Children's Mental Health Matters!

a Maryland public awareness campaign

Facts For Educators

Early Childhood Mental Health

Learning doesn't begin when children start school, it begins at birth. By the time children turn three, they have already begun to lay the foundation for the skills and abilities that will help them succeed in school. Problem solving, toleration frustration, language, negotiating with peers, understanding routines, and self-control are all skills that are developed early in life. The pace of brain development in this stage of life far exceeds growth in subsequent life stages. Research tells us that early experiences can, and often do, impact brain development.

Supporting a child's social and emotional development is a critical component of school-readiness. Parents and caregivers can help children to identify and express emotions, foster secure relationships, encourage exploration, and provide a secure base for the child.

What are social-emotional skills?
Broadly, social-emotional skills encompass a wide variety of skills children need to develop in order to build and maintain healthy social relationships and to understand how to effectively manage emotions.

Why are social-emotional skills important?
Children's mental health or the social and emotional domain is an important domain of development. A child must have social and personal skills to get along with other people, to have self-respect, and to believe they can learn in school. Developing strong social and emotional skills are critical to a child's success in school and at home. Research suggests that children with strong social and emotional skills in kindergarten are more successful than children who do not have strong skills in this area of development.

How do we teach social and emotional skills?
Children begin building these skills from birth, largely from observing and interacting with others.

We can teach social and emotional skills by:
• remodeling pro social behavioral
• labeling children's and adults feelings
• fostering friendships
• teaching the steps for problem solving
• reading books about social and emotional topics (like feelings and friendship)
• doing activities that foster empathy, kindness and compassion
• re-framing our view of behavior - think of all behavior from children as a communication of what they may need or want or be unable to say
• using positive discipline strategies
• using and modeling self-calming techniques
• giving children lots of praise and reinforcement

Behaviors that warrant concern
Infants and Toddlers (birth to age 3)
• Chronic feeding or sleeping difficulties
• Inconsolable "fussiness" or irritability
• Incessant crying with little ability to be consoled
• Extremely upset when left with another adult
• Inability to adapt to new situations
• Easily startled or alarmed by routine events
• Inability to establish relationships with other children or adults

Children's Mental Health Matters!.org
A MARYLAND PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

coordinated by

mhamd
MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND

MCF
maryland coalition of families

www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org

- Excessive hitting, biting and pushing of other children or very withdrawn behavior

Preschoolers (ages 3 to 5)
- Compulsive activities (e.g., head banging)
- Wild, despairing tantrums
- Withdrawn; shows little interest in social interaction
- Repeated aggressive or impulsive behavior
- Difficulty playing with others
- Little or no communication; lack of language
- Loss of earlier developmental achievements

Childhood Traumas
What is Traumatic Stress?
Research has shown that exposure to traumatic events early in life can have many negative effects throughout childhood and adolescence, and into adulthood. Children who suffer from child traumatic stress are those who have been exposed to one or more traumas over the course of their lives and develop reactions that persist and affect their daily lives after the traumatic events have ended.

What Is Resilience?
Resilience is the ability to adapt well over time to life-changing situations and stressful conditions. While many things contribute to resilience, studies show that caring and supportive relationships can help enhance resilience. Factors associated with resilience include, but are not limited to:
- The ability to make and implement realistic plans;
- A positive and confident outlook; and
- The ability to communicate and solve problems.

Factors that contribute to childhood trauma:
- Caregiver's competencies
- Neglect
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Witnessing community violence
- Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse
- Loss of caregiver

Symptoms of Traumatic Stress:
- Re-experiencing the event, reenactments
- Avoidance and general numbing of responsiveness
- Increased arousal

What does it look like?
- Changes in play

- New fears
- Separation Anxiety
- Sleep disturbances
- Physical complaints
- Distress at reminders
- Withdrawal, sadness, or depression
- Easily startled
- Difficulties with attention, concentration, and memory
- Acting out, irritability, aggression

Programs that Support Early Childhood Mental Health:
- Home Visiting programs
- Early Head Start
- Head Start
- Judy Centers

Resources

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning Vanderbilt University
http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project
https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/early-childhood-mental-health-ecmh-consultation-project

The Promise Resource Center
http://thepromisecenter.org/

Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning
https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/SEFEL

The Backpack Series
https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Implementation/family.html#collapse2