

RainbowECHO Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Series Key Takeaways

Addressing Attachment Concerns

- Signs of Attachment Concerns:
 - Babies: Persistent inattention/response to care for babies needs, exposure to trauma, abuse, long or frequent separations from caregivers, depression, substance abuse or illness of caregiver.
 - School-aged children: Withdrawn, overly dependent on adults, acting out frequently for attention, hyper vigilant and easily stressed, emotionally volatile (showing extreme emotions such as anger, despair or fear).
- What can the pediatrician do in the office?
 - Relational: Problem is the dyad, not just the child. Need to explore relational context.
 - Developmental: textured understanding of child's development
 - Multi-disciplinary (DBP, OT, IECMH etc.)
 - Reflective- explore the meaning of the behavior
 - Model regulation coping skills
 - Praise positive interaction of dyad
 - Listen to parent's story
 - Empower caregivers
 - Ask how they feel about their child/relationship and a description of their child
 - Speak on behalf of baby

Addressing Developmental Concerns

- Feel empowered to diagnose and treat preschool ADHD. Implement evidence-based parent training first along with school support, then consider methylphenidate as a first line medication (start low and go slow).
- Effective support for Autism Spectrum Disorder includes coordination of care for appropriate therapies (behavior, speech, OT, etc.), as well as assessment and treatment of common co-morbid conditions, such as sleep with melatonin, anxiety with SSRI's, and ADHD with stimulants when appropriate.
- Remember to center a strengths-based approach to both the child and the parent - encourage parents and refer to additional support if needed.

Addressing Psychosocial Risks during Infancy and Early Childhood

- Prioritize relationships because relationships heal. We may not be able to eliminate stress and adversity experienced by the families we serve, but substantial research and clinical wisdom demonstrate that relationships can heal and provide protection from the negative effects of adversity. Lead with relationships, with co-workers and with families.
- Nurture caregivers. The famous attachment theorist, John Bowlby, once said: "If we value our children, we must cherish their parents." Pay attention to how parents/caregivers are doing because they are the most important influence on children's well-being.

- Attend to strengths. Because we are trained to quickly identify and address concerns or problems, we are inclined to "fix" things. Make a conscious and intentional effort to notice and verbalize child & family strengths too! People are more likely to hear feedback when their strengths are seen and recognized.

Behavior Management Strategies

- Attention Principle: Maximize attention given to positive behaviors and minimize attention given to negative behaviors. This is one of the most effective ways to positively shape behavior.
- Encourage positive parent-child interaction in the form of child-directed play. Recommend 5 to 10 minutes of special time with the child each day. During this time, parents should avoid questions, criticism, and commands to promote a purely positive interaction. Use of PRIDE skills should be encouraged.
- Typically developing children will test the limits about 1/3 of the time. It's important to set developmentally appropriate expectations for parents. When behavioral concerns present, address building positive parent-child interaction and using reinforcement first. Behaviors that can be ignored should be identified. Consequences (time out; removal of privileges) should be used sparingly and for more severe behaviors (e.g. aggression).