

Advisory Committee Workgroups Developing Recommendations

Now a year old, the Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee continues to meet quarterly, most recently on June 2. Three workgroups on prevention and intervention, workforce development, and communication and collaboration are developing recommendations to submit to the Departments of Education and Public Welfare in September.

The **prevention and intervention** group is working on four areas: 1) improved access to coordinated services for young children; 2) expansion of mental health consultation; 3) universal screening programs, and 4) evidence-based best practice programs to support the social and emotional development of all young children.

The **workforce development** group is using competency standards developed by California and Michigan to create a framework for a multi-level array of core competencies for individuals working in early childhood and early childhood mental health roles.

The **communication and collaboration** group will help facilitate the integration and promotion of the efforts of all three workgroups as part of a comprehensive communications plan. The plan includes the development of fact sheets and other materials to raise awareness and support for the healthy social and emotional development of young children and coordinated and accessible community-based mental health services for those who need them.

*A periodic update on early childhood mental health initiatives in Pennsylvania
Number 3, June 2009*



Synergy

Synergy is the interaction of different entities so that the total result of that interaction is greater than the sum of the individual parts. Applied to children's behavioral health services in Pennsylvania, synergy is happening right now as a number of different initiatives use similar language and methodologies to achieve positive outcomes for children and families in all parts of the system. Happily, early childhood mental health initiatives are part of this synergy.

Last fall, the Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Committee adopted the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning's Pyramid Model as the framework for developing its priorities. The three-tiered approach of the pyramid is immediately familiar to those working with the School-Wide Positive Behavior Support model currently being implemented in Pennsylvania's public schools. The prevention base of both pyramids reinforces the work being done by the Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Learning anti-child abuse initiative to infuse five protective factors in all systems serving young children and their families.



Recently, the children's advisory committee for the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services also chose to focus attention on the public health model of addressing the mental health needs of children. The public health approach relies on prevention as a first step and is particularly applicable in early childhood. For example, the Institute of Medicine has developed a three-pronged prevention approach: 1) universal prevention (for all young children anywhere); 2) selective prevention (a preschool in a poor neighborhood); 3) indicated prevention (social-emotional skill-building for selected children at risk).

Other statewide initiatives that are also part of this synergistic effort are High-Fidelity Wraparound, the Sanctuary program, and Integrated Children's Services Planning.

More information about the Pyramid Model is at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/>

Two Updates and a Tribute

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

In an article entitled “The Evidence Base for Mental Health Consultation in Early Childhood Settings: Research Synthesis Addressing Staff and Program Outcomes” (2008), the authors shared results of 26 recent studies showing that Early Childhood Mental Health consultation helped increase staff confidence in dealing with children with difficult behaviors, reduced stress, improved the quality of early learning facilities and reduced staff turnover. The authors also note the ongoing need for “accurate, data-driven information about effective strategies to deliver mental health consultation.”¹

Pennsylvania’s Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project is still relatively young, having been expanded statewide only within the past 18 months. Its goals are: 1) reduce the number of children expelled from child care due to behavior issues, 2) increase the understanding of social and emotional development and its impact on educational success, and 3) link and bridge systems and services on behalf of a child, family and program. The following information is from data collected by consultants in all six Regional keys and from program feedback surveys distributed to early learning center directors and teachers. It covers the period from July 1 to December 31, 2008.

- 8 consultants provided services.
- 229 children received consultation service.
- 51 percent of requests for service were for children ages 0-36 months; 49 percent were for children ages 37-60 months.
- 41 percent of requests were for problems with aggression.
- 51 percent of cases were referred to community agencies for additional services.
- 64 percent of directors and teachers reported that increased understand-

ing of behavior helped them respond to behavioral challenges in ways that support the child’s social and emotional needs.

- 220 hours of professional development were provided on topics such as managing challenging behaviors, promoting social and emotional development, and using reliable screening tools to help identify social and emotional difficulties in young children.
- 60 percent of directors and teachers reported improvement in referring children to appropriate services.

¹Brennan, E.M., Bradley, J.R., Allen, M.D., & Perry, D.F. The evidence base for mental health consultation in early childhood settings: Research synthesis addressing staff and program outcomes, *Early Education and Development*, 19(6), 982-1022. Free reprints available from www.rtc.pdx.edu.

Announcement on “Behavior Supports for Young Children”

Earlier this year, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning and the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services issued a joint announcement on “Behavior Supports for Young Children.” The purpose of the announcement was to “clarify and better define how the Early Intervention and Behavioral Health Service systems can work together in a cooperative, respectful and family responsive manner in order to provide services as needed for children from birth to five years of age.” The announcement defines current early intervention and behavioral health services and how to determine eligibility for services in both systems. It also instructs staff in both systems to work together to meet the needs of the child and family, and notes, “Regardless of how the child enters the service system, both programs at the local level should have interagency agreements that assure referrals to the other program when indicated.” Full text of announcement at http://www.pde.state.pa.us/early_childhood/lib/early_childhood/EI2.pdf.

Remembering Dr. Jane Knitzer

On March 29, 2009, Dr. Jane Knitzer passed away, leaving a long legacy of dedicated work on behalf of children with emotional and behavioral challenges. One of her areas of interest and expertise was early childhood mental health, which brought her to Pennsylvania as the keynote speaker for the Infant-Toddler Mental Health Symposium in December 2007 (see the *ECMH Update*, May 2008).



From 2004-2009, Dr. Knitzer was executive director of the National Center for Children in Poverty. In a tribute on the center’s web site, Dr. Knitzer was credited with believing “that every child and every family is sacred, and that it is every person’s duty to reach out to the most marginalized and vulnerable among us.” More than 20 years ago, Dr. Knitzer’s policy report, *Unclaimed Children: The Failure of Public Responsibility to Children and Adolescents in Need of Mental Health Services*, launched the Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP). One of her more recent publications related to early childhood mental health was *Reducing Maternal Depression and Its Impact on Young Children: Toward a Responsive Early Childhood Policy Framework*.

To honor Dr. Knitzer’s legacy and accomplishments, the National Center for Children in Poverty has established the Jane Knitzer Memorial Directorship in Early Childhood, which will support ongoing work on the issues she cared about most. More information at www.nccp.org.

Workforce Development

Chatham University Infant Mental Health Certificate Program

In December 2008, the 30 individuals who received scholarships from the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning to attend the Infant Mental Health Certificate Program at Chatham University in Pittsburgh were asked to complete a brief survey about their experience so far. Here are a few of the highlights from the survey results:

The program was praised by almost all respondents. Experiences that ranked high included: gaining information and skills that can be used daily at work; exposure to new ideas; being validated for work with young children; and the residency weekend at Chatham University which provided the opportunity to interact with and learn from all the other participants and professors in the program. Participants also named specific knowledge sets they were able to apply immediately in their work settings such as the effect of infant-parent interactions on total development of child and up-to-date neurological and physiological information related to child development.

"I am so excited to be a part of this program, which is essential to giving the children and families we serve the best possible chance for successful futures. The course has increased my knowledge of and passion for Infant Mental Health, and I am looking forward to the next two semesters!"

"This has been a wonderful opportunity, and I am so glad that I was chosen to participate! I am really enjoying learning more about infant mental health, and cannot wait to share this information with my colleagues."

The program is fairly demanding, which has created some challenges for partici-

pants who are also working full-time. Despite these challenges, the overwhelming majority would recommend the program to others. For more information about the infant mental health certificate program at Chatham, go to www.chatham.edu.

Penn State Master's Degree Emphasis in Special Education

Preparing 21st Century Early Childhood Intervention Professionals at Penn State University to Serve Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families: Penn State (University Park campus) now offers a special education master's degree program with an emphasis in early intervention (birth to age 3) and early childhood special education (ages 3-8). The program is designed for individuals who work with infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities and their families. The program is funded through a grant from the United States Office of Special Education. For more information, contact Dr. Marisa Macy at mmacy@psu.edu.

Widener University Early Childhood Mental Health Certificate Program

Beginning in Fall 2009, Widener University Post-Graduate Center (Chester, Pa) will offer an Early Childhood Mental Health Certificate Program, focused on the social, emotional, and behavioral assessment and treatment of young children (birth through five) and their families. The program is "a 12 to 24-month continuing education experience for the variety of professionals already in the early childhood-family field and for those with advanced mental health degrees desiring to expand their services to families with young children." It consists of five six-hour workshops, a reading group and case discussions. In addition, "group learning, mentorship,

and networking experiences provide theoretical and applied content, immersion in a community of providers, and guidance in applying new learning to current practice." A certificate of completion and continuing education credits are awarded to those who complete the program. More information at www.postgraduatecenter.org/ECMHCertificate.html.

Arcadia University Graduate Program in Early Childhood Mental Health

Arcadia University (Glenside, Pa) is in the process of developing a program of graduate study in early childhood mental health. A cross-disciplinary program with psychology is being developed with the intent of starting the program in Fall 2010. For more information, contact Dr. Christina Ager, director of Building Behavioral and Educational Support Teams (BBEST), at agerc@arcadia.edu.

Bureau of Autism Services Online Training Site

The Bureau of Autism Services has developed a virtual training center that is available to the general public as well as to providers and practitioners. This comprehensive resource center enables professionals and families to easily access trainings, documents, and other resources in one convenient location. Currently, there are three videos that can be viewed by the general public: First Look, Second Look, and an Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders. Users need to create a free account and then log-in with their user ID and password. To sign up for a free account and access materials available to the general public, go to <http://bastraining.tiu11.org>.



FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health

Below are excerpts from the first three in a new series of brief and easy-to-understand articles on healthy social and emotional development provided as a service to early learning facilities for their staff and parents. Each month addresses a different issue that parents and practitioners often face, and includes at least one helpful internet resource for more information on the topic.



Recent Publications

Supporting a Diverse and Culturally Competent Workforce, by Hannah Matthew, September 2008. Published by the Center for Law and Social Policy as part of the Charting Progress for Babies in Child Care project. Available at <http://childcareandearlyed.clasp.org/babiesinchildcare.html>.

Mental Health Problems in Early Childhood Can Impair Learning and Behavior for Life, Working Paper #6, December 2008. Published by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Available at www.developingchild.net.

Screening for Social Emotional Concerns: Consideration in the Selection of Instruments, by Jasolyn Henderson and Phillip Strain, January 2009. Published by the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention as part of their Roadmap to Effective Intervention Practices series. Available at www.challenging-behavior.org.

This is the third edition of a periodic early childhood mental health update. Previous editions are available online at www.parecovery.org (Statewide Initiatives/Early Childhood Mental Health). Contributions to future updates are invited. Please send information to:

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#1: Tips on Healthy Social and Emotional Development

- Take time to observe your child to find out what really makes him or her tick.
- Be affectionate.
- Help your child learn to resolve conflict in appropriate ways.
- Support your child's developing skills.
- Help your child experience give-and-take relationships.
- Help your child feel safe.
- Ask for help from others when you need it.
- Help your child respect differences and appreciate their own and others' culture.

#2: On Biting

Why toddlers bite: They lack language skills to express their needs; they are experimenting; they don't want to share; they are teething; they are over-tired; or they're bored
How to prevent biting: Anticipate when bites might happen by paying attention to what's going on with the child right before the bite; distract the child with another activity; suggest another way to handle the situation instead of biting; give the child something he or she can bite or chew instead; suggest ways to share popular toys; and be clear that biting is not acceptable.
What not to do: Do not get angry, shame the child or bite back.

#3: Tips for Helping a Child Who is Experiencing Separation Anxiety

- Understand that while a child's separation anxiety is a normal part of becoming independent, it often feels like the child is become more dependent.
- Practice at home by leaving the child alone in a room; when you return, say, "Mommy (or Daddy) is back!"
- Talk at home about the new people he or she will learn to know at the new place.
- Whenever possible, don't leave the child when he or she is already tired or hungry.
- Don't act upset or make a fuss when you leave.
- Create a little ritual you use every time you leave.
- Have someone focus the child's attention on a toy, book or game—something you know the child really likes.
- Always say goodbye and don't sneak out when the child isn't looking; this can cause the child to mistrust what you say or do.
- Even if you hear the child crying, don't come back after you've left; remember that most of the time the tears stop soon after you leave, so don't feel guilty.
- Take the time at home to nurture your relationship with your child.

Copies of the "FOCUS on Early Childhood Mental Health" series are available from the editor. Additional fact and tipsheets on topics in healthy social and emotional development are available from a variety of sources, including Zero to Three (www.zerotothree.org).