

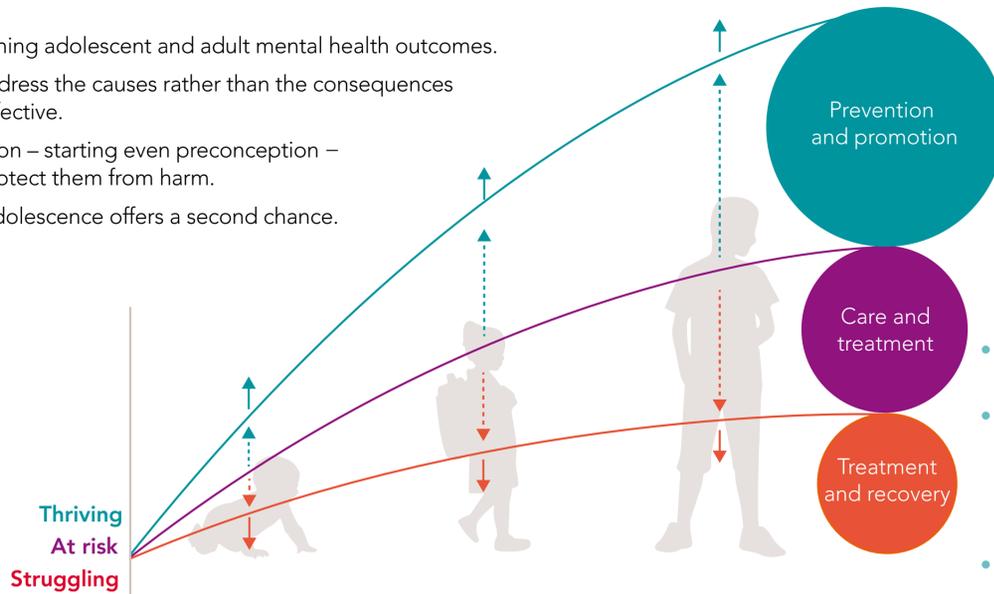
# Child and adolescent mental health: Building an ecosystem of support

## A life-course approach

- The early years of life are critical in determining adolescent and adult mental health outcomes.
- Timely investment in mental health – to address the causes rather than the consequences of ill health – is essential and is also cost-effective.
- This includes early and sustained intervention – starting even preconception – to promote children's mental health and protect them from harm.
- But it is never too late to intervene – and adolescence offers a second chance.

## Environment matters

- Mental health is shaped in powerful ways by children's relationships and living conditions.
- Poverty, violence and discrimination compromise the development and mental health of South Africa's children and increase their risk of developing anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- These risk factors frequently co-occur, with many children facing multiple adversities that accumulate across the life course.

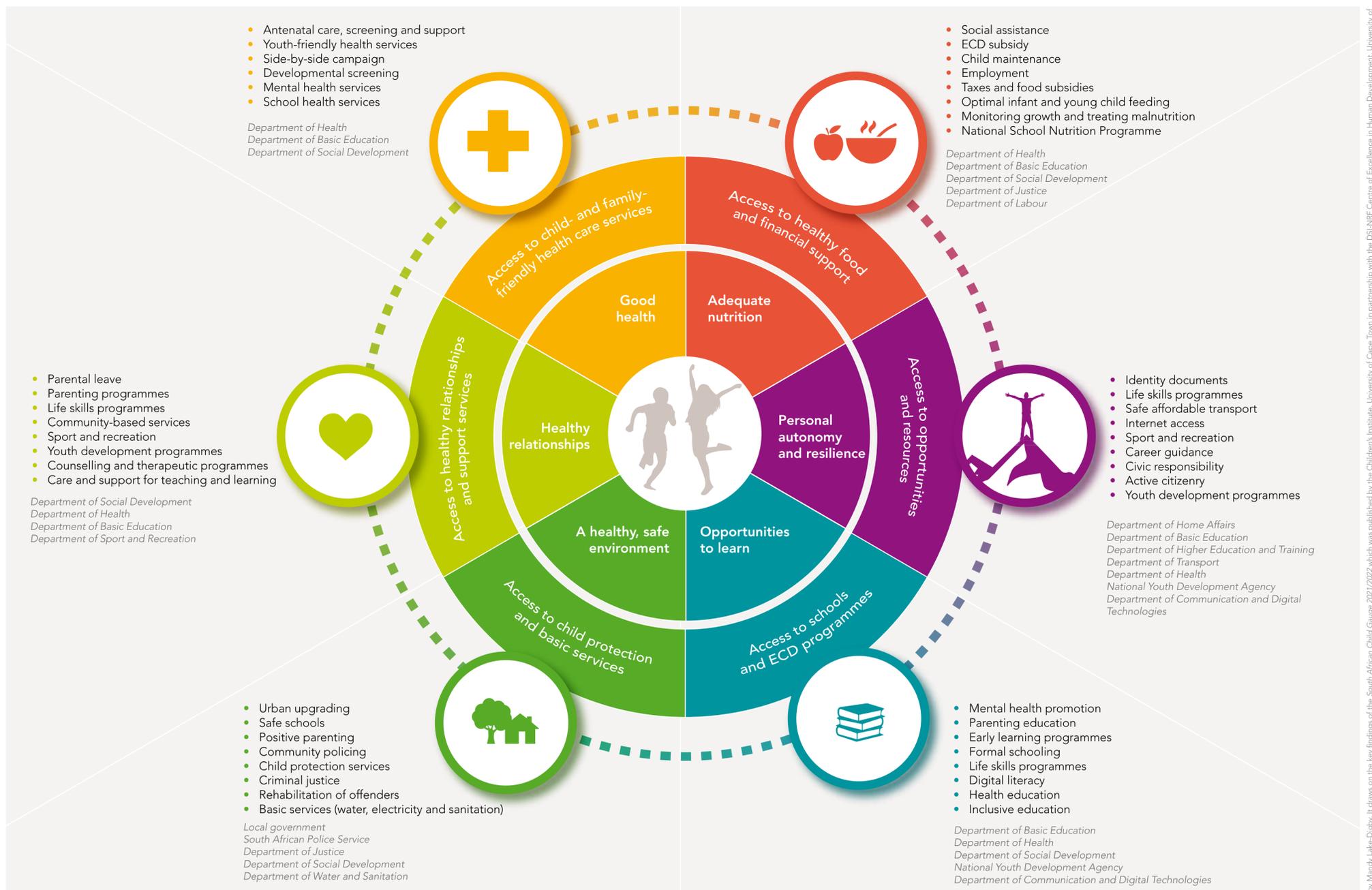


	First 1,000 days	Early to middle childhood (2 – 9 years)	Adolescence (10 – 19 years)
<b>Risk factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drinking during pregnancy</li> <li>• Intimate partner violence</li> <li>• Poor caregiver mental health</li> <li>• Developmental difficulties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor caregiver mental health</li> <li>• Intimate partner violence</li> <li>• School problems</li> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Behavioural problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk-taking behaviour</li> <li>• Gang membership</li> <li>• Substance misuse</li> </ul>
<b>Protective factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy parents</li> <li>• Responsive care</li> <li>• Opportunities for early learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive parenting</li> <li>• Life skills training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic engagement</li> <li>• Supportive peer groups</li> </ul>

## A continuum of mental health



- Children may move along a continuum of mental health in response to changing life circumstances.
- Most children are mentally healthy and have the confidence to meet life's challenges. But all children may experience periods of worry and distress due to challenges ranging from starting at a new school or the pressures of exams, to the loss of a loved one.
- Children's mental health is at risk when their feelings of anxiety and distress start to interfere with their relationships, school work and everyday routines. With additional support, these children are able to cope with life's challenges and return to mental health.
- But about 1 in 10 children will develop a diagnosable mental disorder and/or psychosocial disability that will require professional support and/or psychiatric care.
- Children need different things at different points on the mental health continuum. For most children, responsive parents and supportive communities are enough. Others need additional care and the most severely affected need treatment for recovery.



## An ecosystem of support

- Families are important, as young people who feel loved, supported and accepted by adult caregivers are less likely to experience mental health problems.
- But the burden of protecting children's mental health should not rest with families alone. Many adversities such as chronic exposure to violence and crime, poverty and inadequate healthcare are the responsibility of society.
- Governments should adopt a 'whole-of-society' approach to promote children's mental health and resilience.
- These investments need to extend beyond mental health services, to create an ecosystem of support that protects children from harm, builds their capacity to cope with stress and adversity, and provides them with opportunities to thrive.
- This includes engaging with children as active citizens and as key stakeholders to ensure their insights and experiences inform and enhance policymaking and service delivery - with a strong focus on equity and inclusion to prioritise the most vulnerable and ensure no child is left behind.