



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Mental Health Newsletter

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Parental Depression

Raising a family is a tough job. Parenting with depression can be even more difficult. Parental depression is a widespread health concern that affects the health and well-being of parents and their children. The rate of parental depression is high in Early Head Start (EHS). Fifty-two percent (52%) of mothers and 18% of fathers in EHS meet the clinical criteria for depression (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/research_brief_depression.pdf). Early Head Start and Head Start (EHS/

HS) staff can work with parents to recognize and obtain treatment for depression. Review the following resources to learn more about parental depression and how EHS/HS staff can help.

What's Relevant on ECLKC

[Depression in Mothers, More Than Just the Blues—A Toolkit for Family Service Providers](#)
“People who work with mothers with young children are in a position to address a very serious problem that often goes unnoticed. Mothers and their children and families



can live better lives if the women realize that they have depression and then get help.” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014) This toolkit provides information about the importance of addressing maternal depression, an overview of depression, ways to recognize depression, and tips for working with mothers who may be experiencing depression.

[Five Action Steps to Address Maternal Depression in Head Start Programs](#)

Maternal depression interferes with a mother’s ability to be responsive to her new baby. It also makes parenting toddlers and preschoolers more difficult. Staff can use the following five action steps and listed resources to reduce the impact of depression in the families they serve.

[Talking about Depression with Families: A Resource for Early Head Start and Head Start Staff](#)

“Most EHS/HS staff members are not therapists, nor are they expected to serve as therapists. However, all staff members should be comfortable working to engage every parent—especially parents suffering from depression.” This resource for Early Head Start and Head Start staff gives effective strategies for starting the conversation about depression with families and assisting families in getting the help they need.

[Family Well-being: A Focus on Parental Depression](#)

Evidence from early childhood research and practice shows a strong link between parents’ health and well-being and their children’s development.¹ The research and practices described in this resource show that providing strengths-based support, information about depression, and referrals for treatment can make a huge difference for parents suffering from depression, and for their children too.

[Fostering Resilience in Families Coping With Depression: Practical Ways Head Start Staff Can Help](#)

“Recognizing and identifying strengths and resilience is a crucial part of Head Start’s daily work. In reaching out to families, supporting the growth of children, and encouraging parents to be the best they can be, Head Start staff does the important work of fostering resilience.” (Beardslee, Watson Avery, Ayoub, and Watts, 2008). This short paper provides Head Start staff with an understanding of what resilience is and strategies for promoting it within families.

¹National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000) From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press. doi:10.17226/9824.



Family Connections: A Systemic Mental Health Consultation and Professional Development Model

“Early Head Start and Head Start staff capacity is strengthened with a preventive, system-wide mental health consultation and training approach.” (Family Connections Project at Boston Children's Hospital. Second Edition. HHS/ACF/OHS. 2012.) Staff can use these resources in working with families dealing with parental depression and related issues, working with children in classrooms and in the home, and engaging and supporting parents struggling with adversities. These materials were developed by the Family Connections Project at Boston Children's Hospital.

Short Papers for Families and Staff

Family Connections modules provide a series of short papers designed to share information on topics that are central to understanding depression, resilience and best practice in engaging parents facing adversities. They are intended to work as stand-alone handouts for parents and staff as well as materials used in training workshops and in parent groups.





Make Sure to Watch the Webinar Focused on Supporting Families with Depression

[Supporting Families' Mental Health: A Special Focus on Maternal Depression](#)

Untreated parental depression can lead to poor outcomes for children. View this webinar for information and resources on how staff can support families' mental health, including families experiencing mental health concerns such as depression.

Coming Soon

Depression in Mothers, More Than Just the Blues—A Toolkit for Home Visiting Service Providers

Early Head Start home visitors play an important role in addressing maternal depression. View this webinar in which presenters walk the participants through the toolkit framework and components. Opportunities for additional technical assistance are also shared.



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The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call (888) 227-5125. Subscribe or view all issues of Health Services Newsletter on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/newsletters/newsletters.html>.

School readiness begins with health!