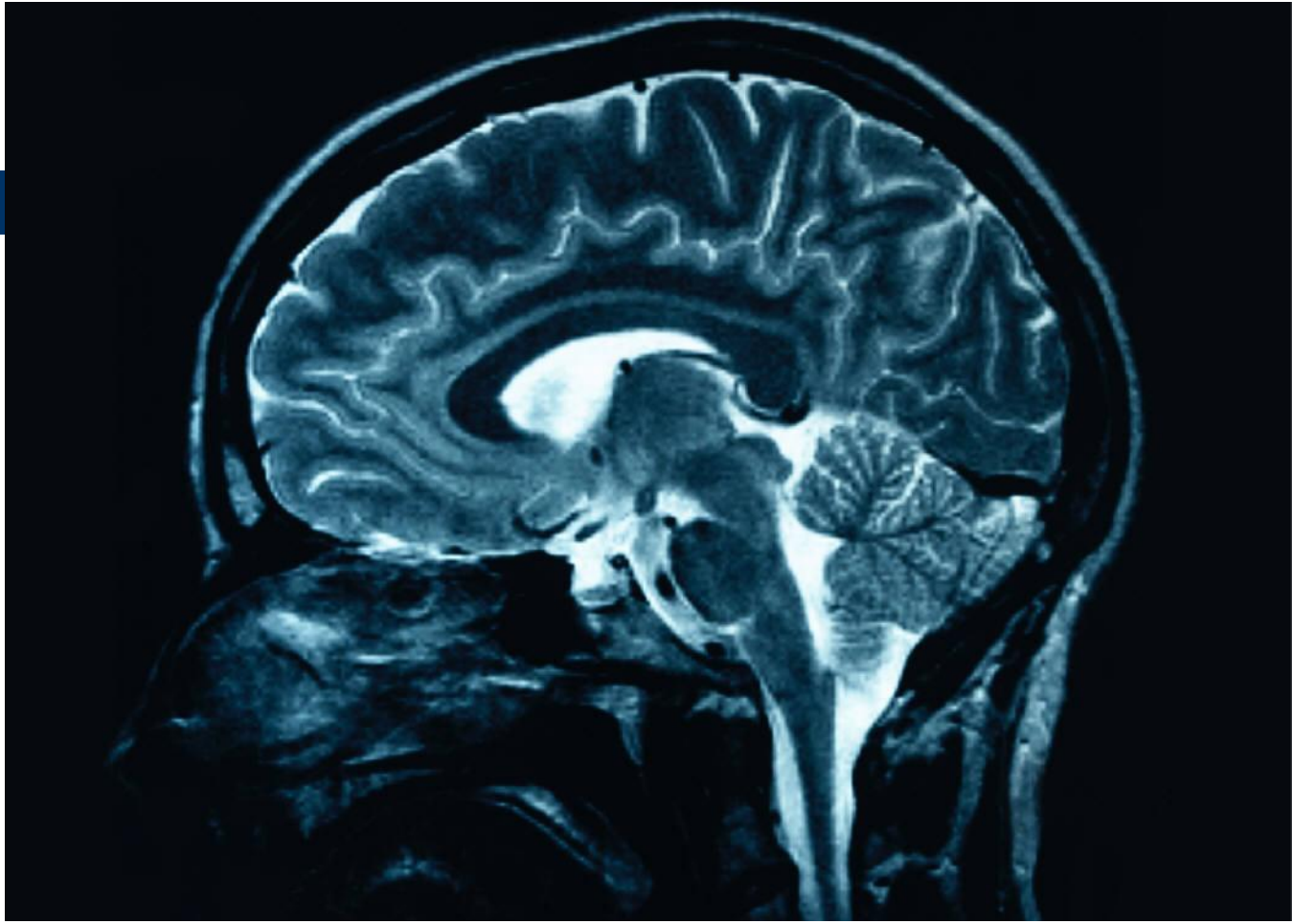


# Enhancing Children's Social Development and Well-being

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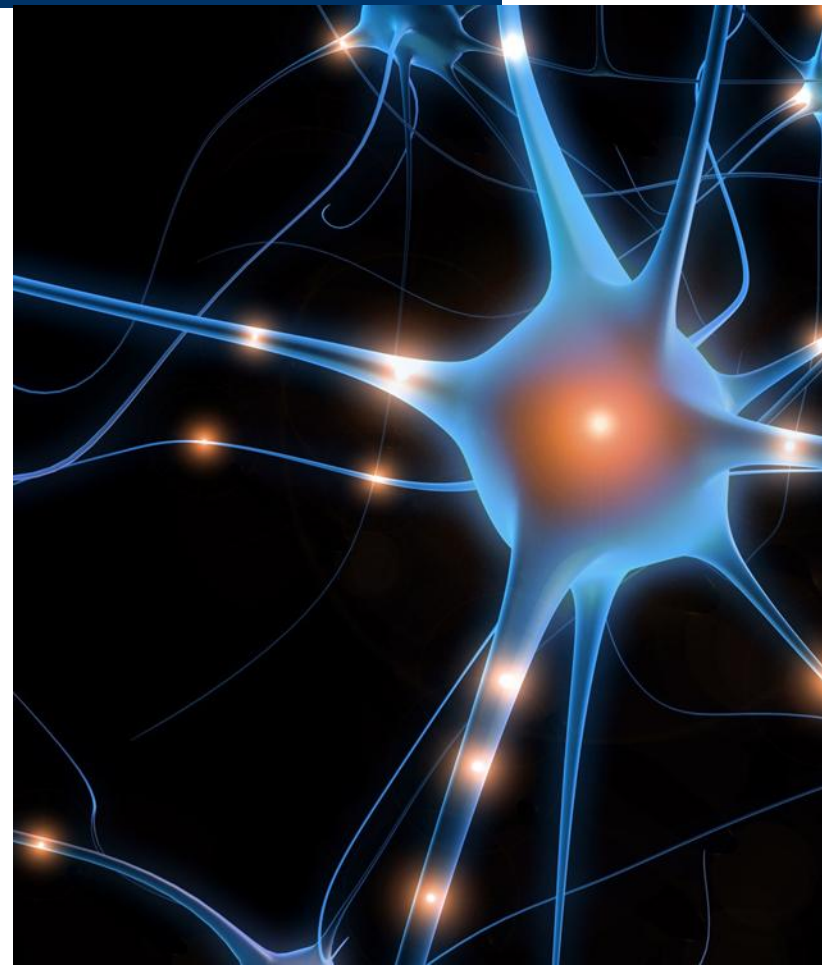






# Key Concepts:

- The brain as a Social Organ.
- Experience-Dependent Brain Development: the Importance of Relationship
- The Plasticity of the Nervous System



# The Brain as a Social Organ

- The individual neuron or a single human brain does not exist in nature
- Human babies survive based on the abilities of their caretakers to detect the needs and intentions of those around them
- Evolutionary imperative: “those who are nurtured best, survive best” (Cozolino 2006)

# Experience Dependent Brain Development: the Importance of Relationship

- Multiple sensory, motor, cognitive, and emotional processing streams contribute to the emergence of social intelligence (Karmiloff-Smith et al., 1995)
- Early in life, interpersonal relationships are a primary source of the experience that shapes how genes express themselves within the brain (Siegel 1999)
- The primary care-giving relationship (attachment relationship) allows the immature brain to use the mature functions of the parent's brain to organise its own processes (Hofer 1994)
- Both of their brains are shaped and reshaped in response to one another (Hofer 1984)

# The Plasticity of the Neural System

- Learning : modification of neural networks, the result of countless interactions between the organisation provided by genetic templates and trial and error learning.
- Critical Periods: early childhood but neuroplasticity continues through adolescence: considerable reorganisation at this time which matches the developmental changes

# What Does This Mean Clinically?

- The importance of early intervention/prevention.
- Importance of nurturing relationships throughout childhood
- Capacity for change throughout life: psychotherapeutic interventions

# Early Intervention/Prevention.

- Social support for families.
- Building community.
- Addressing poverty and social disadvantage.
- Identifying and intervening in maternal depression antenatally and postnatally.
- Parenting Programmes : especially those with a relational focus e.g. The Incredible Years.

# Importance of nurturing relationships throughout childhood

- Children learn from infancy through relationships: they learn about themselves and how to regulate their emotions and behaviour both critical for their social development



- Begins with primary care-giver and then extends to fathers, siblings, extended family and then to teachers and peers.



- Parents can promote well-being by being curious about their child and acknowledging and naming their unique qualities.



# Capacity for change throughout life; psychotherapeutic interventions

- Relational Therapy:

For children parent-child/infant therapy

For adolescents and adults: psychotherapy is relational

- Mindfulness Based Therapy: learning to be attuned with yourself; activating social circuitry.

# To Conclude:

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- We are social beings.
- It is within **relationships** that children develop social and emotional well-being
- We all need ongoing close relationships for our mental health.