Correspondence II - ACF-OHS-IM-24-01 Strategies and Recommendations for Supporting Mental Health

HEAD START
City of San Antonio
Department of Human Services

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: All Head Start Grant Recipients

SUBJECT: Strategies and Recommendations for Supporting Mental Health

PURPOSE: This Information Memorandum (IM) highlights the Head Start Program Performance Standards and related strategies for integrating mental health supports across all Head Start programs.

BACKGROUND: Head Start programs, including preschool programs, Early Head Start programs, Migrant and Seasonal programs, and American Indian and Alaska Native programs, have a long history of providing comprehensive services alongside early education services. They support a program-wide culture that promotes children's mental health and social and emotional well-being. Children's mental health is foundational for family well-being, children's overall healthy development, and long-term success.[1] In recent years, Head Start programs have called for guidance on how to be more intentional in integrating mental health supports into programs. These calls stem from a reported rise in behavioral and developmental concerns, higher rates of staff turnover, and limited availability of specialized mental health services. This IM provides evidence-informed mental health strategies and associated resources that can help address these challenges as part of a renewed effort across federal early childhood funding agencies to integrate mental health supports into programs.

To integrate mental health supports effectively into Head Start programs, it is important to first understand and destigmatize what is meant by "mental health." Young children's mental health, often referred to as early childhood mental health (ECMH), is not mental illness. Rather, it is the same as social

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[1] https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/policy-guidance/dear-colleague-social-emotional-development-and-mental-health

[and emotional development](#) and well-being. It is a child's capacity to express and regulate emotions, form trusting relationships, explore, and learn — all in the cultural context of family and community. ECMH approaches should support every child's development of social and emotional skills, in addition to providing specialized supports for the up to 20 percent of children under the age of 5 who experience social and emotional difficulties.[2]

Strengthening the focus on mental health is particularly appropriate given the Head Start program's mission to serve the most vulnerable children and families and break the cycle of poverty. Individuals living in high-poverty neighborhoods often have less access to high-quality resources and supports compared to individuals living in low-poverty neighborhoods, and are more likely to have worse mental health outcomes as a result.[3] Furthermore, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families[4] and families in remote or rural areas have less access to mental health and substance use services.[5] BIPOC families, including families in tribal communities, are disproportionately affected by chronic stress resulting from structural racism and historical trauma, which further narrows access to services they can trust.[6]

Head Start programs play a vital role in addressing ECMH and reducing disparities in ECMH, because they focus on the whole child as well as partner with families and communities. Family-focused efforts in particular ensure children's mental health continues to be supported in the long-term, after children transition to kindergarten. Many Head Start programs have already adopted [diverse strategies](#) to address ECMH. Programs support family well-being and staff-wellness, which ensures caregivers are well equipped to support ECMH. They directly support the child by strengthening relationships with responsive caregivers, such as [parents](#) and [early childhood staff](#), which is the foundation of ECMH. They provide stable, nurturing environments in

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[2] National Research Council and Institute of Medicine Committee. Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: progress and possibilities. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2009. Brauner, C. B., & Stephens, C. B. (2006). Estimating the prevalence of early childhood serious emotional/behavioral disorders: Challenges and recommendations. Public health reports, 121(3), 303-310.
[3] https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/policy-guidance/dear-colleague-social-emotional-development-and-mental-health
[4] Rafla-Yuan, E., Moore, S., Carvente-Martinez, H., Yang, P. Balasuriya, L., Jackson, K., McMickens, C., & Ropbles-Ramamurthy, B. (2022). Striving for equity in community mental health: Opportunities and challenges for integrating care for BIPOC youth. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 31(2),* 295-312.
[5] Morales, D. A., Barksdale, C. L., & Beckel-Mitchener, A. C. (2020). A call to action to address rural mental health disparities. *Journal of clinical and translational science*, 4(5), 463-467.
[6] Winters M-F. Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit. 1st ed. Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 2020. [Mental-Health-Facts-for-American-Indian-Alaska-Natives.pdf (psychiatry.org)](#)
Gone, J. P., & Trimble, J. E. (2012). American Indian and Alaska Native mental health: Diverse perspectives on enduring disparities. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 8, 131-160.

GUIDANCE: which children can safely learn and practice social and emotional skills, and partner with families to do the same at home. Head Start staff build trusting relationships with families and partner within the community to identify and leverage resources. These steps make it more likely that mental health supports will meet the needs of families and make a difference.

Although there are many ways mental health can be supported in Head Start programs, it is important for programs to develop a comprehensive, integrated early childhood mental health approach that promotes child and adult mental health, prevents concerns from developing, and supports early identification and referrals for treatment when needed. Using a continuum[7] of mental health supports ensures every child and family receives the appropriate level of care. This continuum includes:

    I.   **Mental health promotion** – An approach aimed at strengthening positive aspects of mental health and well-being and is focused on setting children and families up for success.
    II.   **Prevention services and supports** – An approach aimed at reducing the likelihood of future disorders in the general population or for people who are identified as at risk of a disorder.
    III.   **Access to mental health treatment** – Interventions are delivered to people who continue to be at risk after engaging in prevention services or have been diagnosed with a mental disorder.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) continues to strongly encourage grant recipients to use quality improvement funds available to all Head Start, Early Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grant recipients to support these strategies and invest in mental health supports across roles and program service areas. Suggestions of allowable uses for quality improvement funds as specified in the Head Start Act can be found in the FY 2023 Head Start Funding Increase Program Instruction.

For Head Start State Collaboration Offices and recipients closely working with states, it may be of interest to review related program guidance.

Strategies and Recommendations to Support Mental Health
These strategies support program quality and describe resources that can help programs comply with applicable Head Start Program Performance Standards.

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[7] Purgato M, Uphoff E, Singh R, Thapa Pachya A, Abdulmalik J, van Ginneken N (2020). Promotion, prevention and treatment interventions for mental health in low- and middle-income countries through a task-shifting approach. Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences 29, e150, 1–8. https:// doi.org/10.1017/S204579602000061X

INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

1. A focus on social determinants of health, or the conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age, can lead to better mental health outcomes and prevent future mental illness. To promote social conditions that support family well-being, such as family safety, health, and economic stability, programs are encouraged to develop innovative two-generation approaches that leverage community partnerships and address prevalent needs of children and families (45 CFR §1302.50(a–b)). To achieve this, programs can:

   - Create authentic partnerships with families using the Building Partnerships with Families Series as a guide. Programs can support family mental health and well-being by using the family assessment and partnership process to help families with their biggest life stressors.
   - Update the program's intake process with families to include targeted discussions on mental health, such as the families' perceptions about mental health and addressing potential stigma. Include information on mental health supports in the program, such as mental health consultation services and resources and supports available in the community.
   - Establish formal and informal check-ins with families with the intent to support family mental health. For example, build in time during parent-teacher conferences to discuss how families are doing, create a drop-box for parents to discreetly communicate their needs to staff, and devote time in every parent meeting to wellness activities.
   - Invite the mental health consultant to introduce themselves at program events, such as an "Open House" to explain the Head Start program's commitment to supporting mental health. This is an opportunity to familiarize parents with the mental health services available to them, including the role of the mental health consultant and how consultation is used throughout the program.

2. To promote family well-being, programs must collaborate with parents by providing mental health education support services. These services include opportunities for parents to learn about healthy pregnancy and postpartum care that encompasses mental health and substance use treatment options (45 CFR §1302.46(a)). To achieve this, programs can:

   - Offer opportunities for families to connect to talk about their child's development, how they are coping with potential stressors, and what resources they are using. Create a parent group, either virtually or in person, that serves as a space for parents to express their emotions, thoughts, and feelings. For guidance on facilitating this activity, refer to Leading Online Parent Meetings and Groups.
   - Provide training and opportunities for parents to learn about children's health, well-being, and mental health (i.e., in person trainings, virtual trainings, resources/handouts, etc.), as well as developing safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments. For example:
     i. Use the mental health consultant to provide group wellness sessions with parents. In these sessions include information on resources in the community and how to access these resources.

        ii. Invite speakers from mental health and substance use agencies to give talks about mental health and substance use.

- Regularly check in with families about providing supports for their own mental health and well-being, such as education materials on reducing stress and understanding depression.
- For pregnant women and expectant families enrolled in Early Head Start services, include a mental wellness check during the newborn visit that a program must provide to each mother and baby within two weeks after the infant's birth (45 CFR §1302.80(d)). These mental wellness checks are geared towards the parent or family members caring for the child and can be incorporated into a daily health check. Consider incorporating screenings for adult mental health, including depression, and substance use, with appropriate guidance from a mental health professional.

3. To promote staff well-being, programs must make mental health and wellness information available to staff regarding issues that may affect their job performance and must provide staff with regularly scheduled opportunities to learn about mental health, wellness, and health education (45 CFR §1302.93(b)). To achieve this, programs can:

- Implement identified policies, procedures, and strategies to support staff wellness that are informed by program data, such as those described in ACF-IM-HS-21-05 Supporting the Wellness of All Staff in the Head Start Workforce. It is important to gather feedback from staff on their well-being and job satisfaction, as well as wellness strategies, to determine if refinements or improvements are needed.
- Provide program leaders with foundational training in supporting workforce mental health such as through the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NTCSN). The NTCSN offers resources and trainings on a wide range of topics, including strategies to prevent, recognize and address secondary traumatic stress, which may be experienced by Head Start staff caring for children affected by trauma.
- Consider establishing communities of practice or reflective supervision groups that help directors and managers focus on creating safe environments and communications that convey to staff that it is safe to disclose and receive support if and when they experience mental health challenges.
- Promote employee assistance services and build a culture to address the stigma of seeking help for mental health reasons. Raise employee awareness around free or low-cost mental health supports available, such as benefits included in health insurance plans.

4. To promote child well-being, a program must ensure staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers implement positive strategies to support children's well-being (45 CFR §1302.90(c)(i)). To facilitate implementation of positive strategies, programs can:

- Train staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers to have basic knowledge of developmentally appropriate strategies to support positive behaviors. Since developmental expectations and appropriate strategies may differ depending on a child's age and developmental skills, staff working with preschool-age children, may still benefit from a basic understanding of how to support infants and toddlers.

- Ensure staff understand that following children's lead in structured play activities is an impactful way to understand children's developmental skills, identify and offer positive attention to their strengths, and practice self-regulation skills in a controlled environment.
- Make sure learning environments are designed to support children's self-regulation. This could include creating "cozy spaces" that are clearly visible to adult supervision where children can go if they are feeling overwhelmed. Similarly, spaces can be created with activities or sensory materials as places to express energy. These types of spaces are designed so that teachers can still observe the child or children who are in them, while also providing them the needed supports to self-regulate.
- Partner with families to understand the development, communication style, strengths, and temperament of each child in order to establish predictable routines, transition strategies, and developmentally appropriate behavioral expectations for children in the program.

INCREASE PREVENTION SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

5. To support children's ongoing social and emotional development, programs must provide supports for effective classroom management and positive learning environments; supportive teacher practices; and strategies for supporting children with challenging behaviors and other social, emotional, and mental health concerns (45 CFR §1302.45(a)). To achieve this, programs can:

- Implement an all-hands-on deck approach by creating a multidisciplinary team that works together in your program to support children's mental health. This team can be comprised of individuals that already work with the child or family across disciplines. The benefit of having a team of professionals with multiple perspectives (i.e., mental health, early childhood, special education, family service, health, nutrition, etc.) is that it ensures the most comprehensive approach to support the needs of a child and family.
    i. For example, consider ways to integrate prevention-focused approaches such as the Pyramid Model with mental health supports such as mental health consultation.
- Seek direct guidance from a mental health or child development professional to ensure that findings from developmental screening and assessment required in 45 CFR §1302.33, including social and emotional screenings, are used when making a referral to determine if the child is eligible for services through IDEA or section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. While programs wait for an eligibility evaluation and possible services, programs can consider an individualized approach to support positive behaviors and teach new skills.
- Review your program's educational curriculum to ensure it offers appropriate social and emotional learning opportunities, including intentionally planned learning experiences to help practice self-regulation skills. If you notice that many children in the group need social and emotional development support, spend some time intentionally embedding more of the experiences and activities from your curriculum that support these skills. Work these activities and supports into your daily routines and revisit them as needed to ensure children are developing skills in this area.

- Implement a systems-level approach for adult regulation such as the "Tap-In/Tap-Out" system[8] when an education staff member is feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, or otherwise dysregulated. This strategy allows for education staff to engage another staff member from a predetermined list to "tap-in" and cover the class. The education staff member can then "tap-out" and engage in strategies for accessing a calm state before returning to the learning environment.

6. Infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) is a prevention-based approach. Mental health consultants work with Head Start leaders, staff, and families to support children's healthy social and emotional development. Grant recipients have shared that it can be challenging to obtain mental health consultants, particularly in rural areas. A few strategies for building mental health consultation access include:

- Encourage existing staff to use educational benefits, such as tuition and fee support, to work towards mental health consultant qualifications. These and other strategies are described in ACF-IM-HS-22-06 Strategies to Stabilize the Head Start Workforce.
- Reach out to mental health organizations and other early childhood programs to identify potential partners for mental health consultation services. For example, ask other local Head Start or early childhood programs, home visiting programs, and state or tribal early care and education offices how they find mental health consultants. Ask local pediatricians, community health clinics, and hospitals where they refer children and adults for mental health services. After identifying possible partners, reach out to orient them to the role of mental health consultation in Head Start programs and explore potential collaborations.
- Prioritize finding a mental health professional who is familiar with the families in your program or community. Your Head Start program can help them learn about child development, group care, the culture of your program, relevant HSPPS, and IECMHC.
- Consider implementing approaches such as telehealth or remote consultation, especially in rural areas, while efforts to build capacity for in-person mental health consultation are underway.[9]
- Consult IECMHC.org's interactive map of consultants.

7. To ensure mental health consultants engage in prevention-focused activities, programs must ensure the mental health consultant assists, at a minimum, with the requirements listed in 45 CFR §1302.45(b). To achieve this, programs can:

- Provide professional development opportunities for staff during onboarding and periodically after. For example, the Foundations of Infant and Early Childhood

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[8] Venet, A. S. (2019, September 13). *The evolution of a trauma-informed school*. Edutopia.
[9] Mental Health Services for Children Policy Brief | CSELS | Rural Health | CDC
Terry-Leonard et al (2022). Early childhood mental health consultation: Brief report of adaptations in the virtual learning environment. ECMHCvirtualAdaptations_v6.pdf (iecmhc.org)

Mental Health Consultation iPD Course can ensure that all staff understand that IECMHC is a way to grow the capacity of adults to support the child's social and emotional well-being, rather than a direct intervention or treatment approach.

- Use the expertise of the mental health consultant at a programmatic level, in addition to consulting at the level of specific children, families and classrooms. For example, the mental health consultant can help program leaders and staff explore strategies for enhancing systems that support staff well-being. They can also help design program-wide policies and procedures related to mental health supports, such as positive discipline or screening and assessment practices.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

8. Programs must build community partnerships to facilitate access to additional mental health services as needed (45 CFR §§1302.45(a)(4), 1302.53(a)(2), 1302.80(c)). To achieve this, programs can:

- Consult with your Health Services Advisory Committee on local opportunities and potential partnerships. Identify grant funds available in your local community that are designated to support early childhood mental health. For example:
  i. Partner with local Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs). CCBHCs are designed to ensure access to coordinated comprehensive behavioral health care. CCBHCs are required to serve anyone who requests care for mental health or substance use, including developmentally appropriate care for children and youth, regardless of their ability to pay, place of residence, or age.
  ii. Leverage community health workers, family navigators, promotores, and peer specialists to reduce mental health stigma and provide support to families navigating mental health systems and other systems that address social determinants of health.
- Use resources that offer expertise in culturally grounded mental health practices, such as partnering with tribal healers to connect families to traditional ways of healing.
- Build partnerships with local colleges and universities that may provide sliding scale mental health services through their mental health training clinics. A sliding scale is a flexible fee structure or payment system that asks a client to pay based on their ability to do so.
- Facilitate access to community enrichment activities that can both protect and promote child and family mental health (i.e., sporting activities, cultural events, religious organizations, farmers' markets, and play groups).
- Assess barriers to obtaining mental health services and provide supports based on this assessment to facilitate access. Examples could include providing transportation from the program to clinics or providing families with private spaces equipped with appropriate technology to access tele-mental health services.

These evidence-informed mental health strategies can support Head Start programs in intentionally integrating mental health supports across their program. They can address challenges programs face such as behavioral and developmental concerns, staff burnout, and the

limited availability of specialized mental health services. The accompanying appendix includes more specific resources to support these recommendations.

OHS will continue to work with programs to support the mental health of children, families, and staff in Head Start programs. Please direct any questions about the content of this IM to your OHS regional office.

Thank you for all you do on behalf of children and families.

Sincerely,

/ Khari M. Garvin/

Khari M. Garvin
Director
Office of Head Start

APPENDIX: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Appendix includes a variety of resources that support the promotion of mental health and well-being of children, families, and the child care workforce. Examples include different funding streams and supports from initiatives, programs, and agencies that support early childhood development and family well-being.

The Appendix is by no means exhaustive but includes examples of best and promising practices that are research- and/or evidence-based. Specific mention of organizations does not imply endorsement by ACF, HHS, or the U.S. government.

MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

STRATEGY 1. A focus on social determinants of health, or the conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work and age, can lead to better mental health outcomes and prevent future mental illness. To promote social conditions that support family well-being, such as family safety, health, and economic stability, programs are encouraged to develop innovative two-generation approaches that leverage community partnerships and address prevalent needs of children and families (45 CFR §1302.50(a–b)).

- Resources on the ECLKC to support programs in understanding and addressing broader social conditions and events that impact mental health include:
    - The Mental Health and Wellness chapter of the Health Manager Orientation Guide describes the importance of social determinants of health and equity as it relates to mental health.
    - The Head Start Heals Campaign is a collection of resources on the ECLKC describing how to support the mental health of children and families, particularly when children and families are exposed to traumatic events or situations that overwhelm their ability to cope.
    - Family Support and Well-being is a collection of resources on the ECLKC for ensuring family members are safe, healthy, and have chances for educational advancement and economic mobility.
    - Building Partnerships with Families is a four-module learning series to enhance knowledge and practice about engaging families using strengths-based attitudes, relationship-based practices, and reflective practice. This professional development course accessible for free on the Individualized Professional Development Portfolio with continuing education units awarded for completion.
    - Family Engagement and Cultural Perspectives: Applying Strengths-based Attitudes tool, can be used as part of training and reflective practice and supervision.
    - Check In and Partner with Families offers relationship-based competencies to support family engagement, recognizing that partnering with families supports child and family well-being.
    - Challenges and Benefits of Making Parent Connections provides strategies for connecting with parents.
- Resources on the ECLKC to support partnerships with families around mental health include:

- o [Family Connections: A Mental Health Consultation Model](#) provides preventative, systemwide mental health consultation and training approach for staff. These resources and training modules support staff to work with families dealing with parental depression and related adversities, with children in classrooms and in the home, and to engage and support parents struggling with adversities.
  - o [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Information for Families](#) provides an overview of mental health consultation for families.
  - o [Leveraging Sources of Resilience to Support Mental Health](#) webinar discusses the importance of finding, understanding, and elevating sources of resilience to support mental health, with a focus on racially and ethnically diverse and under-resourced communities.
- Other resources to support family relationships and partnerships include:
  - o [Information for Caregivers on Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) is a one-page resource to help caregivers learn about the benefits of infant & early childhood mental health consultation.
  - o [ACF Video Series on Early Childhood Social Emotional Development and Mental Health and Caregiver Well-being](#) is a series of short videos spotlighting the importance of robust social emotional development and mental health support strategies within programs serving young children and their families.
- Potential partnership opportunities for Head Start programs include:
  - o [Healthy Start programs](#) are Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA) grant recipients situated in many communities and can work as partners with Head Start programs. Healthy Start programs seek to improve health outcomes before, during, and after pregnancy. Local Healthy Start programs match families with a care coordinator, who then develops personalized plans that can include prenatal and post-partum care, mental health and substance use screening, intimate partner violence screening, and linkages to other services such as assistance with transportation and housing. Every Healthy Start project also has a Healthy Start Community Action Network to increase awareness of and partnerships with a wide range of programs offering health, behavioral health, and social supports. As of 2023, there were [111 Healthy Start projects](#); some Healthy Start grant recipients already collaborate with Head Start programs.

STRATEGY 2. To promote family well-being, programs must collaborate with parents by providing mental health education support services, including opportunities for parents to learn about healthy pregnancy and postpartum care that encompasses mental health and substance use treatment options (45 CFR §1302.46(a)).
- Resources on the ECLKC that support families during pregnancy, infancy, and the transition to parenthood can be found in the [Pregnancy](#) collection, including:
  - o [The Newborn Visit: Information for Early Head Start Staff](#) describes and provides tips for the newborn visit.
  - o [Head Start Services as a Maternal Health Intervention](#) webinar includes information on maternal depression and conversations on health equity in maternal health.
  - o [Connecting All Parents with Perinatal Mental Health Services](#) webinar addresses the unique needs of specific birthing people — such as LGBTQI+ people,

indigenous people, immigrants, and refugees — who may benefit from specialized or tailored mental health resources during and after pregnancy.

- These resources support screenings for depression and substance use.

- Other resources to promote healthy pregnancy and postpartum care and support families experiencing perinatal mental health challenges include:
  - The Perinatal Mental Health page provides basic information on perinatal mental health and links to a wide range of resources, webinars, and free trainings. It is developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network. SAMHSA also has a webpage with Resources for Parents and Caregivers.
  - The Mom's Mental Health Matters Initiative provides extensive information about depression and anxiety during pregnancy and postpartum, including signs and symptoms, risk factors, and treatment options. It is developed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). They have materials (such as posters and postcards) that can be ordered and disseminated by Head Start programs.
  - The Action Plan for Depression and Anxiety Around Pregnancy serves as a checklist to help identify and seek help for anxiety and depression from the NIH.
  - Depression During and After Pregnancy provides information about perinatal depression and links to find effective treatment and community resources such as Postpartum Support International, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness. It is developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- Resources on the ECLKC that support family engagement activities include:
  - Talking with Families about Their Child's Development provides strategies to partner with families in ongoing conversations about growth and development.
  - Leading Online Parent Meetings and Groups resource offers examples to consider before, during, or after leading online parent activities.
  - Family Engagement in Early Care and Education Learning Series modules guide early childhood professionals to consider how the relationships they build with families can support positive parent-child relationships, learn how to use reflective practice as one strategy to enhance work with families, and explore how larger systems and cultural contexts influence family engagement. This resource includes modules on understanding children's behavior as communication and responding with families to developmental concerns.
  - Partnering with Families to Support Inclusion: Part 1 webinar offer strategies that program staff can use to support families to learn about and act on developmental concerns.
  - Supporting Social and Emotional Well-being is a collection of resources that can inform professional and parental development.

- Other resources to help families understand their child's development and mental health include:
  - Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers is an online resource for parents of 2- to 4-year-olds which provides information on positive parenting strategies. The website includes articles and FAQs answered by parenting experts, videos, and free print resources developed by the CDC.

- o "Learn the Signs. Act Early." is a CDC initiative that provides free materials and resources to help families and early childhood professionals promote developmental monitoring and screening activities, track developmental milestones, and recognize signs of developmental concerns. With family-friendly resources available in print, online, and via CDC's Milestone Tracker App, information can help families and professionals learn the signs of social-emotional development and encourage them to act early to access screening and additional services when they have any questions or concerns.
  - o The aRPy Ambassador Program identifies individuals who can help Head Start programs and families implement the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices: a set of research-based best practices for working with young children with disabilities or delays, their families, and the personnel who serve them. The program is co-led by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) through a Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs cooperative agreement.
  - o Healthy Steps: Healthy Steps Should I be concerned? Understanding and talking about mental health with your child is a video about parenting and signs of mental health concerns in children. It features parents and caregivers from around the country who talk about how they noticed and responded to their child's mental health concerns. This video highlights federal resources about mental health and where to get help.

  - o Talking about mental health: Tips for parents and caregivers from young people is a tip sheet created by young people who have experienced mental health challenges. Youth share what has helped and what they wish parents and caregivers would say and do when talking about mental health. The tip sheet also includes links to additional resources. ACF also has a webpage dedicated to Mental Health Resources for Parents and Caregivers.
- Potential partnership opportunities for Head Start programs to promote healthy child development and mental health include:
  - o Healthy Steps Specialists in pediatric primary care practices offer developmental, social-emotional, and behavioral screening for all young children (birth to 3), screening for family needs, care coordination, parenting support, and consultation for children and families. Where applicable, Head Start programs can partner with Healthy Steps sites in their communities to coordinate care for families. There are currently Healthy Steps sites in 24 states and the District of Columbia, and more than 200 primary care practices.
- Resources on the ECLKC to support a family's own mental health include:
  - o Several materials designed for use with families, including materials on reducing stress, understanding depression, taking care of yourself, and coping with grief and loss.
  - o Fathers, Families, and Mental Health is a webinar that explores how to best support the family system by learning about the unique experiences of fathers, appropriate screening tools and interventions, and the impact of the father on the family.

- o [Understanding Addiction and Substance Use Stigma: What You can Do to Help](#) provides information on substance use disorders and how to support those impacted by substance use.
  - o [Strategies to Support Families Who May Be Experiencing Domestic Violence](#) provides resources for staff working with families who may be experiencing intimate partner violence.
  - o [Should I be concerned? Understanding and talking about mental health with your child](#)
  - o [Talking about mental health: Tips for parents and caregivers from young people](#)
  - o [Mental Health Resources for Parents and Caregivers](#).
- Various helplines have been developed to provide free and direct mental health support to individuals, including staff and families:
  - o HRSA funds the [National Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#) which provides free and confidential support (in English and Spanish) before, during, and after pregnancy.
  - o SAMHSA has a number of national helplines and free resources to help individuals access behavioral health treatment that can be made available to families. These include:
    - ▪ [Findtreatment.gov](#) offers a confidential and anonymous resource for persons seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders in the United States and its territories.
    - ▪ [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) offers free and confidential support for people in distress, 24/7.
    - ▪ [National Helpline](#) offers treatment referral and information
    - ▪ [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) offers immediate crisis counseling related to disasters, 24/7.
    - ▪ Programs can order free printed posters and other materials from [SAMHSA's store](#).
  - o [Stronghearts Native Helpline](#) 1-844-7NATIVE (762-8483) is a safe, anonymous, and confidential domestic and sexual violence helpline for Native Americans and Alaska Natives, offering culturally appropriate support and advocacy.
  - o [The Native Crisis Text Line](#) connects those seeking crisis support with a trained counselor by texting the word "NATIVE" to 741741.

STRATEGY 3. To promote staff well-being, programs must make mental health and wellness information available to staff regarding issues that may affect their job performance and must provide staff with regularly scheduled opportunities to learn about mental health, wellness, and health education ([45 CFR §1302.93(b)](#)).
- [Promoting Staff Well-being](#) is a collection of resources on the ECLKC website to support staff wellness and mental health, including:
  - o [Cultivating Wellness: 8 Dimensions of Staff Well-being](#) offers early childhood program staff strategies to cultivate their health and well-being. This professional development course accessible for free on the Individualized Professional Development Portfolio with continuing education units awarded for completion.
  - o [Managing Stress with Mindful Moments](#) offers resources such as breathing and movement exercises.

- o [You Make the Difference Posters](#) can be displayed to help staff find inspiration and practical strategies to reduce stress.
  - o [Promoting Organizational Staff Wellness](#) webinar explores how to build an organizational and program-wide culture of wellness.
  - o [Practical Strategies for Improving Staff Wellness](#) webinar discusses practical strategies for nurturing staff's well-being and hear about ideas and resources to build wellness into their everyday routines.
  - o [Tips to Support Family Services Staff Wellness](#) is a resource that offers program strategies for leaders and supervisors and self-care tips for family services professionals and home visitors.
  - o [Staff Wellness for Home Visitors](#) webinar explores the importance of staff wellness and professional boundaries in home-based settings.
  - o [Strengthening Trauma-Informed Staff Practices](#) brief outlines different strategies to strengthen trauma-informed practices for staff.
  - o [Promoting Healing and Resilience with Staff and Families](#) webinar offers ideas and strategies for creating trauma-informed and healing-centered interactions before, during, and after traumatic events.
- Resources on the ECLKC that focus on ensuring workforce job satisfaction and engagement include:
  - o [Improving Head Start Workforce Compensation, Wellness, and Career Advancement,](#) Office of Head Start staff discussed strategies related to compensation, benefits, and well-being.
  - o [Improving Staff Wellness and Job Satisfaction](#) webinar explores meaningful self-care strategies that improve wellness and job satisfaction and help staff perform their job with resilience.
  - o [Using Brain Science to Inspire and Motivate Education Staff](#) webinar explores how to create and sustain motivation and commitment to high-quality service, even when the work is challenging and at times stressful.
  - o [Tips on Becoming a Reflective Supervisor and a Reflective Supervisee](#) includes information sheets to support the workforce in using reflective supervision practices.
  - o [Using Reflective Supervision to Build Capacity](#) webinar outlines information for supervisors and staff on how reflective supervision can be used to build reflective capacity for education staff and improve program quality and practice.
- Other resources to support Head Start workforce well-being and mental health include:
  - o [Psychological First Aid](#) resources are designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. Psychological First Aid is developed by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and National Center for PTSD.
  - o [Infant/Toddler Workforce Wellness: Focusing on Wellness is Critical for Early Childhood Professionals](#) offers resources for child care providers looking to reduce stress and prioritize their own wellness, curated by Office of Child Care.
  - o [Mental Health and Wellness Resources](#) contains resources for child care providers to support both their own mental health and the mental health of the children they serve curated by the Office of Child Care.

- SAMHSA's National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative (NCTSI) raises awareness about the impact of trauma on children and adolescents. Through this initiative, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) offers resources and trainings on a wide range of topics, including strategies to prevent, recognize and address secondary traumatic stress, which may be experienced by early childhood providers caring for children affected by trauma.
    - Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals, from NCTSN For example, Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals, describes how individuals experience secondary traumatic stress (STS), how to identify STS, and strategies for prevention and intervention. NCTSN was created through SAMHSA's National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative.
    - Trauma-Informed Care for Schools Before, During, and After Possible Emergency Events resources are created by the Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center.
    - Understanding Educator Resilience and Developing a Self-Care Plan is a webinar which provides educators with information on the concepts of resilience and compassion fatigue, and the impact of stress and burnout on the education environment, as well as ways to identify signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue and concrete steps for developing a professional self-care plan. It was developed by the Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center.
    - Total Worker Health®: A Guide to Worksite Wellness and Safety in the Child Care Setting is a comprehensive toolkit based on CDC evidence for child care center leaders and staff to learn safe and healthy skills for themselves and learn how to be healthy role models for the children they see every day.
    - Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace is a CDC/NIOSH Science blog that discusses workplace strategies to support worker mental health and well-being and organizational success.

STRATEGY 4. A program must ensure staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers implement positive strategies to support children's well-being and prevent and address challenging behavior (45 CFR §1302.90(c)(i)).

- Resources on the ECLKC on positive strategies to support children's behaviors include:
    - Infant/Toddler Positive Behavior Support and Preschool Positive Behavior Support from the Pyramid Model Framework are webinars from the Teacher Time series focused on building relationships, emotional literacy, problem-solving and relationship skills, responding to persistent challenging behavior, and more.
    - Engaging Interactions and Learning Environments in-service suites are a professional development resource that include several resources for social and emotional support, well-organized classrooms, and instructional interactions. Several suites have additional materials that have been specifically designed for programs with American Indian and Alaska Native populations.

- o [Following Children's Lead](#) is a webinar on social and emotionally intelligent ways in which teachers can engage children in learning.
  - o [Understanding and Managing Children's Behavior](#) Tip sheet offers information on supporting children who need more help managing strong emotions by developing and using an Individual Support Plan (ISP).
  - o [Mindfulness Practices with Children](#) provides audio recordings of mindfulness practices with the Sesame Street Muppets.
- Resources on the ECLKC to help families understand child development include:
  - o [Introduction to Temperament](#) is an ECLKC resource providing an overview of what temperament is, including the nine common traits that can help to describe a child's temperament and how they react to and experience the world. This form can be used by families to help understand where their child falls on the [Temperament Continuum](#).
  - o [Positive Solution for Families: Routine Guide](#) is a resource for families of children 2-5 years old. It offers suggestions and strategies to prevent, teach, and respond, to the challenging behavior a child may be having.
- The National Center on Pyramid Model Innovation's resource library includes several resources on positive behavior supports, such as:
  - o [Pyramid Model Practices Implementation Checklist for Preschool (2-5 years) Classrooms](#) this checklist highlights high quality practices to support nurturing and responsive relationships; high quality, supportive environments; teaching social-emotional skills; and addressing challenging behavior.
  - o [Taking a Break: Using a Calm Down Area at Home](#) resource to support families in creating environments that support a child's self-regulation at home.
  - o [Help Us Calm Down: Strategies for Children](#) visual support that can be used in learning settings.
- Other programs that offer resources to support parenting and help families understand and promote their child's development include:
  - o [Introduction to Temperament](#) is an ECLKC resource providing an overview of what temperament is, including the nine common traits that can help to describe a child's temperament and how they react to and experience the world. This form can be used by families to help understand where their child falls on the [Temperament Continuum](#).
  - o [Positive Solution for Families: Routine Guide](#) is a resource for families of children 2-5 years old. [Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs)](#) serve families of children (birth to 26) and inclusive of all disabilities. These [centers](#) provide training and information that meets the needs of families of children with disabilities.
  - o [Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs)](#) are parent training and information centers operated by local parent organizations that help ensure underserved families of children with disabilities (including low-income families, parents of children who are English learners, and parents with disabilities) have the training and information they need to participate effectively in helping their children. [CPRCs](#) are required to establish cooperative partnerships with the parent training and information centers in their states.

- o [Parent Cafes](): Many communities have implemented parent cafes with funding and other supports from state or local health and mental health departments, grants from SAMHSA (Project LAUNCH), or family resource centers and other community organizations. Learn more in the [March 2020 Children's Bureau brief]() on approaches to strengthening [protective factors]() in child welfare.
- o [The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network]() offers free technical assistance and resources to government agencies and nonprofit organizations in states, tribes, and territories to improve supports and services for grandfamilies and kinship families. For example, this [tip sheet discusses starting grandfamily support groups](). The network is funded through the Administration for Community Living (ACL).
- o [Thriving and Healthy Kids: We All Have a Role to Play in Promoting Positive Childhood Experiences]() is a resource website created by ACF and CDC in partnership with parent leaders and the American Academy of Pediatrics and Prevent Child Abuse America. The resources were developed to help individuals learn more about how they can use existing strategies and resources to play a role in preventing adversity and promoting positive experiences so children can thrive.

PREVENTION SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

STRATEGY 5. To support children's ongoing social and emotional development, programs must provide supports for effective classroom management and positive learning environments; supportive teacher practices; and strategies for supporting children with challenging behaviors and other social, emotional, and mental health concerns (45 CFR §1302.45(a)).

- Resources on the ECLKC to support multidisciplinary team approaches include:
  - o [All Hands-on Deck: Partnering with Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultants to Implement the Pyramid Model]() is a resource from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations and highlights different ways an IECMH consultant can directly support Pyramid Model implementation.
  - o The [Crosswalk of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Pyramid Model Coaching: Building Capacity in Early Childhood for the Promotion of Social and Emotional Health]() supports visualization of the unique and complimentary aspects of IECMH consultation and the Pyramid Model.
- Resources on the ECLKC on individualizing approaches for children, include:
  - o [IDEA]() resource collection offers information related to the federal law that guarantees early intervention and early childhood special education services for children with disabilities from birth to age 5.
  - o [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act]() is a federal statute that prohibits discrimination based on disability in certain programs, including those that receive Federal financial assistance. Section 504 requires these programs to provide qualified individuals with disabilities, including preschool-aged children, equal opportunity to participate in the program. Programs that provide preschool education must also take into account the needs of qualified preschool-aged children with disabilities in determining the aids, benefits, or services to be provided.

- o [Highly Individualized Practices Series](#) is a webinar series that offers effective strategies for teachers, home visitors, and coaches to use when supporting children with disabilities or suspected delays.
  - o [The Inclusion Lab App](#) is a mobile application designed to help disability service coordinators, education managers, and coaches support education staff to provide highly individualized instruction for young children with disabilities or suspected delays.
  - o [Understanding and Managing Children's Behaviors: Individual Support Plans (ISP)](#) this ECLKC resource offers strategies, resources, and a process for developing an ISP.
  - o [Developing a Neutralizing Routine](#) is a resource that supports a plan for how to address challenging behavior when it occurs to ensure responses to the behavior does not escalate it and aims to neutralize the effects of implicit bias on decision making.
- [Social Emotional Learning](#) is a collection of resources on the ECLKC such as webinars and 15-minute in service suites. Social and emotional learning begins with positive relationships, supportive learning environments, actively teaching social emotional skills, and understanding behavior including challenging behavior.

STRATEGY 6. Infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) is a prevention-based approach. Mental health consultants work with Head Start leaders, staff, and families to support children's healthy social and emotional development. Grant recipients have shared that it can be challenging to obtain mental health consultants, particularly in rural areas.

- Resources on the ECLKC to support programs to access mental health consultants include:
  - o [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Your Program](#) is a resource collection that includes information about how to choose and use an IECMH consultant, how to deliver effective IECMH consultation services.
  - o The ECLKC offers [Tips for Offering Effective Mental Health Consultation in Ever-changing Contexts.](#) This resource explores strategies and tips Head Start programs can use to build strong IECMH consultation services, including using technology as a substitute or supplement to in-person services.
- [Early care and education offices](#) are state or local entities that oversee early care and education programs and services. Programs can reach out to offices to identify potential partners for mental health consultation services.
- Resources to help identify mental health consultants developed by the Center of Excellence (CoE) for IECMHC include:
  - o [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Hiring Guidance](#)
  - o Infant and [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Workforce Development Plan Overview](#)
  - o Virtual Community [interactive map of consultants](#) who self-identify as infant and early childhood mental health consultants

STRATEGY 7. To ensure mental health consultants engage in prevention-focused activities, programs must ensure the mental health consultant assists, at a minimum, with the requirements listed in 45 CFR §1302.45(b).

- Resources on the ECLKC on mental health consultation activities include:

- o [Foundations of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) offers a detailed learning experience for mental health consultants and anyone who currently uses or wants to learn more about Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. This professional development course accessible for free on the Individualized Professional Development Portfolio with continuing education units awarded for completion.
  - o The [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) section of the Health Managers Orientation Guide describes the role, services, and supports of a mental health consultant.
- The CoE for IECMHC has several resources to support mental health consultants to engage in prevention-focused activities, tailored to specific needs or early childhood populations, including:
  - o [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) is a collection of videos, tools, and resources that can help consultation systems, leaders, and practitioners in building capacity for understanding race and systemic racism, bias, and culturally responsive practices.
  - o [Equity in IECMHC: Looking back, looking forward](#) is a webinar that features a panelist of practitioners who are meaningfully advancing the work of equity in IECMHC, including an example how a community developed their own IECMH consultants
  - o [Making a Difference: Maternal Depression:](#) This video describes how maternal depression affects infants and toddlers, and how IECMH consultants can build the capacity of home visitors and early care and education staff to address maternal depression. This video includes highlights from a webinar presented on 3/27/18.
  - o [Considerations for Providing Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Early Care and Education Settings to Support Children in Foster Care](#) is a brief that explains how infant and early childhood mental health consultation can mitigate the challenges children in foster care face, as well as the challenges that early childhood education teachers and other program staff face in providing the best possible care for them.
  - o [Family Engagement: Explore IECMHC Strategies for Enhancing Family Engagement](#) webinar highlights the family engagement framework developed by the National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. The webinar features examples of how IECMH consultants can support enhanced family engagement in early care and education programs.
  - o [Beyond the 101: Providing IECMHC to Infant Toddler Caregivers](#) is an e-learning module that explores the needed shifts in thinking and perspective when providing IECMHC in settings serving primarily infants and toddlers.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

STRATEGY 8. Programs must build community partnerships to facilitate access to additional mental health services as needed (45 CFR §§1302.45(a)(4), 1302.53(a)(2), 1302.80(c))

- Resources on the ECLKC to support community engagement include:

- o The Engaging Community Partners to Support Mental Health section of the Health Manager Orientation Guide describes mental health specific considerations for community engagement to support mental health.
  - o Strategies and Examples for Community Partnerships is a resource that outlines how Head Start programs can work with community partners to support positive outcomes for children and families.
- Resources on the ECLKC relevant to culturally grounded mental health approaches include:
  - o Mental Health and Equity webinars highlight the importance of understanding, affirming, and supporting nondominant ways of responding to mental health challenges and raise awareness about the effect of historical trauma on mental health and how to reduce barriers of bias.
  - o Head Start Programs, Indigenous Families, and Addiction links to a video series that discusses the most important concepts and facts regarding addiction, explores the experience of many Indigenous people, and uncovers how to make substance use recovery support more responsive.
- Resources on the ECLKC that support access to mental health treatment information and referrals:
  - o Finding a Mental Health Provider for Children and Families in Your Early Head Start/Head Start Program offers guidance in identifying mental health providers who best meet a family's needs, culture, and personality and ideas to overcome barriers.
  - o Facilitating a Referral for Mental Health Services for Children and their Families is a brief that offers Head Start program staff guidance on special considerations for making and supporting successful referrals.
- Other resources to support engagement with community mental health partners include:
  - o Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) are designed to ensure access to coordinated comprehensive behavioral health care. This SAMHSA resource outlines the history and background of CCBHCs, offers information about expansion grants and certification criteria, as well as technical assistance and resources. Visit the CCBHC locator page to view an interactive map and downloadable PDF list of CCBHCs by state.
  - o Visión y Compromiso offers information on the roles of promotores and community health workers.
  - o The Find a HRSA Health Center tool provides information about where HRSA-supported health centers are located in each community. These centers provide comprehensive primary care services through permanent, fixed service delivery sites, temporary locations, mobile units, and service delivery sites located in or proximate to schools. Health center school-based service sites help to facilitate access to essential services for students, family members and other members of the community. Find a Health Center provides information about where health centers are located in each community. The Children's Health and Education Mapping Tool from the School Based Health Alliance enables health, education, and other partners to identify each other at a local level and develop new partnerships.

- The HHS School-Based Health Services resource list (March 2022) is an expansive compendium of resources for educators grouped topically and including early care and education, emergency response, behavioral health and trauma, social determinants of health, and health care coverage.
  - Regional Partnership Grants (RPG) are administered by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families Children's Bureau (CB) to improve the well-being of children affected by parental substance use disorders. The projects support interagency collaborations and integration of programs, services, and activities designed to increase the well-being, improve the permanency, and enhance the safety of children who are in, or at risk of, out-of-home placements as the result of a parent or caregiver's substance use disorder.
  - National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW) provides technical assistance to RPG grantees and community partners on cross-systems collaborative capacity; program sustainability; trauma-informed and culturally responsive evidence-based and evidence-informed services for children, parents, and family members; family-centered substance use and mental health disorder treatment and recovery support services; and lasting systems change.
  - The Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for States is part of a collaborative funded by the CB at ACF to provide support to state and territorial child welfare agencies and their partners. The Center for States helps agencies to deliver services that are grounded in racial equity, follow evidence-based processes and practices, and keep children, youth, and families safe and thriving. There are 10 Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative Liaisons who serve as single points of contact for all Center activities within their regions.
  - Infant-Toddler Court Program – National Resource Center grants change child welfare practices and improve the early developmental health and well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families by expanding research-based infant toddler court teams.
- Resources relevant to providing culturally grounded and responsive mental health services from SAMHSA include:
  - The Improving Cultural Competence Treatment Intervention Protocol guide helps professional care providers and administrators understand the role of culture in the delivery of mental health and substance use services. It describes cultural competence and discusses racial, ethnic, and cultural considerations.
  - Racial Equity and Cultural Diversity Resource Collection webpage includes a compilation of products and resources on cultural responsiveness, racial equity, and cultural diversity for the mental health workforce.
  - Information on IECMHC and Tribal Nations is a web page created to support programs, local governments, and tribal nations in creating better services and systems for their infants, toddlers and young children and their families through Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program.