with enduring effects.

Wisconsin Study:

128.104.130.44/index.html

Life Stress and Human Development Lab:

www.psychiatry.wisc.edu/essexlab/

James Heckman

The Heckman Equation

www.heckmanequation.org

Judith Lichtman

National Partnership for Women and Families

www.nationalpartnership.org

john a. powell

Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society

diversity.berkeley.edu/haas-institute

Arthur Rolnick

Human Capital Research Collaborative

www.humancapitalrc.org

John Shonkoff

Center on the Developing Child

www.developingchild.harvard.edu

Ellis Memorial

Ellis Memorial child development center is one of Boston's best and most affordable, with skilled preschool teachers like Aiyauna Terry.

www.ellismemorial.org

Edward Tronick

Still Face Experiment

www.umb.edu/cdu

EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVOCACY & POLICY RESOURCES

A list of national organizations working to improve the conditions faced by young children and their families.

ACEs Too High

www.acestoohigh.com

Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs

www.amchp.org

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org

Center for Law and Social Policy

www.clasp.org

CityMatCH

www.citymatch.org

Child Care Aware

www.childcareaware.org

Essentials for Childhood

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/essentials.html

Every Child Matters Education Fund

www.everychildmatters.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children

www.naeyc.org

National Partnership for Women and Families

www.nationalpartnership.org

ReadyNation

www.readynation.org

Zero to Three

www.zerotothree.org



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CALIFORNIA NEWSREEL

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California Newsreel produces and distributes cutting-edge social justice films that inspire, educate and engage audiences. Founded in 1968, Newsreel is the oldest non-profit, social issue documentary film center in the country, the first to marry media production and contemporary social movements.

Award-winning titles include *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*, *RACE-The Power of an Illusion* and *Homegoings*. Visit www.newsreel.org to view over 150 documentary titles.