

Early Childhood Mental Health

Increasingly, the needs of young children from birth for positive social and emotional health are becoming recognized as a critical component of school readiness and overall well-being. While all young children need support to foster healthy social and emotional development, some need special attention because they are at risk for or are exhibiting challenging or troubling behavior. To address these various levels of need, GUCCHD embraces a comprehensive approach to early childhood mental health—one that provides a continuum of supports and services for young children and their families spanning from promotion to prevention to intervention. Our early childhood team strives to advance this approach to early childhood mental health in all our efforts.

What is Early Childhood Mental Health?

- The social, emotional, and behavioral well-being of young children and their families
- The developing capacity of a child to:
 - Experience, regulate, and express emotion
 - Form close, secure relationships
 - Explore the environment and learn (adapted from ZERO TO THREE)

Why is Early Childhood Mental Health Important?

- Young children's mental health has significant implications for functioning across home, school, and community settings.
- Mental health challenges are surprisingly common among young children under the age of 6.
- Studies estimate that between 4 and 10% of all young children have clinically significant emotional and behavioral challenges.
- The expulsion rate among children in prekindergarten programs is more than three times the rate for K-12 students.
- The presence of social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, such as attention problems or aggression, compromise young children's chances for school success.
- Early onset of behavior problems without effective intervention is related to the need for special education services, delinquency, and early school drop-out.