

Jennifer Simpson
Nancy Koroloff
Andrea Doerfler
*Regional Research Institute
for Human Services
Research and Training Center
on Family Support and Children's Mental Health
Portland State University
P.O. Box 751
Portland, Oregon 97207
Voice: 503-725-4040
Fax: 503-725-4180*

Early Childhood Mental Health

This session was aimed at addressing the major issues connected to early childhood mental health, as well as encouraging a conversation among session participants on their experience with and knowledge about mental health for children ages 0-5 and their families. The session began with a brief presentation on the work the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health is doing on early childhood mental health and, in particular, a summary of the monograph being written in connection with Children's Mental Health Services and the Child Mental Health Initiative grant sites. The presenters then offered key terms and definitions in early childhood mental health and a list of concerns central to the design and delivery of mental health services for very young children. At this point, the session broke into general questions and conversation among all participants and presenters.

The following terms were defined:

Early Childhood Mental Health

Interventions that support the emotional and behavioral health needs of young children.

Early Intervention

"Early intervention consists of multidisciplinary services provided for developmentally vulnerable or disabled children from birth to age three and their families" (Meisels & Shonkoff, 1990).

Family Centered

"A combination of beliefs and practices that define

particular ways of working with families that are consumer driven and competency enhancing” (Dunst, Johanson, Trivette, & Hamby, 1991).

“A system of care which is family-centered supports all family members involved with the child’s care; and involves all family members in all aspects of planning and evaluating the service delivery system (including services for themselves and the services for their families)” (Simpson, Koroloff, Friesen, & Gac, 1999).

Social Competence

Everyday effectiveness in meeting family, school, and individual responsibilities as measured by physical health, school achievement, social relationships, psychological and emotional development, and family relations (Reynolds, 1998).

Child Development Specialist

A person with training and experience in the development of young children including assessment, diagnosis, and intervention.

The presenters listed the following issues as central to early childhood mental health:

Kinds of Services Offered as “Early Childhood” Services

What services do children with emotional, behavioral, and mental health difficulties need when they are very young? What services are systems of care providing?

Philosophy / Model of Services

How are early childhood mental health services structured? What kinds of ideas are behind the services offered? How do early childhood services fit within the

larger system of care? Are there any specialists or services that are available for very young children?

Assessment and Diagnosis Process

How do assessment and diagnosis processes work in early childhood mental health? How can they work better for families? What are useful services, and how are they provided when a family does not want a diagnosis?

Family Participation and Access to Services

How do families access early childhood mental health services? How are families participating in the design and delivery of early childhood mental health services?

Collaborative Relationships with Other Child-Serving Agencies

How is the mental health system of care working with other community agencies to provide services to very young children?

Training

What kinds of training is offered specifically for participants in systems of care working with very young children?

Evaluation

How are services to very young children evaluated? How are families involved in this evaluation?

The discussion and questions touched on many issues in relation to early childhood mental health, including funding, sibling issues, working parents, day care and child care, cultural perspectives, the role of education, genetic/biological vs. environmental factors, and maternal and child health. The conversation also touched on policy issues, as well as IDEA regulations.

References

Dunst, C. J., Johanson, C., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, D. (1991). Family oriented early intervention policies and practices: Family-centered or not? *Exceptional Children* 58(2).

Meisels, S.J. & Shonkoff, J.R. (1990). *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Reynolds, A.J. (1998). Developing early childhood programs for children and families at risk: Research-

based principles to promote long-term effectiveness. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 20(6).

Simpson, J.S., Koroloff, N., Friesen, B.F., & Gac, J. (1999). Promising practices in family-provider collaboration. *Systems of Care: Promising Practices in Children's Mental Health, 1998 Series, Volume II*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, American Institutes for Research.