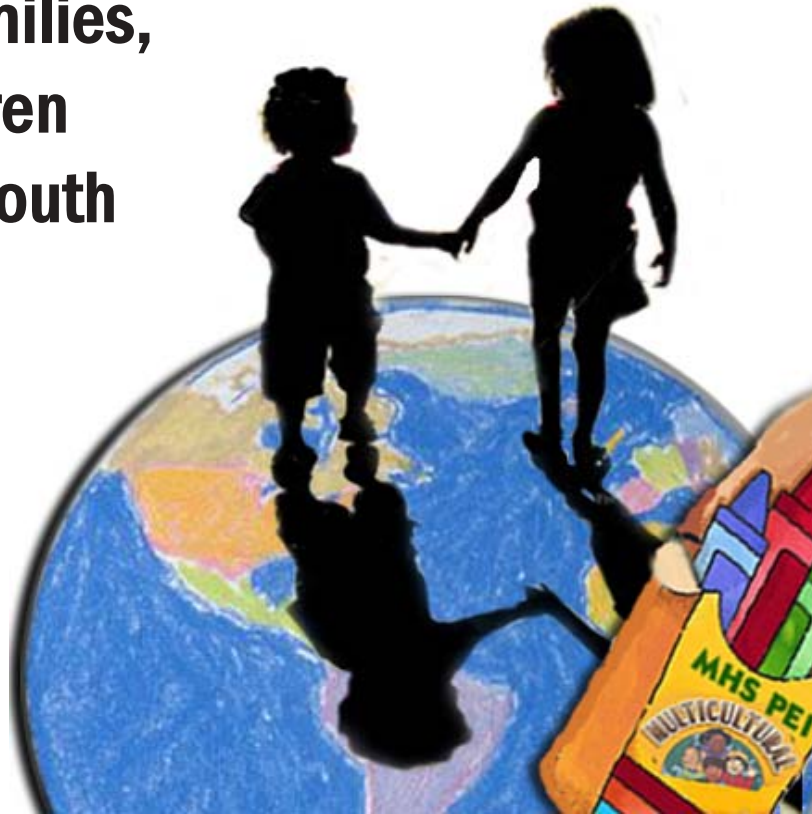


COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACT • MHSA • PROP 63

The impact of stress in families, children and youth



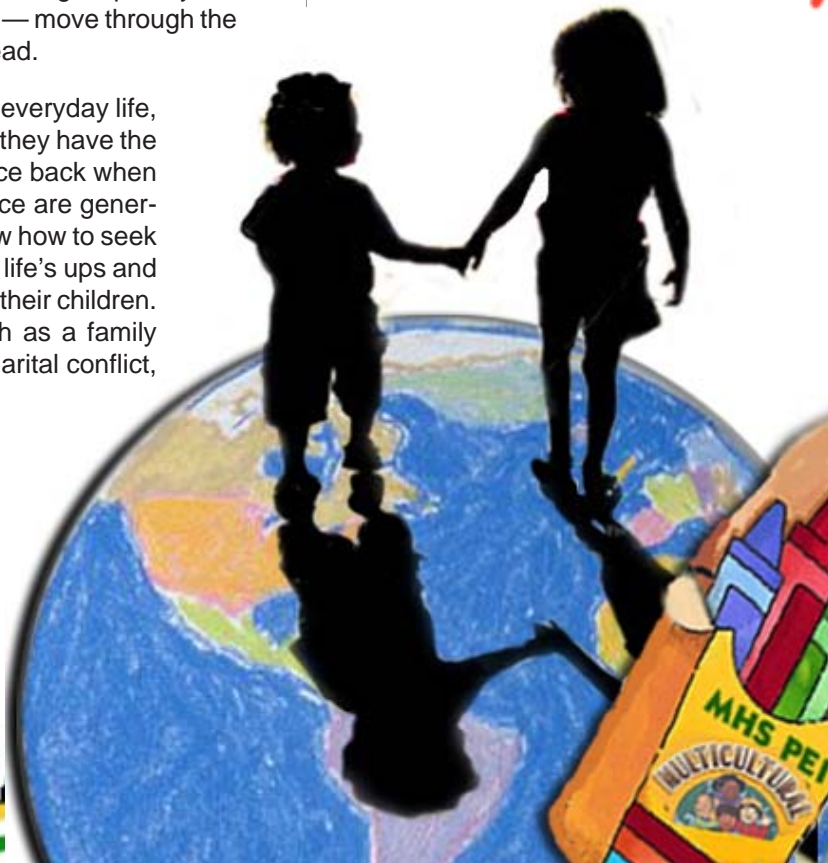
The impact of stress in families, children and youth

Introduction

People with good emotional health are aware of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. They have learned healthy ways to cope with the stress and problems that are a normal part of life. They feel good and secure about themselves and have healthy relationships. However, many things that happen in life disrupt emotional health and lead to strong feelings of sadness, stress or anxiety. These things include being laid off from your job, having a child leave or return home, dealing with a chronic illness or the death of a loved one, getting divorced or married, suffering an illness or an injury, getting a job promotion, experiencing money problems, moving to a new home or town, or having a baby. “Good” changes can be just as stressful as “bad” changes. By recognizing problems and seeking help early on, you can help your child — and your entire family — move through the tough times toward happier, healthier times ahead.

Parents, who can cope with the stresses of everyday life, as well as an occasional crisis, have resilience; they have the flexibility and inner strength necessary to bounce back when things are not going well. Parents with resilience are generally able to cope on their own, but they also know how to seek help in times of trouble. Their ability to deal with life’s ups and downs serves as a model of coping behavior for their children. However, multiple negative life stressors, such as a family history of abuse or neglect, health problems, marital conflict, and domestic or community violence—and financial stressors such as unemployment, poverty, and homelessness—may reduce a parent’s capacity to cope effectively with the typical day-to-day stresses of raising children. Individuals who have experienced traumatic events oftentimes suffer psychological stress related to the incident. In most instances, these are normal reactions to

abnormal situations. While early identification and timely intervention can greatly improve the likelihood of positive developmental outcomes for these children, accessing appropriate developmental and remedial services can be a significant challenge for families and agencies. Identifying and coordinating specialized medical care, developmental assessment, special education, respite care, psychological or psychiatric services, financial assistance, recreational programs, and supportive family counseling is a complex and often daunting undertaking (Children and Family Research Center, 2004). Many child welfare agencies depend on community providers and other service systems to meet the specialized needs of these children and their families. Unfortunately, in many communities, the parents who can not cope with stresses



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of every day life, as well as an occasional crisis, may have guilt, may live in denial and refused to seek specialized services. This creates additional challenges for families and their children.

One of the many factors that can affect the emotional health of young children is the mental health status of their parents. For example, depression among young mothers has been shown to influence the mental health of their young children. These findings are significant because mental disorders that occur before the age of six can interfere with critical emotional, cognitive, and physical development, and can predict a lifetime of problems in school, at home, and in the community. Without intervention, child and adolescent disorders frequently continue into adulthood.

Each year, young children are expelled from preschools and childcare facilities for severely disruptive behaviors and emotional disorders. Early childhood is a critical period for the onset of emotional and behavioral impairments. In 1997, the latest data available, nearly 120,000 preschoolers under the age of six - or 1 out of 200 - received mental health services.



Good mental health allows children to think clearly, develop socially and keep learning new and necessary skills to succeed in his/her life.

From birth to school age, children are totally dependent on their parents and caregivers than at any other time in their lives. Children must be provided with physical sustenance as well as social, emotional and intellectual stimulation. Maternal bonding and attachment and maternal responsiveness to newborn/ infant cues are predictors to later cognitive ability and mental health in school aged children and adolescents. Since children develop rapidly, delivering mental health services and supports early and swiftly is necessary to avoid permanent consequences and to ensure that children are ready for school.

The environment which optimizes healthy early childhood must be loving, and nurturing. During the 0 to 7 formative years, we lay the foundations for trust, form "attachments" and "feelings of self-worth". Although not all children need exactly the same from the world around them, all, without doubt, thrive best in physically and emotionally healthy surroundings. The negative

Every child deserves a good future



It is easy for parents to identify their child's physical needs: nutritious food, warm clothes when it's cold, and bedtime at a reasonable hour. However, a child's mental and emotional needs may not be as obvious. Parents and family members are usually the first to notice if a child has problems with emotions or behavior. The parent's observations with those of teachers and other caregivers may lead you to seek help for their child.

The basics for a child's good mental health are:

- Unconditional love from family, Self-confidence and high self-esteem,
- The opportunity to play with other children,
- Encouraging teachers and supportive caretakers,
- Safe and secure surroundings, and
- Appropriate guidance and discipline.

Family responsiveness is key in infant and toddler social development.



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consequences of neglect during this age cannot be overstated. Examples of the high-risk populations among infants and mothers are teen parents, families living in poverty, and parents abusing drugs and/or alcohol. We cannot emphasize enough the opportunities for long term positive outcomes in committing mental health services and resources to working with this age group.

The 7 to 11 year-old age group is extremely important to the well being of communities. During this stage all children emerge from the circle of family influence and gradually become part of the wider social fabric. This is the age when children actively explore the values and norms of their community. The success of the transition of children in our community into the wider world has a tremendous impact on their future life opportunities. Legally, children of this age group who are in crisis are not considered responsible for their own actions. For effective community safety and crime prevention, early identification and early intervention are key considerations for this age group.

Research has shown that public money spent on education and the protection and provision of basic necessities have the greatest impact on these individuals' futures. Children aged seven to eleven are also most easily influenced by education and social/community

Untreated mental health problems can impact children's life



interventions.

Early signs of mental health problems in children and youth can include:

- Sudden changes in mood or behavior;
- Feelings of sadness or hopelessness that don't go away;
- Avoidance of friends;
- Constant anger and aggression; Defies rules or requests;
- Excessive crying and feelings of worthlessness;
- Extreme and unrealistic fear or anxiety;
- Inability to concentrate; and
- Poor school performance

More serious symptoms include:

Depression; substance abuse and loss of touch with reality; suicidal behavior; violence; attention deficits; defiance.

Studies show that, at any given time, at least one in five children and youth has a mental health problem. Emerging research indicates that intervening early can interrupt the negative course of some mental illnesses and may, in some cases, lessen long-term disability. New understanding of the brain indicates that early identification and intervention can improve outcomes and periods of abnormal thoughts and behavior that have cumulative effects and can limit capacity for recovery. Other factors that may impinge on the mental health of a child can include poverty, family size, parenting, and domestic violence.



Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) is the Key!

For people with mental health problem of all ages, early detection and treatment can prevent mental health problems and negative outcomes from accumulating. Early intervention can have a significant impact on the lives of children and adults who experience mental health problems.

- The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) program is designed with the vision of promoting early intervention and prevention services with medical and supportive care to prevent mental health problems from becoming severe and disabling.
- The PEI program is being developed to improve access of care to mental health



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services by unserved and underserved populations by expanding and developing the types and quality of services and supports necessary to reduce the long term effects of untreated mental health problems.

- The PEI program was created to improve access of care to mental health services by unserved and underserved populations by expanding and developing the types and quality of services and supports necessary to reduce the long term adverse impact on service consumers, their families and the state.

The Mental health Services Act (MHSA) emphasizes prevention and early intervention as a key for successful outcomes over untreated serious mental illness.

The County of San Diego’s Mental Health Services Department has conducted an extensive community input process to identify mental health needs and priority populations as part of MHSA, Prevention & Early Intervention (PEI) planning.

Input has been solicited in a variety of ways including:

- 1) Community Forums,
- 2) Focus Groups,
- 3) Community Input Forms, and
- 4) Key Informant Interviews.

A series of Community Forums have taken place over the last five months. The Community Forums included public meetings, consisting of 40 to 150 participants that included many stake holders and advocates working in the field. In addition, small Focus Groups are being facilitated by community agencies, in order to obtain input from underserved and underrepresented individuals. These focus groups consist of 6 to 15 participants and were inclusive of many consumer level stakeholders and their families. Approximately 250 people participated in Focus Groups.



Participate in this change!

Individuals who have experience, interest, or expertise in this subject are invited and encouraged to participate in the Planning Process. By participating in the planning and development of PEI, you assist in identifying much needed services to improve the well being of children, their families and the community.

Join us and provide input !!!

Public input can be provided in different ways. At the Children’s Mental Health Services System of Care Council on the 2nd. Monday of each month, from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m., at 3255 Camino del Rio South, Garden Room, San Diego, CA 92108.

For more information regarding the County of San Diego Mental Health Services Act Prevention & Early Intervention (PEI), please visit:

www.sandiego.networkofcare.org/mh/home/mhsa_prevention.cfm



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Article edited by Dr. Piedad Garcia, Ed.D., LCSW, Assistant Deputy Director, County of San Diego, Mental Health Services.

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