



Mental Health in the Child Care Setting



Introductions/Icebreaker

Please stand and tell the group:

- your name,
- the number of years you have worked in a child care setting, and
- one thing that you do for yourself to promote your own positive mental health.



Training Objectives

- List characteristics of mentally healthy children
- Explain how to build a strong caregiver/teacher-child relationship
- Identify ways to create a child care environment that enhances social and emotional growth
- Recognize risk and behavioral characteristics for mental health problems
- Advise about responding to a child with social and emotional difficulties



Opening Activity

- What do you think of when you hear the words mental health?
- What do you think of when you hear the words mental illness?



Infant mental health is:

“The developing capacity of the children from birth to three to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children.”
(Zero to Three, 2002, pg.2)



Characteristics of Mentally Healthy Young Children

- Positive self esteem
- Capacity for warm and trusting relationships
- Able to express feelings and needs
- Control of impulses and behavior
- Empathy and compassion for others
- Skills to focus attention and make plans



Characteristics of Mentally Healthy Families

- Adults are in charge
- Children feel they belong and are valued
- Communication is clear and fair
- Changes are expected; family can respond
- Outside help is sought when needed



Influences on Brain Development

- Quality relationships are critical to brain development.
- Significant maltreatment places a child at risk for developing
 - depression,
 - anxiety disorders,
 - cognitive impairment, and
 - difficulty in relationships.



Valuing Families

Child care staff value families by:

- Asking about child's and family's history,
- Making families a part of the day,
- Inviting parents to participate,
- Communicating with parents about the child's experiences and behavior at home and in child care, and
- Offering developmental guidance.



Program Support for Strengthening Relationships

- Adequate adult to child ratios
- Small group sizes
- One primary teacher per child
- Continuity of care; one caregiver over time
- Time for parents/guardians to share information
- Time for teachers to get to know the child through observation



Environmental Support for Social and Emotional Needs

- Arrange classroom so caregiver/teachers can visually monitor with ease.
- Limit # of children in each activity area.
- Arrange materials so children can move easily between activities.
- Reduce stimulation (noise and light).



Make Daily Routines Predictable

- Post pictures or other visual cues about what comes next.
- Alternate small and large group activities, as well as quiet and high-energy activities.
- Allow clear choices between activities.
- Create rules and rituals that are easy to follow.



Activity: Promoting Mental Health for Children

- Divide into groups of 4-6.
- Select a recorder/reporter.
- Read the worksheet.
- Identify strategies that child care staff can use to support the “protective factors” for children.



Supporting Children with Social & Emotional Difficulties

Gather information from parents/guardians:

- Prenatal and birth history
- Medical conditions
- Development
- Temperament
- Likes and dislikes
- Family relationships
- Previous child care experiences



Risk Factors for Mental Health Problems

- Family stress
 - Maternal depression or other mental illness
 - Poverty
 - Substance abuse
 - Homelessness
 - Family violence
 - Military deployment of a parent
 - Death or loss of a family member



Risk Factors for Mental Health Problems (continued)

- Neglect or abuse
- Special medical/developmental needs
 - Physical or mental disability
 - Special health care needs
 - Chronic medical conditions



Behavioral Red Flags

- Emotionally extreme
- Inappropriate for age/developmental stage
- Hurtful to self or others
- Difficult for others to form relationship with child
- Driven, excessive, persistent, out-of-control



Behavioral Red Flags (continued)

- No interest or ability to play with peers
- Suddenly changing emotions
- Overly fearful of certain people or objects
- Regression in behaviors already mastered



Assessing Problem Behavior

- Observe and document the child's behavior.
- Have other colleagues observe the child (perspective).
- Share concerns with child's parents, work with them to understand behavior.
- Request mental health consultation (with consent).



Interpreting the Meaning of a Child's Behavior

- Developmental skills
- Individual traits
- Home environment
- Child care environment
- Unmet emotional needs



Tips for Caregiver/Teachers

- Keep emotions in check.
- Respond to misbehavior with empathy.
- Believe the child can do the right thing.
- Hold children accountable for decisions.
- Provide repetition and practice.
- Pay attention to behavior triggers.
- Let removal to other settings be a last resort.



Activity: *Asking for Help*

- Review *Asking for Help* worksheet.
- Divide into two groups.
- Select a group leader and a recorder/reporter.
- Review the case scenario in the “*Asking for Help*” handout.
- Answer the questions that follow.



Mental Health Services

- Child care facilities can link with mental health services to provide support to children, families, and caregiver/teachers.
- Mental health services can be provided by people from different backgrounds.
- Mental health services can be secured in response to crisis or on an ongoing basis.



Mental Health Services in Child Care Facilities

- Observation of a child in the classroom
- Assessment of a child
- Mental health support for staff
- Individual therapy
- Therapy with parents/families
- Therapeutic play groups for children
- Education and support groups for parents
- Consultation, education, and support for caregiver/teachers and directors
- Referral to outside services



Availability of Mental Health Services

- Fee-for-service
- Health insurance
- Early Intervention
- School system (under IDEA)
- Local health department
- Community based clinics



Review: Training Objectives

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Closing

In one minute, write an answer to the question:

- What did I learn that I can take back and apply to my everyday work experience?



Evaluation of Trainer

- Take 5 minutes to complete.