

# Children's Mental Health Matters!

a Maryland public awareness campaign

Facts For Families

## 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.

### 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- Excessive hitting, biting and pushing of other children or very withdrawn behavior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- Withdrawn; shows little interest in social interaction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 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.

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](http://www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org)

*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

*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

**Resources**

*Prevention*

**Family Tree**

410-889-2300

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

**B'more for Healthy Babies**

410-649-0526

<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)

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MCF ~ 410-730-8267 ~ [www.mdcoalition.org](http://www.mdcoalition.org)

The Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMd) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with School and Community Champions across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children's mental health. For more information, please visit [www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org](http://www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org)