

FOCUS

On Early Childhood Mental Health



Pennsylvania Key
*Early Childhood Mental
Health Consultation
Project*
717-213-2063
micwal@berksiu.org

What is Early Childhood Mental Health?

At 34 months, Benjamin was throwing half-hour tantrums every day in his early learning facility. An Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant—a person with special skills in working with young children with emotional and behavior problems—came to observe Benjamin. His teachers thought the problem began at home because even though he had always thrown tantrums, they got worse when his mother became pregnant again and his father left town. The consultant called the mother who reported that she was bedridden with a high risk pregnancy and her husband was out of town for six weeks. The consultant helped make a change in Benjamin's morning routine at the early learning facility, and his mother asked his grandmother to help her at bedtime. Within two weeks, Benjamin was having only two tantrums the whole week, each lasting only a few minutes. He didn't need to be referred for any additional services.

About 15 percent of young children have mild to moderate behavior problems like Benjamin's. If they're not addressed, they can lead to bigger problems as the child grows. Less than 10 percent of young children receive the services they need for their problems. Benjamin was one of the lucky ones to receive help early.

Early childhood mental health means healthy social and emotional development in young children. Children are more likely to develop good social and emotional skills when they have safe, secure and nurturing relationships with other people. With those skills, they can then learn how handle everyday conflicts and challenges, and to trust others and feel empathy, compassion and generosity.

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.

Adapted from "Tips on Nurturing Your Child's Social and Emotional Development," by Zero to Three—www.zerotothree.org