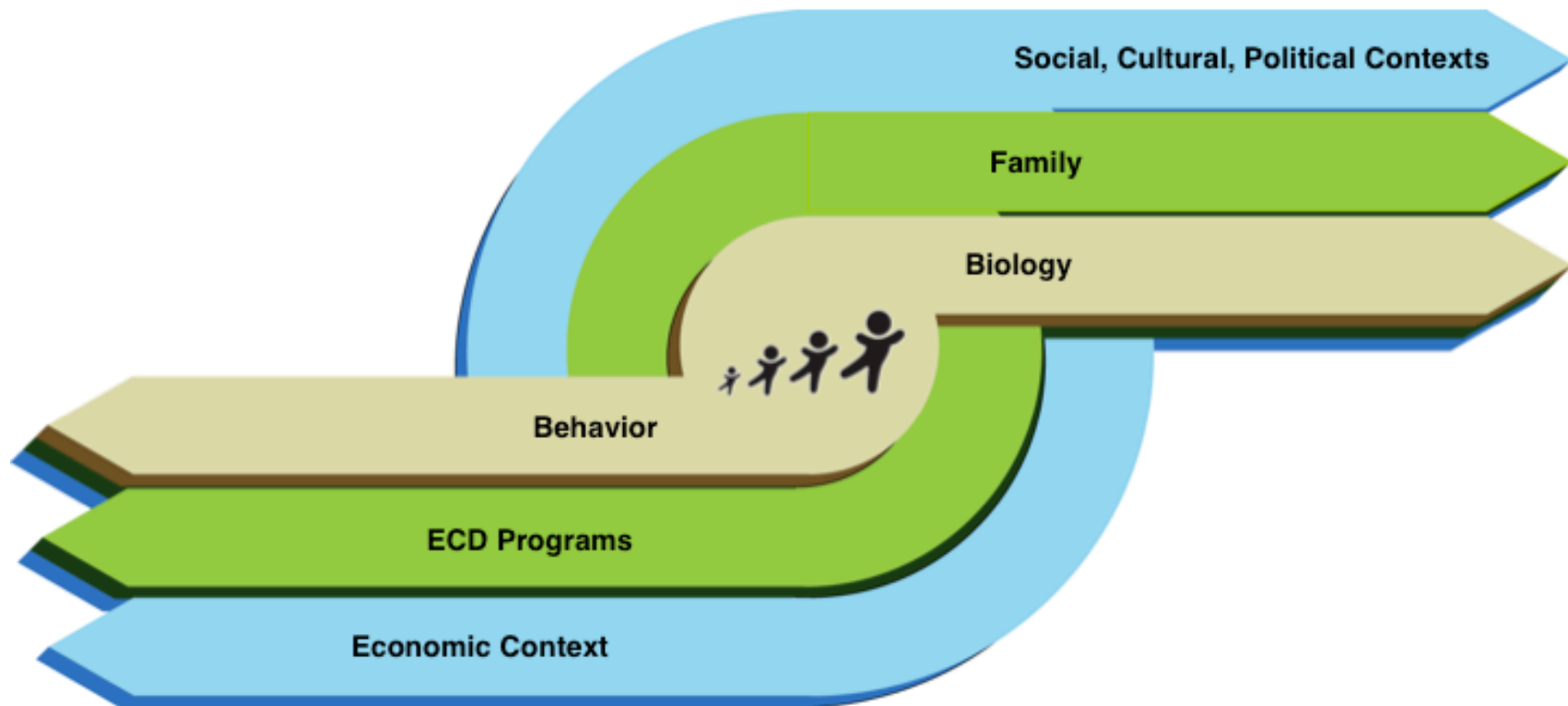# The Ecology of Peace:
Formative Childhoods and Peace Building

A Brief Note

**November 2012**

The Ecology of Peace

The Ecology of Peace is a conceptual framework for exploring the multiple relationships between early childhood development and peace building. Each of these constructs is expressed at the individual, family and community level. The framework provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding the bi-directional and mediated relationship that exist among the multiple levels of the model.

What is Early Childhood Development?

- A multifaceted concept that encompasses child and context

- Child
  - Age: prenatal period through the transition to school (age 8 - 9)[1,2]
  - Domains of development: physical health and motor development; cognitive skills; social and emotional functioning; and competencies in language and literacy, ethical and spiritual development, sense of group membership, and identity within families, communities, cultures, and nation states.[3]

- Context (family and community)
  - Context is a determinant of the achievement of developmental potential
  - Young children make rapid strides in all areas of development through interaction with their environment[4,5,6,7]
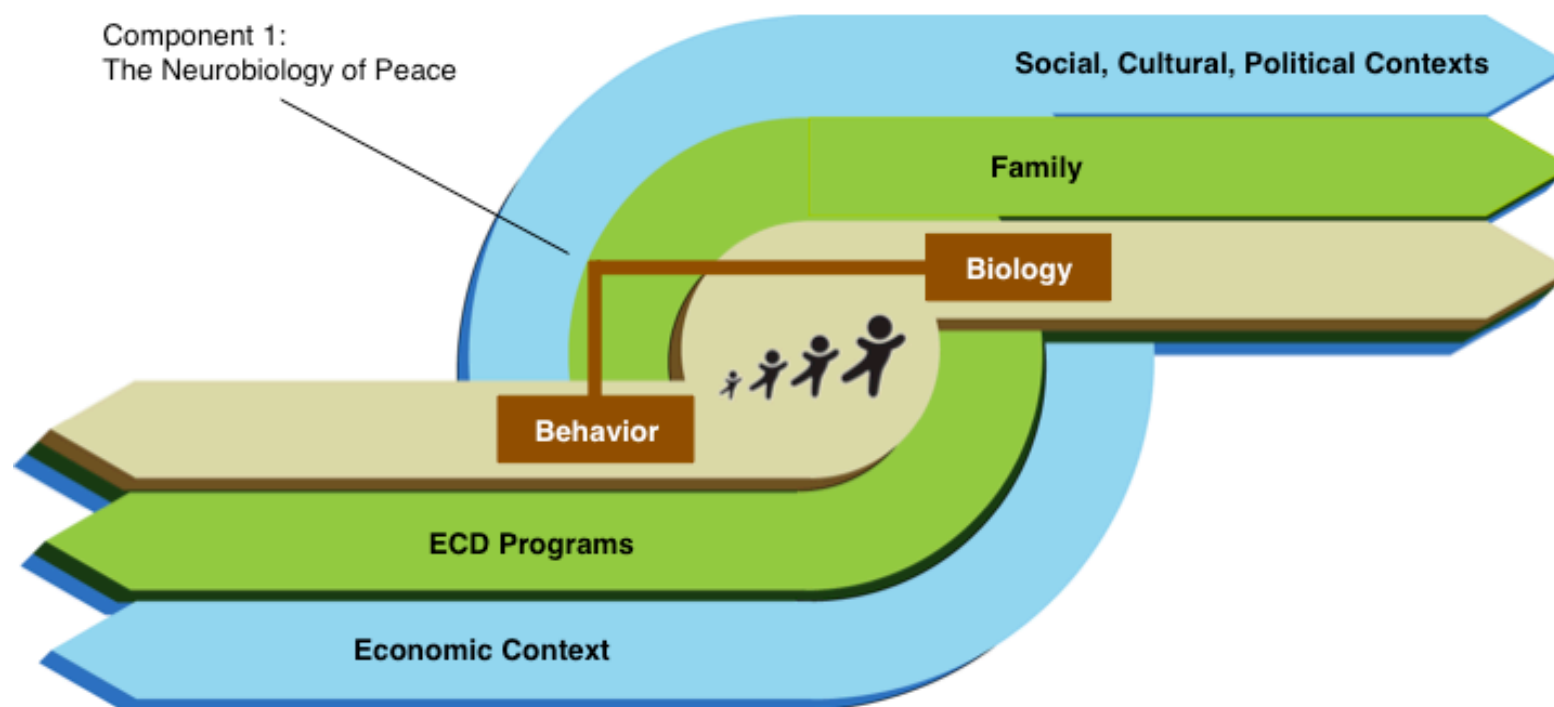
What is Peace Building?
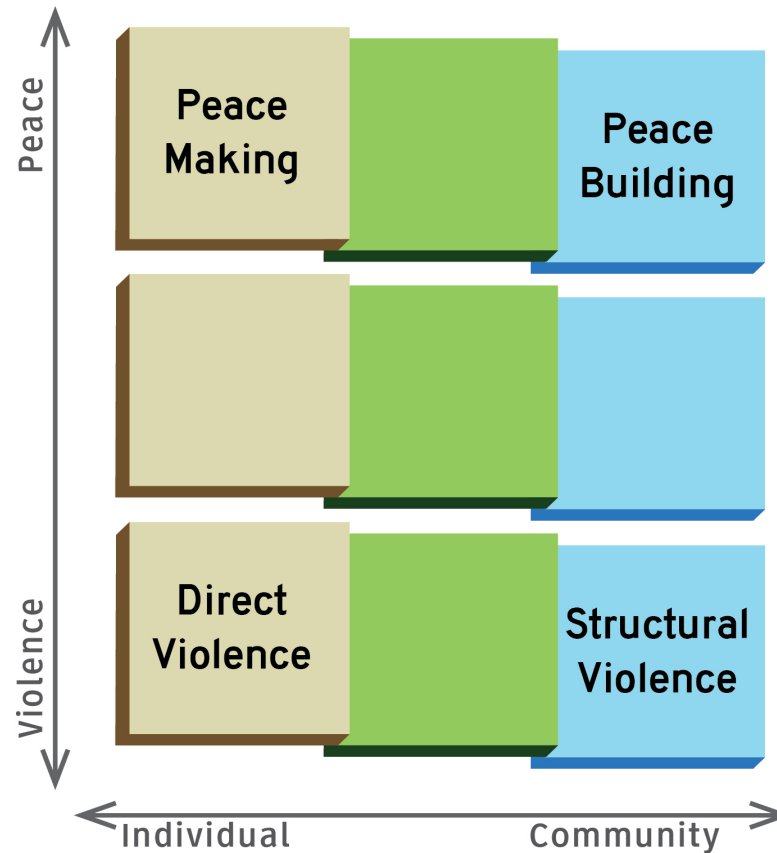
Peace building is the process of resolving conflict and establishing sustainable peace in a manner that maximizes justice, equality and harmony. Peace building extends beyond prevention of violence.[8]

What is Peace Building?

- There are two levels of violence
  - <u>Direct violence</u> refers to the interpersonal conflict that harms individuals
  - <u>Structural violence</u> is expressed through political and economic processes and oppression within a society

- There are two levels of efforts to achieve peace
  - <u>Peacemaking</u> is the process of reducing direct violence through conflict resolution and other non-violent means; it is a reaction in response to a threat or the anticipation of violence
  - <u>Peace building</u> has a proactive focus with an emphasis on the development of an effective infrastructure to reduce structural violence and sustain social justice, healthcare and economic development; it is multidimensional with legal, cultural, political, medical and socio-economic elements[9]

Component 1:
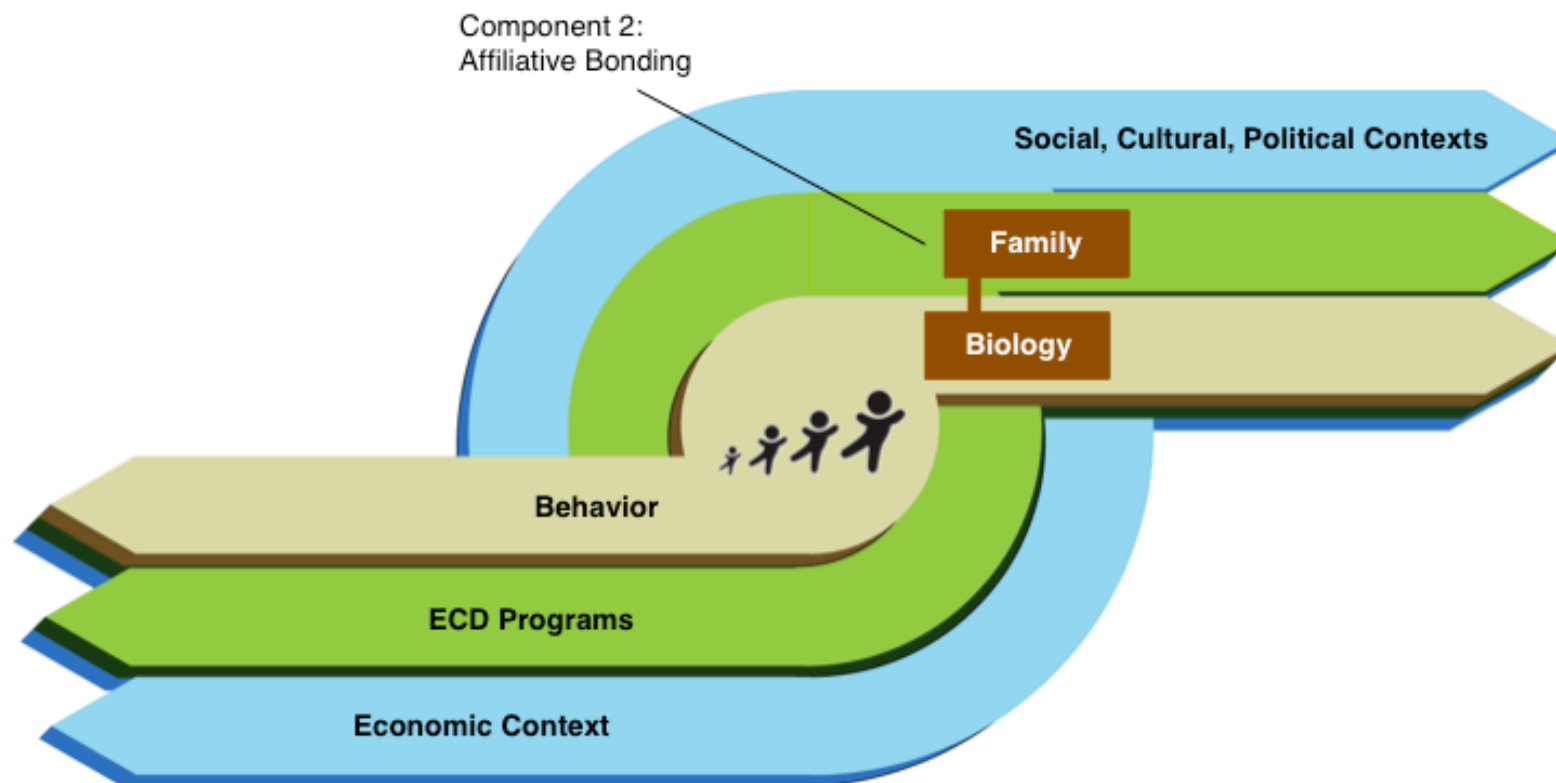## The Neurobiology of Peace

The focus of Component 1 is early neuronal development as a predictor of peace building.

Component 1:
The Neurobiology of Peace

- A primary point of interest in neuroscience research is how early life experiences can set the stage for future interactions

- The neuropeptide oxytocin (OT) is involved in processes of bonding and interacts with multiple neurophysiological systems in the brain and body

- Recent OT research points to the OT system's extensive involvement in behaviors that pertain to peace, including
  - Trust[10] and cooperation[11] among in-group members
  - The ability to read others' mental states and empathize with others' feelings and experiences[12,13,14]

Component 2:
Affiliative Bonding

Component 2:
Affiliative Bonding

Social, Cultural, Political Contexts

Family

Biology

Behavior

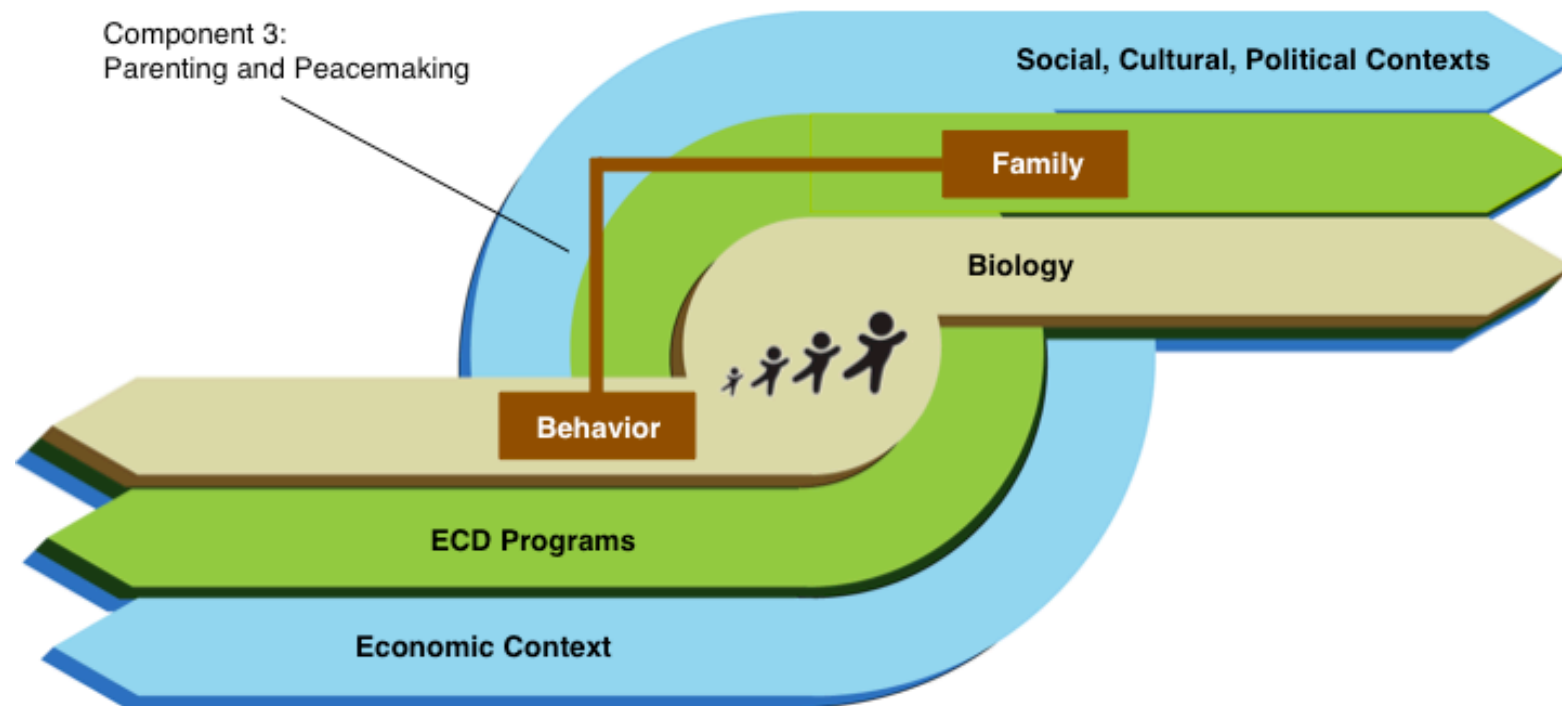ECD Programs

Economic Context

The focus of Component 2 is early bonding as a precursor to behaviors associated with peacemaking.

Component 2:
Affiliative Bonding

- Studies assessing the involvement of the OT system in human bonding examine the expression of micro-level social behavior in each partner during dyadic or triadic interactions[15]

- These micro-level social behaviors are measured through multiple dimensions
  - Gaze; proximity; arousal; touch; affect; exploratory behavior; vocalization

- These expressions have been assessed in various contexts
  - Face-to-face interactions; exploratory play; interactions between children or adolescents and their best friends or a peer group; exchanges between romantic partners

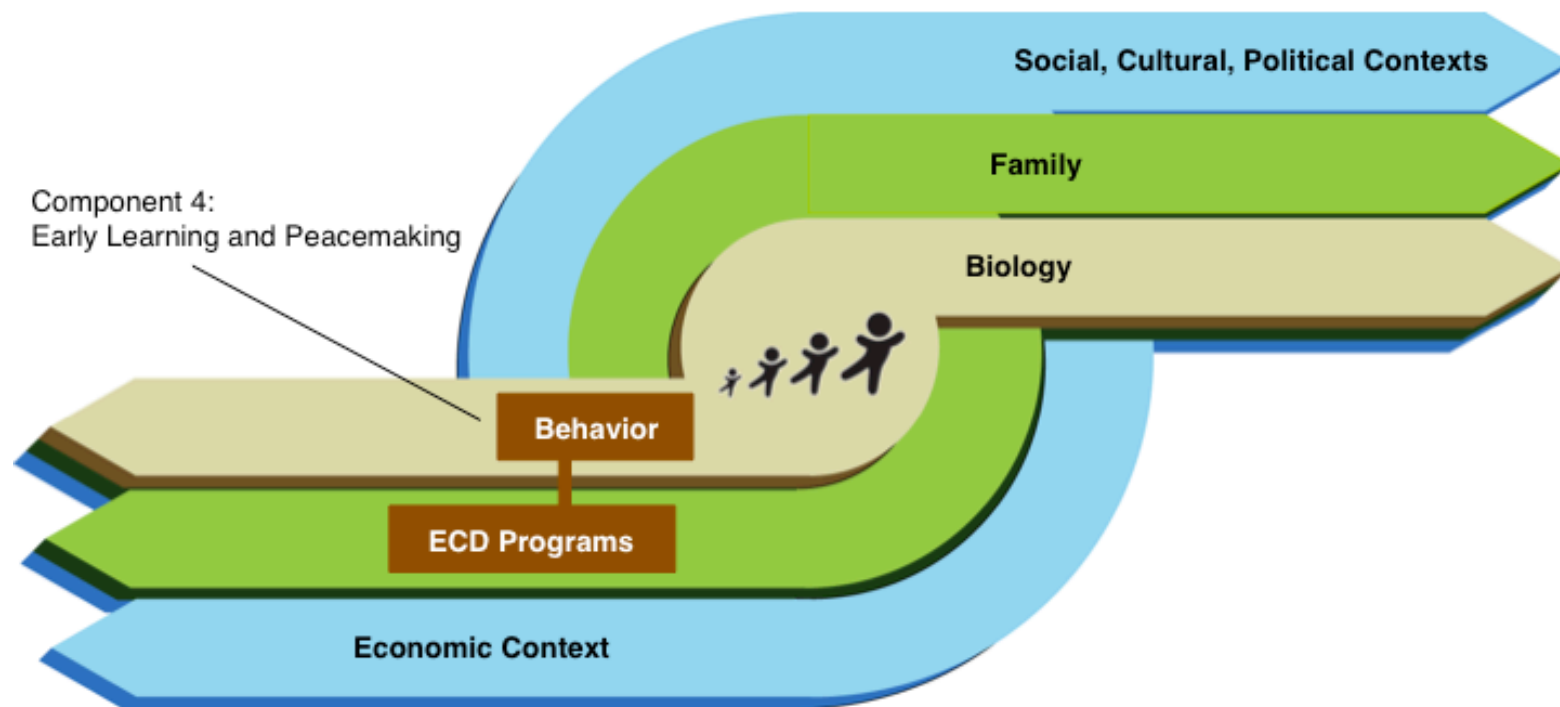# Component 3:
Parenting and Peacemaking

The focus of Component 3 is to understand the impact of parenting programs on parent and child peacemaking behaviors.

Component 3:
Parenting and Peacemaking

- The foundation for development in the early years is the way that caregivers meet a child's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional needs

- Parents and other primary caregivers determine the environment in which children grow, develop and learn
  - Indicators of violence in the home show that nearly two-thirds of children ages 4 and under experience mild physical and psychological aggression by parents[16]

- Parenting programs are activities, services or interventions for parents aimed at improving parenting

Component 4:
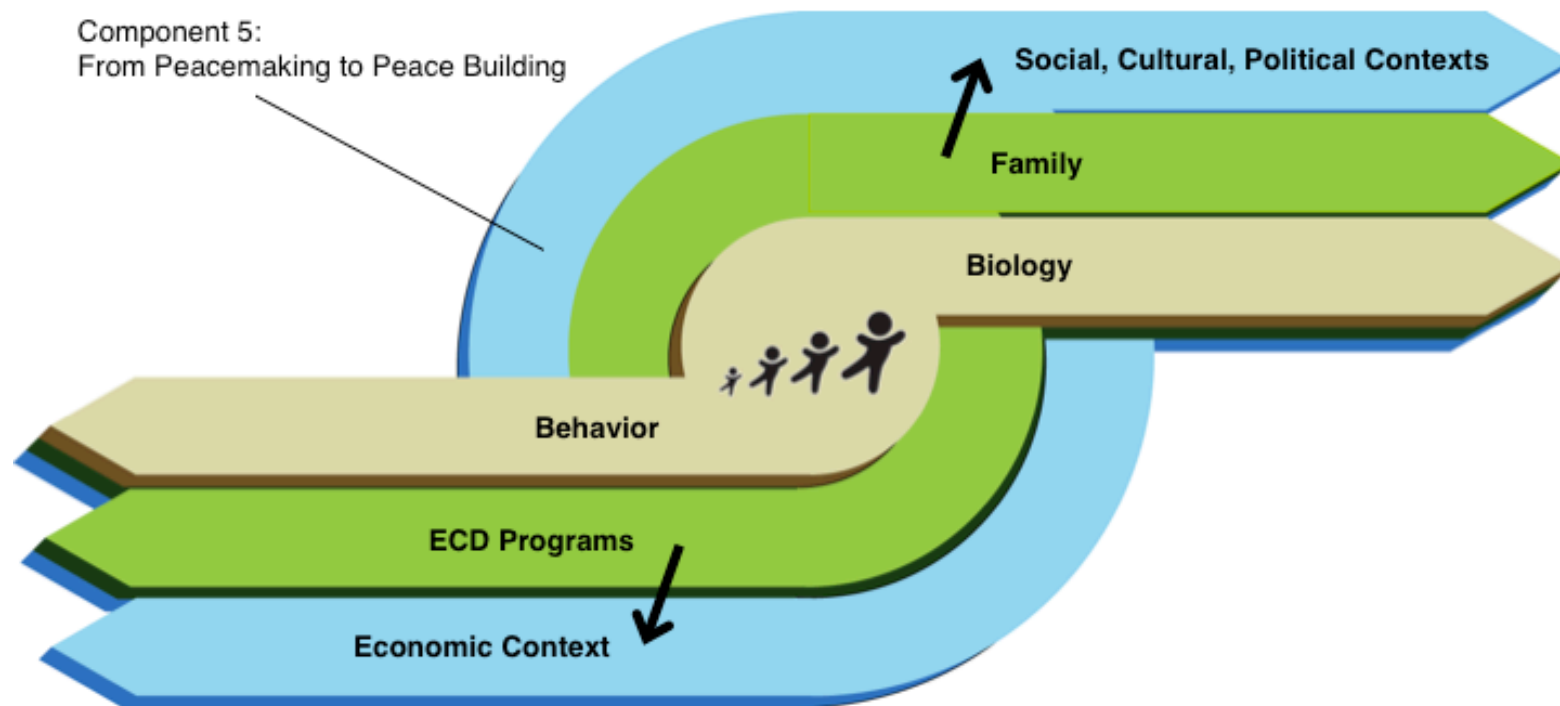## Early Learning and Peacemaking

The focus of Component 4 is the association between early learning programs and peacemaking.

Component 4:
Early Learning and Peacemaking

- Six dimensions of quality early learning programs that form the theoretical foundation for examining early learning programs as a strategic entry point for peacemaking

  - Holistic child outcomes; responsive interpersonal relationships between key caregivers or teacher and children; training and capacity of service providers; curriculum; school and home relationship; presence of provisions for children in higher risk situations[17]

- Application of these dimensions of quality early learning programs to peacemaking initiatives has yet to be tested but theoretical frameworks have been proposed[18]

Component 5:
From Peacemaking to Peace Building

The focus of Component 5 is the association between individual-level outcomes and community- and societal-level functioning.

Component 5:
From Peacemaking to Peace Building

- Most parenting and early learning programs operate at the level of the individual or the family (the peacemaking level)

- A distinctive feature of the Ecology of Peace framework is the exploration of how families can influence communities and how peacemaking can be translated into peace building

- Two hypotheses explain this relationship
  - Human capital: as early childhood is known to be the optimal phase of development for human capital formation, investments in early childhood programs provide the greatest return on investment[19]
  - Permeation of outcomes: family-based intervention programs can promote outcomes that permeate not just individual homes but entire communities[8]

Conclusions

- Young children and their families are progressively being exposed to greater violence in homes, schools and communities, and among nations

- Evidence from the field of early childhood development clearly demonstrates that lasting and intergenerational change can occur through interventions early in life

- The Ecology of Peace conceptual framework provides a set of hypotheses to explore the viability of promoting peace through early childhood

- These hypotheses are currently being tested

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the support of Ayşen Özyeğin and ideas presented in the discussion paper *Building A Generation of Reconciliation: The Role of Early Childhood Development in Peace Building*[8] as the motivation for this conceptual framework.

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The Ecology of Peace: Formative Childhoods and Peace Building
A Brief Note

For further information

Pia Rebello Britto, Ph.D.
pia.britto@yale.edu

Members of the team

Yale University: Pia Rebello Britto, Ph.D., James Leckman, M.D., Catherine Panter-Brick, Ph.D., William Hodges, M.A., Rima Salah, Ph.D., Kyle Pruett, M.D., Maria Regina Reyes, Ph.D., and Anna L. Zonderman, M.P.H.

AÇEV: Cigdem Kağıtçıbaşı, Ph.D., Diane Sunar, Ph.D., Yanki Yazgan, M.D., Ayla Goksel, M.Sc., and Yasemin Sirali, M.B.A.

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