

# Parenting Matters

Evidence-Based Strategies to Promote Mental Health  
and Prevent Mental Illness in Families

William R. Beardslee, MD

*Carter Center Symposium*



“The pediatrician can regard the family as carrying the ‘chromosomes’ that perpetuate the culture and also form the cornerstone of emotional development.”

Beardslee & Richmond  
*Mental Health of the Young: An Overview*

# Recent Resources

1. *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People*. Institute of Medicine, National Academies Press, 2009.
2. Forum on Children's Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Health  
Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC). 2014. Strategies for scaling effective family-focused preventive interventions to promote children's cognitive, affective, and behavioral health: Workshop summary. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
3. Parenting Matters - [nap.edu/parentingmatters](http://nap.edu/parentingmatters)

# Risks for Depression

## **Specific:**

- Extensive family history of depression, especially parents
- Prior history of depression
- Depressogenic cognitive style
- Bereavement

## **General:**

*(Risks for many disorders)*

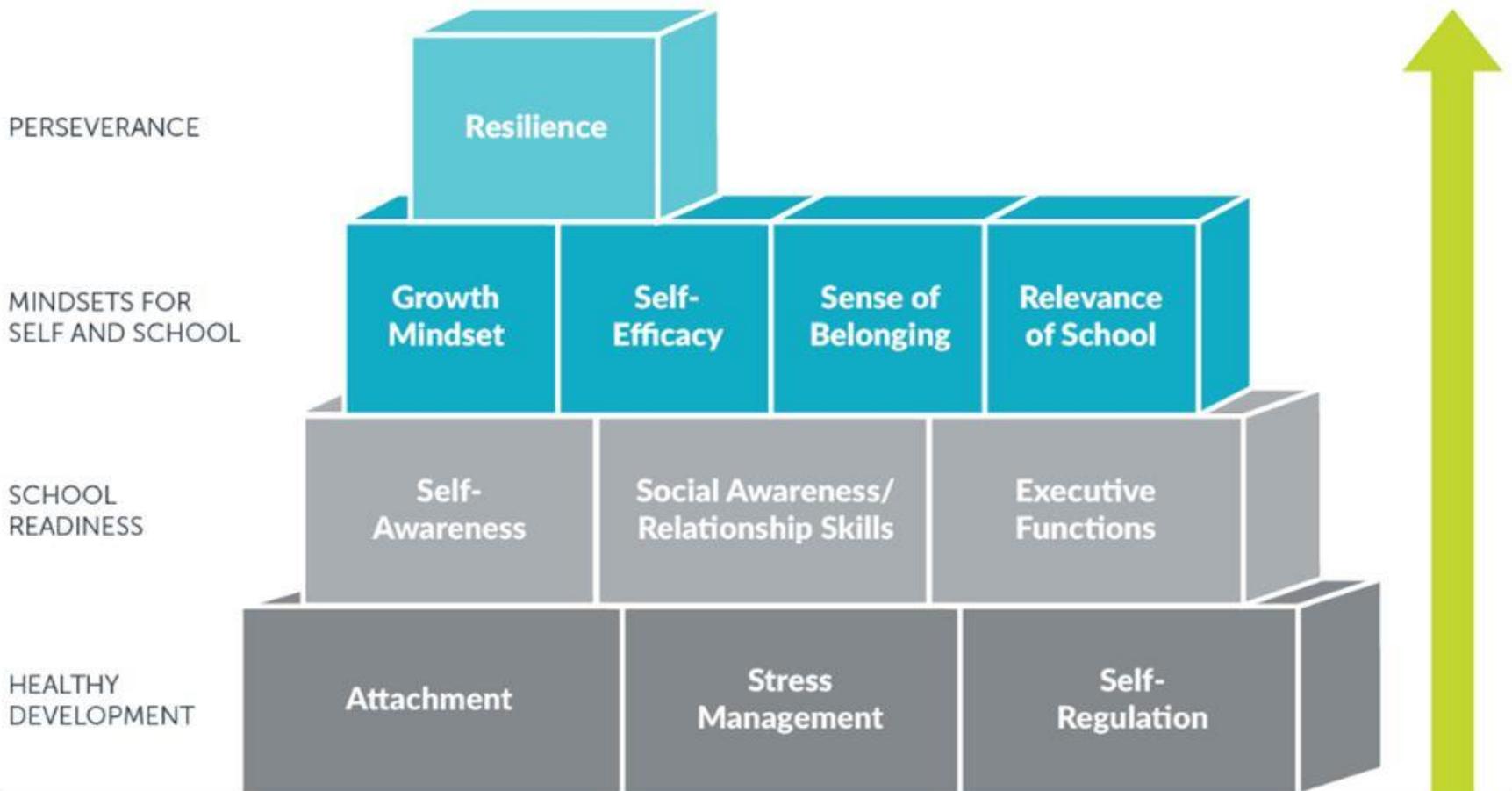
- Exposure to trauma
- Poverty
- Social isolation
- Job loss
- Unemployment
- Family breakup
- Loss of community
- Dislocation/immigration
- Historical trauma

# Characteristics of Resilience in Civil Rights Workers

- Capacity for anger and continuous working
- Capacity to grieve and keep working
- Capacity to have a vision for the future and also to work actively in the present
- Deep commitment to human relationships
- Long-term commitment to self-understanding, self-reflection, and shared understanding

# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR LEARNING: DEVELOPMENT OF **RESILIENCE**

Masten, 2007



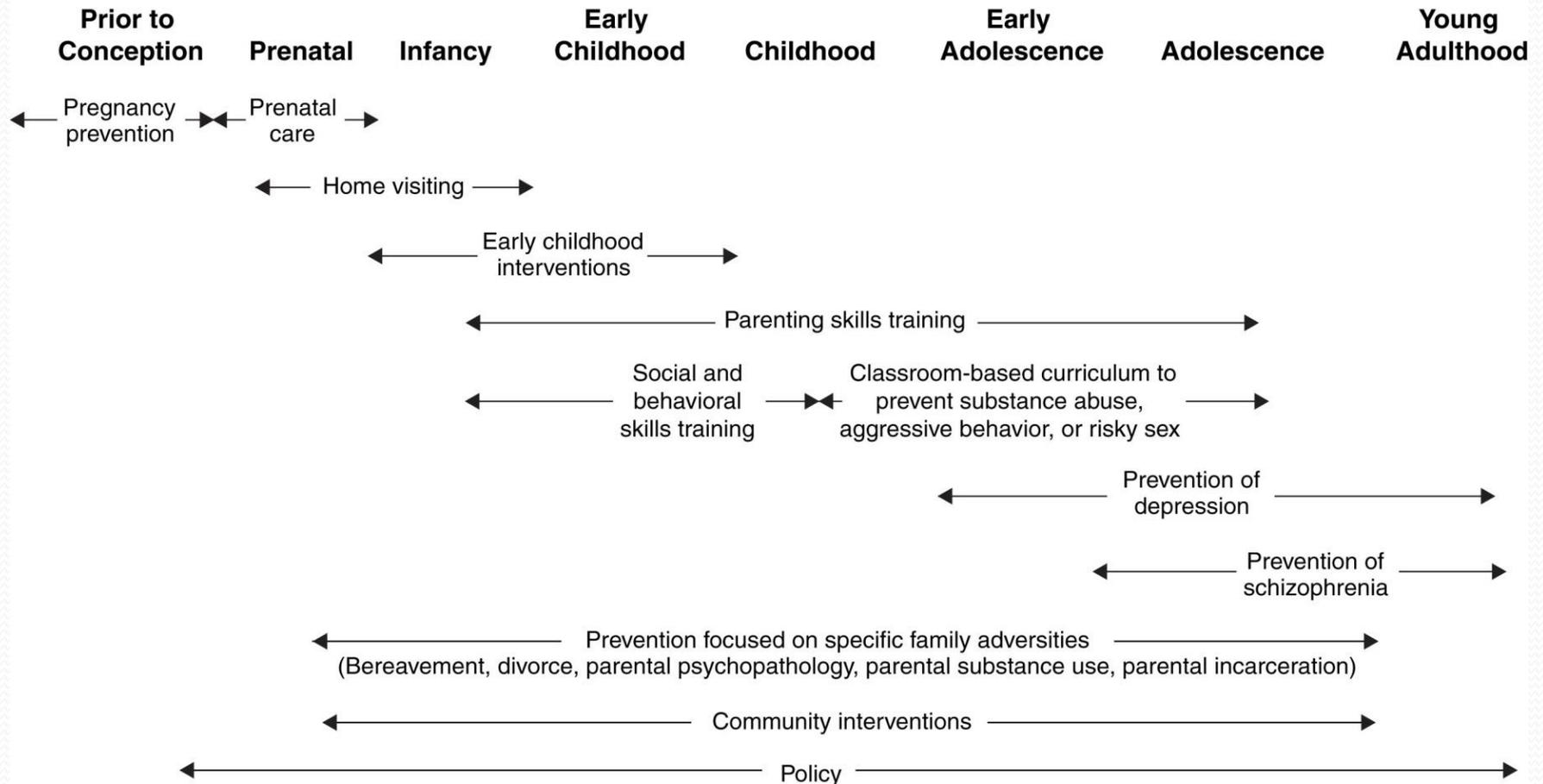
# Mental Health Promotion

## Aims to:

- Enhance individuals'
  - ability to achieve developmentally appropriate tasks (developmental competence)
  - positive sense of self-esteem, mastery, well-being, and social inclusion
- Strengthen their ability to cope with adversity

# Preventive Intervention Opportunities

## Interventions by Developmental Phase



# Evidence That Some Disorders Can Be Prevented

- Interventions to support parenting have a particularly strong evidence base
- School and community interventions are quite effective
- Depression and substance abuse prevention are effective in adolescence

# Generic Features of Preventive Interventions

- Reduce or minimize toxic biological and psychological processes
- Richly reinforce self-regulated, prosocial behavior
- Teach prosocial skills and values
- Foster acceptance

# Implementation

- Strong across the board evidence for family-based prevention strategies
- Need to move from efficacy toward effectiveness trials
- Implementation research has highlighted:
- Complexity
- Important role of community
- Cultural humility and cultural and linguistic competence are essential for implementation



# Population Health and Wellness

## **Context**

Intervening in the lives of young children and their parents involves both attention to specific parenting practices and intervention strategies and to the larger social determinants of health. Young children in particular are very sensitive to the effects of environment.



# Population Health and Wellness

## **Broad Approaches Necessary**

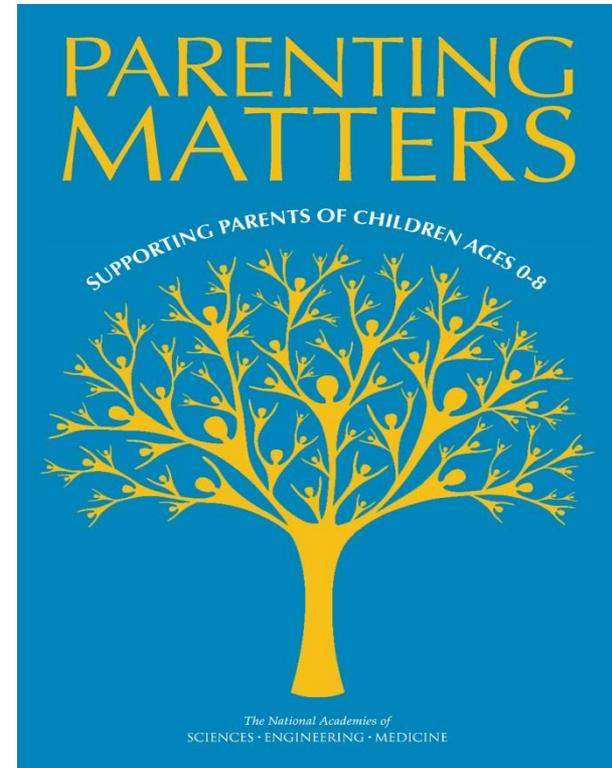
Programs that strengthen family income, and that reduce food and housing insecurity, violence, and social isolation, are all important approaches.

# Parenting Matters

Supporting Parents of Children  
Ages 0-8

For more information visit  
[www.nas.edu/parentingmatters](http://www.nas.edu/parentingmatters)

Email: [parenting@nas.edu](mailto:parenting@nas.edu)



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# Parenting Matters - Outline

1. Introduction
2. Parenting Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices
3. Federal Policies and Investments Supporting Parents and Children in the United States
4. Universal/Preventive and Widely Used Interventions
5. Targeted Interventions Supporting Parents of Children with Special Needs, Parents Facing Special Adversities, and Parents Involved with Child Welfare Services
6. Elements of Effective Parenting Programs and Strategies for Increasing Program Participation and Retention
7. Toward a National Framework
8. Conclusions and Recommendations

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# Parenting Practices

Parenting practices associated with positive child outcomes in the areas of physical health and safety, emotional and behavioral competence, social competence, and cognitive competence, include:

- Contingent responsiveness (“serve and return”)—adult behavior that occurs immediately after a child's behavior and that is related to the child's focus of attention, such as a parent smiling back at a child
- Showing warmth and sensitivity
- Routines and reduced household chaos
- Shared book reading and talking to children
- Practices that promote children's health and safety—in particular, receipt of prenatal care, breastfeeding, vaccination, ensuring children's adequate nutrition and physical activity, monitoring, and household/vehicle safety
- Use of appropriate (less harsh) discipline

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# Interventions to Support Parents and Parenting

## *Scaling Effective Interventions*

- The committee identified several interventions that promote effective parenting practices. These include
- Formal sources of parenting support (e.g., well-child care, center-based child care)
- Parent skills training programs
- Interventions targeted to specific populations of parents (e.g., parents facing adversities such as mental illness, substance abuse, and intimate partner violence)
- Many families that could benefit from interventions do not receive them. Better leveraging services, such as health care and early care and education, with which many parents already have ongoing connections as points of intervention and referral would improve the reach of effective strategies.

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# Key Interventions Early in Life with Policy Implications

- Home Visiting
- Early Head Start / Head Start center-based care
- Paid Family Leave

# Three Examples of Parenting Interventions Used Widely

*Including behavioral health programs embedded in primary care*

1. Carolyn Webster-Stratton: The Incredible Years  
- Dr. Ellen Perrin
2. Triple-P
3. Thomas Dishion: Family Check-In

# Why a Two Generation Approach to Prevention?

“Achieving breakthrough outcomes for children experiencing significant adversity requires that we support the adults who care for them to transform their own lives.”

~ Center for the Developing Child,

*Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A science-based approach to building a more promising future for young children and families, 2016*

# Strengthening Parent and Child Executive and Self-Regulatory Skills

- Definition
  - the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks
- Brain function
  - **Working memory** governs the ability to retain and manipulate distinct pieces of information over short periods of time.
  - **Mental flexibility** helps us to sustain or shift attention in response to different demands or to apply different rules in different settings.
  - **Self-control** enables us to set priorities and resist impulsive actions or responses.
- Skills can be learned through practice and every day activities

# Increasing Parents' Engagement in Programs and Services

- Parent engagement is key
- Ways to increase parent engagement and program uptake are crucial

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# Addressing Gaps in Research

- Cultural humility and cultural and linguistic competence are essential
- More work is needed on intervention for parents with special needs
  - Parents with mental illness
  - Interventions that target fathers
  - Study of differences in parenting and engagements across diverse populations and family forms

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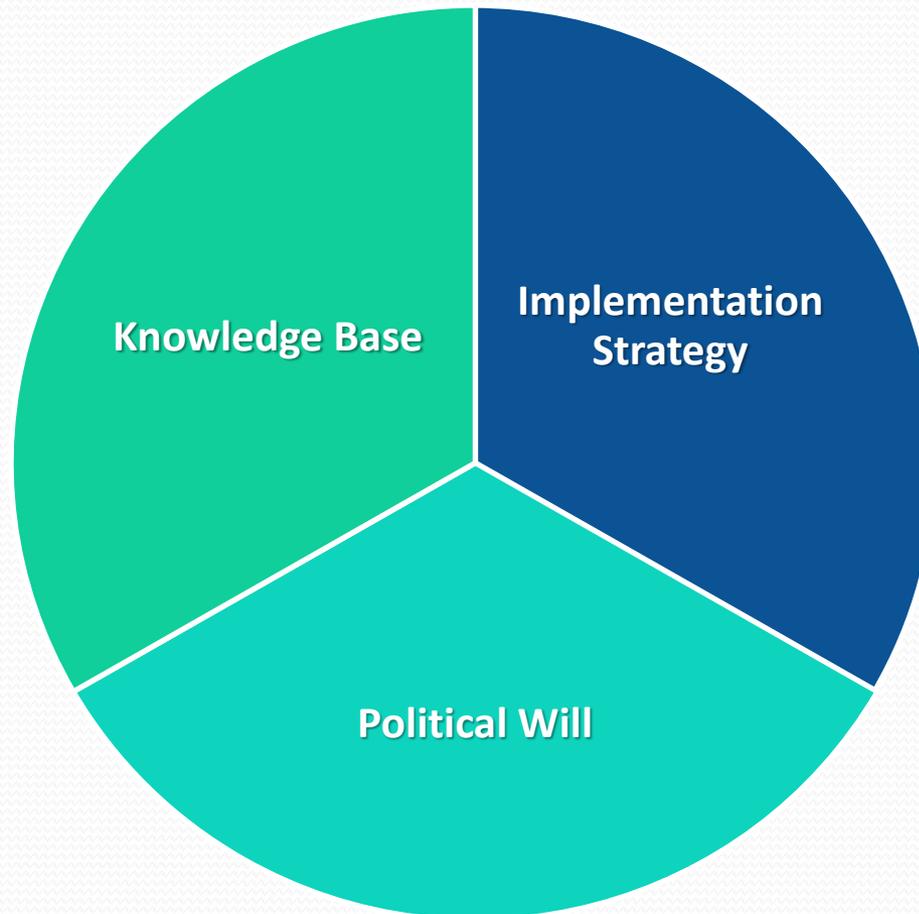
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# Elements of Effective Interventions

- View parents as equal partners in determining the types of services that would most benefit them and their children
- Tailor interventions to meet the specific needs of families
- Integrate services and collaborate to support families with multiple service needs
- Create opportunities for parents to receive support from peers to increase engagement, reduce stigma, and increase sense of connection to other parents with similar circumstances
- Address trauma, which affects a high percentage of individuals in some communities and can interfere with parenting and healthy child development
- Make programs culturally relevant to improve program effectiveness and participation across diverse families
- Enhance efforts to involve fathers who are underrepresented in parenting research

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# The Richmond Model



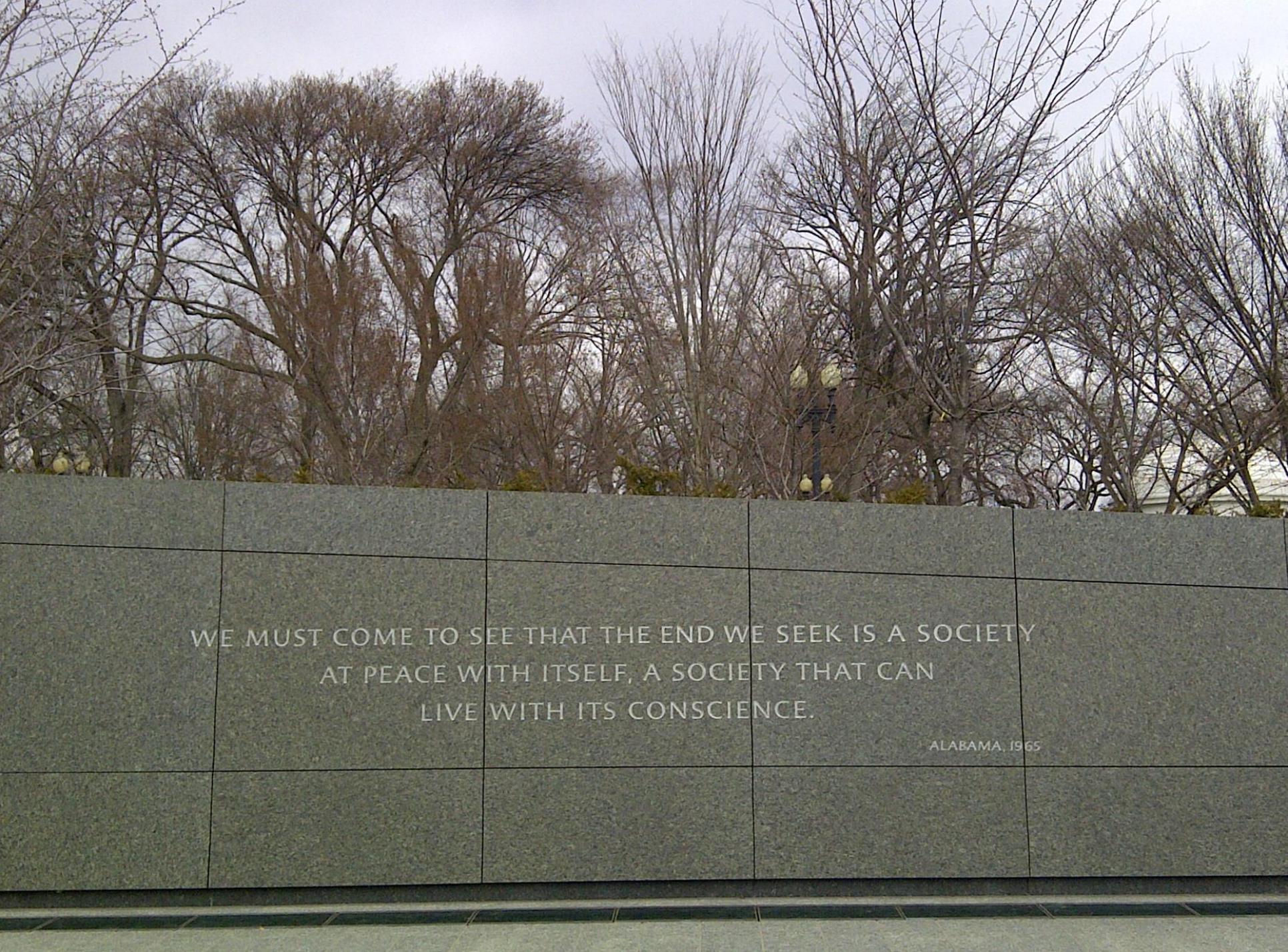
# Conclusions

- Behavioral mental health promotion and prevention have a strong evidence base.
- Such approaches need to be widely implemented while being continuously improved.
- Political will is essential.



“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.



WE MUST COME TO SEE THAT THE END WE SEEK IS A SOCIETY  
AT PEACE WITH ITSELF, A SOCIETY THAT CAN  
LIVE WITH ITS CONSCIENCE.

ALABAMA, 1965