

Early Childhood Mental Health Systems of Care



What is Early Childhood Mental Health?

Early childhood mental health is the physical, emotional, social, and behavioral well being of children birth through five and their families, including the growing capacity to:

- ★ Experience, regulate, and express emotion;
- ★ Form close, secure relationships; and
- ★ Explore the environment and learn.

Early childhood mental health is influenced by:

- ★ The physical characteristics of the young child;
- ★ The quality of the adult relationships in the child's life;
- ★ The care-giving environments the child is in; and
- ★ The community context in which the child and family lives.

What is an Early Childhood Mental Health System of Care?

An early childhood mental health system of care is not a program; it is a coordinated network of community-based services and supports. These supports are organized to meet the challenges of children with serious mental health needs and their families. For children birth through five, systems of care are built upon a set of values that includes family and child-centered practice and policy, cultural and linguistic competence, and grounding in developmental knowledge. Systems of care maintain services and supports that:

- ★ Promote positive mental health by offering:
 - ◆ Developmental and social-emotional screening in primary care, early care and education programs;
 - ◆ High quality child care;
 - ◆ High quality training on social-emotional development;
 - ◆ Use of an evidence-based early childhood curriculum; and
 - ◆ Information promoting healthy social-emotional development.
- ★ Prevent mental health problems in children and families by offering:
 - ◆ Home visitation programs;
 - ◆ Mental health consultations;
 - ◆ Family mentors/family supports;
 - ◆ Caregiver supports;

- ◆ Social skills curriculum; and
- ◆ Interventions.
- ★ Intervene for children and families impacted by mental health disorders by providing:
 - ◆ On-site mental health consultations;
 - ◆ Crisis teams;
 - ◆ Wraparound services;
 - ◆ Relationship-based therapies;
 - ◆ Hotline for families;
 - ◆ Behaviorally-based programs in a variety of settings; and
 - ◆ In-home treatment.

Why Are Systems of Care Needed?

Children with serious mental health needs and their families require supports and services from many different child and family serving agencies. By creating partnerships among these groups, systems of care are able to coordinate services and supports that meet the ever-changing needs of each child.

What Types of Services Are Coordinated by Systems of Care?

- ★ Care coordination (care/case management)
- ★ Childcare
- ★ Counseling (individual, family and group)
- ★ Crisis outreach
- ★ Family support
- ★ Health care
- ★ Legal services
- ★ Mental health information resources
- ★ Protection and advocacy
- ★ Psychiatric consultation
- ★ Recreational treatment
- ★ Respite care
- ★ Transportation



For more information on Early Childhood Mental Health Systems of Care and other topics of importance related to children's behavioral health and mental health, contact Maine Parent Federation by telephone at 1-800-870-7746 (Maine only), 207-623-2144, or by email at parentconnect@mpf.org.

Adapted with permission from *Early Childhood Mental Health in a System of Care and Infusing Mental Health Services and Support in Early Childhood Settings*, Georgetown Center for Child and Human Development, www.georgetown.edu (retrieved 6/2008)

June 2008