

From Zero to Three: <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/early-childhood-mental-health/promotion-prevention-treatment.html>

Early Childhood Mental Health: Promotion, Prevention and Treatment

Early childhood mental health can be considered to be synonymous with healthy social and emotional development. It also refers to the mental health difficulties and disorders experienced by very young children. We can think of the response to infant and early childhood mental health needs as existing along a continuum of promotion, prevention, and treatment services.

Promotion

Promotion services encourage and support social-emotional wellness and good mental health. Promotion services are universal; they reach out to all parents of very young children. Examples of promotion programs include social marketing efforts that encourages parents to play with their children, or parent telephone “warmlines” that encourage calls from those with questions about typical child behaviors and development.

Prevention

Prevention programs reach out to families that are experiencing greater levels of stress that may increase their young children’s risk of developing social-emotional or mental health problems. These programs seek to prevent the development of early childhood mental health difficulties by providing needed support and information. Examples of prevention programs include home visiting for families with young children or self-help support groups for those who are concerned they could abuse or neglect their child.

Treatment

Treatment programs are designed to alleviate the distress and suffering of a young child’s mental health problem and support the return to healthy development and behavior. Public and private mental health treatment programs and early intervention programs assess, diagnose and treat mental health and developmental disorders.

Adapted from Parlakian, P. and Seibel, N.L. (2002). [*Building Strong Foundations, Practical Guidance for Promoting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers*](#). Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.