

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.

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- Excessive hitting, biting and pushing of other children or very withdrawn behavior

### Preschoolers (ages 3 to 5)

- Engages in compulsive activities (e.g., head banging)
- Throws wild, despairing tantrums
- Withdrawn; shows little interest in social interaction
- Displays repeated aggressive or impulsive behavior
- Difficulty playing with others
- Little or no communication; lack of language
- Loss of earlier developmental

## 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, reenacting
- Avoidance and general numbing of responsiveness
- Increased arousal
- Witnessing community violence
- Emotional, physical, or sexual abuse
- Loss of caregiver

## 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

## Suggested Activities to Promote Social Emotional Development

- Read books and help your child identify emotions.
- Allow your child to control the book and take ownership of reading activity.

- Use pictures of a range of faces (happy, scared, sad, mad, silly, tired, etc.) and have your child practice making those faces.
- Follow your child's lead in play.
- Narrate your child's actions and continuously describe your own actions and surroundings.

## Programs that Support Early Childhood Mental Health

- Home Visiting programs
- Early Head Start
- Head Start
- Judy Centers

## Resource Links

### Prevention

#### Family Tree

410-889-2300

Parenting HelpLine: 800-243-7337

<http://www.familytreemd.org/>

#### B'more for Healthy Babies

<http://healthybabiesbaltimore.com/>

#### The Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, Vanderbilt University

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>

### Treatment

#### Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project

[http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/24/ecmh\\_brochure\\_dec2014.pdf](http://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/24/ecmh_brochure_dec2014.pdf)

#### University of Maryland Taghi Modarressi Center for Infant Study

<https://medschool-umaryland.givecorps.com/projects/2702-department-of-psychiatry-center-for-infant-study>

#### Johns Hopkins Children's Mental Health Center

410-955-3599

[https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/psychiatry/specialty\\_areas/child\\_adolescent/patient\\_information/outpatient/broadway\\_campus/childrens\\_mental\\_health.html](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/psychiatry/specialty_areas/child_adolescent/patient_information/outpatient/broadway_campus/childrens_mental_health.html)

#### Catholic Charities Early Childhood Mental Health Services

410-252-4700

### General

#### Maryland Coalition of Families

410-730-8267

[www.mdcoalition.org](http://www.mdcoalition.org)

#### Mental Health Association of Maryland

443-901-1550

[www.mhamd.org](http://www.mhamd.org)



an initiative of



The Children's Mental Health Matters Campaign, an initiative of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD), receives funding from the Maryland Department of Health – Behavioral Health Administration, the Maryland Family Network, and community sponsors. Together with the Maryland Coalition of Families, National Center for School Mental Health, MANSEF, and hundreds of community champions, we work to raise public awareness and acceptance of the importance of children's mental health to overall child and family wellbeing. We are grateful to the National Center for School Mental Health for their collaboration in creating these resources for families.