

*Foundations of Infant-Family
and Early Childhood Mental
Health Training*

**Course: When to Worry About
a Child's Social Emotional
Well-being**

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Transdisciplinary Mental Health Practitioners
(TMHP) Series



CALIFORNIA CENTER
for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health
at WestEd Center for Prevention & Early Intervention



What we are doing today

Knowledge Area B: Infant, Toddler and Preschool Development. 2.5 hours

Knowledge Area E: Observation, Screening and Assessment. 2.5 hours

Objectives:

- 1. Participants will recognize key signs and symptoms of the different types of distress in young children. Participants will learn to consider what behaviors such as “tantrums and aggression” are communicating to their caregivers.**
- 2. Participants will improve skills in observing infants, toddlers and preschoolers.**
- 3. Participants will discuss the role of teachers and others in observing and supporting children's social emotional development.**
- 4. Participants will consider a variety of ways to use observational information including when and how to provide feedback to other caregivers and collaborate with caregivers to support the child.**

What is early childhood mental health?

- * developing capacity of young children to form secure and healthy relationships with others
- * experience, control and express a wide range of emotions
- * demonstrates curiosity and an eagerness to learn

Early Childhood Mental Health is Social Emotional Well-being

https://youtu.be/Dmz7UN_WZ_c

What is social emotional development?



Table Talk

Talk about what an emotionally healthy child acts like and why. Talk about how being emotionally healthy may help get a child ready for school.

A Closer Look: Capacity to Form Secure and Healthy Relationships

Infants and toddlers: cuddles, shows affection, enjoys being with other people, signals or asks caregivers when they need help

Preschoolers: capacity to trust other adult caregivers, enjoys playing with other children, shows empathy



When to Worry



- difficulty trusting adults and asking for help
- does not enjoy playing with others, isolates
- does not participate in activities that most children enjoy
- does not take pride in their work

What else do you want to add to the list?

Experience, Control and Express a Wide Range of Emotions

- **Infants:** smiles spontaneously, cues the caregiver and can be soothed, shares in the feelings of others
- **Toddlers:** begins to name feelings, express big feelings, more assertive
- **Preschoolers:** can identify feelings, express empathy and more proactive in asking for emotional support

Video:

<https://youtu.be/nXCD-LuUYjY>

When to Worry

- * difficulty describing emotions and internal experiences
- * frequent tantrums, easily upset, difficult to soothe
- * “big feelings” turns into aggressive behavior



What are your expectations about a preschooler's ability to manage anger?

Video

• <https://youtu.be/hLK3ui2m61U>

- 4 year old child tantrum, consoled by the teacher

Ways Children Tell Us They are Stressed and Overwhelmed

- are overactive
- have difficulty focusing or completing a task
- become easily frustrated
- have difficulty making decisions
- have difficulty following directions



Ways Children Tell Us They are Stressed and Overwhelmed

- solve problems by hitting, biting, grabbing or pushing
- have tantrums
- cling to adults
- avoid new tasks
- do not play with other children
- cry frequently and cannot be soothed easily
- do not eat



Curiosity, Eager to Learn

Infants and toddlers: explores the environment, brings adults to play with them, able to sit and enjoy activity for increasing periods of time

Preschoolers: asks questions, likes listening to stories, remembers enjoyable activities

vs.

- * difficulty paying attention
- * problems processing information
- * problems completing tasks
- * difficulty planning
- * does not explore the environment
- * difficulty with transitions

What other observations do you have?

There's Always More to What We See



Understanding a Child's Behavior

1. Developmental Stage
2. Individual Differences
3. Child-care environment
4. Home environment
5. Culture
6. Unmet Social and Emotional needs



Source: Kadija Johnston and Charles Brinamen
Mental Health Consultation in Child Care

Developmental Stage

- <https://youtu.be/yOCAHDbV3a4>
- Milestones to watch for, Birth to 4 months
- <https://youtu.be/udvZY5XDb-s>
- Milestones to watch for, 5 - 7 months
- <https://youtu.be/DEKggK52iSg>
- Milestones to watch for, 12-18 months
- <https://youtu.be/O4jewlBdz90>
- Milestones to watch for, 2 years old
- https://youtu.be/lqxiPam_kYI
- Milestones to watch for, 3 years old





Around the age of 2 years old, it's developmentally appropriate when children strongly assert themselves. At what point would you be concerned?

Individual Differences

- *medical issues
- *special needs
- *temperament, personality
- *sensory and regulatory issues
- *cognitive level and functioning

Childcare Environment

Physical Environment - room organization, types of toys and materials, group size

Sensory Environment - auditory, visual, tactile stimulation

Staff - consistency, routines

Curriculum - age appropriate, well balanced and interesting

Culturally responsive, positive and respectful relationships



Home Environment

*who's in the home, any recent changes?

*primary attachment relationship

*sources of family stress

*routines and family activities

*physical environment, home organization



Culture

- *cultural differences in child rearing between home and preschool
- *cultural differences between caregivers and providers
- *relevant cultural and linguistic issues

Unmet Social and Emotional Needs

- *trauma history
- *emotional neglect, emotional abuse, physical and sexual abuse
- *parental mental illness
- *drug and alcohol use in the family
- *domestic violence in the family

Relationships are Central in Screening, Observation and Assessment

- * child's development is seen in the context of his or her primary relationships
- * observations, screening and assessment involve conversations between the family and providers
- * incorporate perspectives from multiple disciplines
- * screening and assessment outcomes can improve the quality of parent-child and teacher-child interactions, increase parent and teacher understanding and child's adaptive capacities

• *From Testing to Talking: Linking Assessment and Intervention Through Relationships With Parents, Donna Weston, PH.D. and Barbara Ivins, PH.D.*

What Does Early Childhood Mental Health Treatment Look Like?

- The goal is to improve the quality of the caregiver-child relationship and improve the child's social and emotional functioning.
- * relationship based and of particular importance is the therapist's relationship with the family
- * emotional support
- * unstructured developmental guidance
- * multidisciplinary approach
- * concrete assistance

Partnering with Caregivers

How comfortable are you talking with caregivers about a child's problem behaviors?

What gets in the way of engaging caregivers?

How can we build relationships with caregivers despite the limits of our provider-caregiver relationship?

Tips In Sharing Your Concerns With Caregivers

Be mindful of the caregiver's self-esteem.

Read the caregiver's cues. If he or she is defensive, adjust how much information you want to share, your tone of voice and your body language.

Feedback should be specific.

Conversation should end with a future focus; how would improvements look like?, how we do things differently?

Would You Be Worried?

- Imagine that this child is in your daycare. He has been crying a lot lately and you cannot figure out what has been going on. Mom says that he does the same at home. You go on a home visit and this is what you observe.

https://youtu.be/Ti85_dYjqt4

Table Talk

- 1. What are some of your thoughts before going into the home? Any hypotheses?
- 2. What do you imagine the parent-relationship would be?
- 3. After having observed the child in the home, what do you think might be going on for the child?
- 4. What would you recommend to the parents?
- 5. How might you work together with the parents in figuring out how to decrease the amount of distress the child is experiencing?

Child's name: _____

Date: _____

Reflection Guide

Relationships: with you, family, peers, self-concept

Unique Characteristics:

Physical, ASQ,
sensory/regulatory
personality



Cognitive capacities:

Speech and language
interests
ability to focus

Culture

Environment: Home & school

Behavior and Feelings

Family

Child is still learning: _____ I can help him by: _____

Other comments: _____



Responding and attending to children's social and emotional well-being is hard work. Making time for self-care is key to caring for others.