

Promoting the Healthy Social and Emotional Development of Our Youngest Children

The Minnesota Thrive Initiative



What happens in the early years affects the course of development across a person's life span.

What is Early Childhood Mental Health?

Early childhood mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.

It is the capacity of the child from birth to age five to experience, regulate and express emotions; to form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and to explore the environment and learn. Infant mental health refers to how these issues affect development in the first three years of life.

Why Is It So Important?

New research on the developing brain points to the importance of early experience, not just for cognitive development, but for emotional development as well. Brain development is shaped by an infant's experiences and early relationships.

“Emotional growth, patterns of attachment and increasing competency in the ability to form relationships, and the emergence of self-confidence are as crucial to overall development as are physical growth, cognitive or motor skills.” - Jane Knitzer, National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia School of Public Health, 1998.

It's about early relationships:

- Promoting and supporting nurturing relationships for all infants and small children.
- Building the first relationship as a solid base for future relationships.
- Helping babies learn to trust that physical and emotional needs will be met.
- Enabling young children to use those trusting relationships to become healthy, productive adults.

Healthy social-emotional development is strongly linked to success in elementary school. It is just as important as literacy, language and number skills in helping young children be ready for school.

A child who cannot “regulate and express emotions, form close and secure relationships and explore the environment and learn” is not likely to tune into teaching and will not fully benefit from early educational experiences.

Communities can help! Find out how by learning about the Minnesota Thrive Initiative.

FAST FACTS

- *Infants can experience real depression as early as four months of age.*
- *Maternal depression, anxiety disorders and other forms of chronic depression affect at least 10% of mothers with young children.*
- *Because infants are so dependent on their parents or primary caregivers, whatever affects the adult has an effect on the child.*
- *An Illinois survey revealed that 62% of infant and toddler programs lacked adequate mental health services.*
- *A widely publicized study in Infants and Young Children found that preschoolers are expelled at 13 times the rate of k-12 students because of social-emotional and behavioral problems, especially in programs without mental health services. (MA)*
- *The emotional, social and behavioral competence of young children is a strong predictor of academic performance in elementary school.*



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Each Thrive community's continuum of care for young children will support early childhood mental health, defined as the developing capacity of a young child to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn.

What is the Minnesota Thrive Initiative?

Early childhood educators and parents across Minnesota are reporting concern over the social and emotional well-being of the children in their care, as evidenced by troubling behaviors. While there is a growing awareness of the mental health needs of young children, there has not been equal growth in available services. In fact, early childhood mental health services are non-existent in many areas of Greater Minnesota.

The **Minnesota Thrive Initiative** will allow Action Teams in six pilot sites to implement community-designed strategic plans that not only promote the healthy social and emotional development of their youngest and most vulnerable citizens, but also provide for the intensive interventions required by children and families in highest need.

The **Minnesota Initiative Foundations**, with funding from the **Bush Foundation** and others, are helping six Action Teams in regional pilot sites gather information, map available services and hold community forums for learning and discussion.

The Action Teams will then use what they have discovered to devise unique networks of services appropriate for their communities. Local people are the leaders in the process and the results will be tailored to local needs.

The continuum of care developed in each pilot site will address the resources and services needed for each level, whether it is expanded capacity, training, outreach, new programs or funding.



Where are the Thrive Pilot Sites?

- ★ Northwest Minnesota Foundation: Bemidji-Blackduck-Kelliher
- ★ Northland Foundation: Duluth, Hermantown and Proctor
- ★ West Central Initiative: Pope County
- ★ Initiative Foundation: Greater St. Cloud Area
- ★ Southwest Initiative Foundation: McLeod County
- ★ Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation: Freeborn County

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What are Early Childhood Mental Health Services?

The goal of early childhood mental health services is to strengthen the relationship between the parent and child.

Since the young child's development occurs within the context of family and other primary relationships, *mental health services are provided within the context of these relationships*. Mental health services are provided in a collaborative manner with the parents, establishing a trusting relationship by listening and learning from each other as they all seek to provide what is best for the child (Minnesota Infant Mental Health Services Feasibility Study, 1998).



Early Childhood Mental Health Continuum of Care

Promotion/prevention

Activities and opportunities available to all young children and their families, in a variety of community settings, to promote positive social and emotional development.

Early intervention services

Services for families with young children who present behavioral concerns but do not qualify for diagnosis.

Interventions

Services for families with young children who have a mental health diagnosis but continue to function in the community.

Intensive Interventions

Services for families and their young children with severe mental health issues who qualify for mental health diagnosis and who do not function well in the community.