



Information for Families and Staff



FOCUS on 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 a 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 these problems. Benjamin was one of the lucky ones, he received help early.

Early childhood mental health means healthy social and emotional development in young children. Children are more likely to develop healthy social and emotional skills when they have safe, secure and nurturing relationships with other people. They learn how to 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 to 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. Check www.zerotothree.org for more information.



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2nd page is
designed as a
handout for
Parents.

Let Children Be Children

Do you worry that your children are growing up too fast? Do you wonder what to say when they talk about "going on a date"? Are you frustrated when they beg to watch television shows or movies with characters and activities that are just too old for preschoolers?

We worry too. Let's work together to protect children and let them enjoy being preschoolers. Here are five ideas that may work for your family.

- **Limit the time your child spends in front of a screen—**television, computer, video game, and so on. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting total screen time to no more than 1 to 2 hours a day for children older than 2 years.

- **Make a list of things to do instead of watching a screen.** Ask your child to think of activities he or she enjoys—reading, doing a puzzle, tossing a ball to the dog, or helping to cook dinner. Use photographs or drawings to illustrate each item on the list. Include some activities you can do together. Use the list to help your child choose something to do instead of screen time.

- **Schedule a weekly family night.** Include your child in planning what to make for dinner and what to do afterward. You might go for a walk around the block, play a board game, tell stories, organize family photos, or do any other activity your family enjoys.

- **Help your child become a unique individual with varied interests and abilities.** One way to do this is by reading and talking about books in which both male and female characters are strong, confident, thoughtful, and sensitive. And you and the other important adults in your child's life can do this by being role models—men and women who work, enjoy hobbies, take care of the home, and spend lots of loving time with their children.

- **Work with other people who want to preserve childhood.** Talk with friends, neighbors, family members, and the parents of your children's friends and classmates. Agree to hold birthday parties focused on fun rather than TV or movie characters; to dress your children like preschoolers, not teenagers; and to resist (rather than giving in) when children ask you to buy things you know are not good for them.



A message from your child's teacher
