

# A Vision of Early Mental Health Services in Child Care and Development Settings for Los Angeles County

## Talking Points: Shaping the Prevention and Early Intervention Plan of the Mental Health Services Act

These talking points, taken directly or extrapolated from a number of sources, are intended to support efforts by the child care and development community to advocate for the inclusion of child care and development programs as an integral partner with mental health professionals to ensure that all children experience positive social-emotional development. Mental health services provided in child care and development programs also require attention to building the capacity and supports of the both the mental health and child development professionals as well as aiding and supporting parents.

### Challenges

- Mental health concerns of infants and toddlers often go unrecognized until much later.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Postpartum depression also hurts babies. Infants and toddlers of depressed mothers can develop serious emotional and attachment disorders.  
*First 5 LA. (February 9, 2008) Policy Picks: Improving Mental Health Care for Young Children.*
- Nearly 70% of children in foster care will experience a mental illness.  
*First 5 LA. (February 9, 2008) Policy Picks: Improving Mental Health Care for Young Children.*
- Some preschoolers begin their early education programs with severe behavioral problems, often limiting their ability to participate fully and benefit from their early education experience. These problems may result in suspension or expulsion from the program.  
*Gilliam, W.S. (January 2008) Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion. Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief-Advancing PK-3, No. Seven.*
- Unidentified and untreated mental disorders can mean the loss of critical developmental years and can lead to youth suicide, school failure, and involvement with the juvenile justice systems.  
*Mental Health America. (March 15, 2007) Improving the Mental Health & Well-being of America's Children.*
- Preschool teachers and staff may have characteristics and mental health conditions that affect their classroom and behavior management skills or tolerance for problem behaviors, also leading to the suspension or expulsion of "problem" children from the program.  
*Gilliam, W.S. (January 2008) Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion. Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief-Advancing PK-3, No. Seven.*

### Opportunities

- Strengthening families and communities will ensure that fewer children are put at risk of mental health problems.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Increasing mental health services for children under five would reduce the number of school-age children requiring mental health services for serious disorders.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Families and other caregivers (including early educators in child care and development programs) have the capacity to support children's positive social-emotional development, avoiding mental health problems later in life.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Families and professionals need information and skills to be able to recognize early signs of mental illnesses.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Early childhood mental health consultation may be an effective means for decreasing the likelihood that children with challenging classroom behaviors will be expelled or suspended.  
*Gilliam, W.S. (January 2008) Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion. Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief-Advancing PK-3, No. Seven.*

## Recommendations

- Provide for mental health promotion and prevention activities that target children birth to five and their families. Include children who do not have a diagnosis or reach medical necessity, but whose development and emotional well-being are at significant risk.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Provide mental health consultation services in settings that serve children birth three as well as birth to five and their families, including in child care and development programs.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Ensure that mental health professionals who work with very young children (birth – 5 years) and their families understand children’s social-emotional needs and can recognize children at risk for mental health disorders.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Strengthen the capacity of professionals in child care and development programs to recognize the risk factors and early signs of social-emotional problems and mental health illness. Increase the capacity of mental health services and allied professionals to respond appropriately to children and families who have been identified.  
*Zero to Three. Infants and Toddlers and the California Mental Health Services Act.*
- Build the capacity of early childhood mental health consultants skilled in managing challenging classroom behaviors in preschools and help preschool teachers and staff gain the skills they need to manage children’s behavior.  
*Gilliam, W.S. (January 2008) Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion. Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief-Advancing PK-3, No. Seven.*
- Provide early educators and staff with regular access to early childhood mental health consultations to help address challenging behaviors in the classroom.  
*Gilliam, W.S. (January 2008) Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion. Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief-Advancing PK-3, No. Seven.*
- Support child care and development programs in the development and implementation of supportive services and policies aimed at reducing job stress among their early educators and staff.  
*Gilliam, W.S. (January 2008) Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion. Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief-Advancing PK-3, No. Seven.*

### **Quick Statements:**

- Young children (birth to five) are expelled from child care and development programs for behavior problems, such as biting, nonstop crying, tantrums, and throwing things.
- Staff of child care and development programs often do not have the skills to identify or intervene with young children with mental health disorders or may have stresses of their own lives that impact their ability to effectively work with children.
- Early childhood mental health consultants in child care and development settings help early educators gain skills for managing children’s behavior and communicating with parents about mental health concerns.
- Children who participate in high quality child care and development programs that are infused with comprehensive supports, including mental health services, are less likely to need special education, engage in the juvenile justice system, or be expelled from school and are more likely to succeed in school and graduate.

For more information on the MHSA/PEI, the vision for integrating mental health services with child care and development programs, and additional resources, visit [www.childcare.lacounty.gov](http://www.childcare.lacounty.gov).