

Family Support NEWS BRIEF

A publication of

 CENTER FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES



Supporting the Mental Health of Families

Family support professionals connect families to a variety of supports and resources within their community. These professionals provide information and help with parenting skills, education, job attainment, child development, health and nutrition, and several others. This support is provided during home visits and through connecting parents to resources within their community.

One of the most common supports that family support professionals provide is connecting parents to mental health resources. Sometimes the support for parents goes beyond just a concern, and the parent may need to be evaluated by a mental health professional. This article will address common warning signs, ways that family support professionals can address and support families with mental health needs, and the importance of staff professional development to best support families.

Early Warning Signs

According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) some of the early warning signs of a mental health issue are low energy, change in eating habits, mood swings, not completing daily tasks, isolation from people, loss of interest in activities, and feeling hopeless.¹ View full list and more information on [SAMHSA's website](#). Professionals serving families may notice these signs in their interactions with parents during home visits.

Sometimes there may be a pattern of behaviors that indicate the parent may have a mental health disorder. "A mental disorder may be present when patterns or changes in thinking, feeling or behaving could cause distress or disrupt a person's ability to function." This can affect their relationships with others, the way they behave in social settings, and work performance.²

How to Support Families

Family support professionals will want to be vigilant when parents are displaying these indicators. When there is a concern about mental health, workers can take several steps to assist families. If properly trained, the first step may be to conduct a screening to confirm if there is a mental health problem. The next step for professionals would be to make a referral to one of their community partners who helps families with mental health needs. The staff member may also suggest that the parent visit their primary care provider. Once the referral is made, the family support professional will want to connect the family or parent to a staff member at the supporting organization or agency. A follow up will be needed to ensure that the family has contacted the referral source.³

Training and Professional Development

Discussing the topic of mental health with families can be uncomfortable for home visitors. This is why there needs to be an active effort from family support programs to train and provide professional development on this subject. A article on Parent and Child Mental Health and Well-being indicates that the training for home visitors, “should provide guidance on balancing conversations about family-identified needs with discussions about mental health and other psychosocial risk factors that can impair effective parenting,

child development, and family well-being.”³ Some organizations have started working with mental health consultants to help train staff and provide resources for families in need. Additionally, program supervisors should discuss family mental health needs in individual and group supervision.³

There are several efforts that family support programs and staff can make to identify family mental health needs. The steps taken by staff to identify mental health concerns will help to lessen parental stressors and contribute to positive outcomes for parents and their children.

References

1. “What Is Mental Health?” SAMHSA, www.samhsa.gov/mental-health Accessed February 1, 2024.
2. “Mental Health: What’s Normal, What’s Not.” Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 14 Dec. 2021, www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/mental-health/art-20044098 Accessed February 1, 2024.
3. Ward EA, Tandon D, Ammerman RT. Parent and Child Mental Health and Home Visiting. In: Tremblay RE, Bovin M, Peters RDeV, eds. Spike D, Gaylor E, topic eds. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development [online]. <https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/home-visiting/according-experts/parent-and-child-mental-health-and-home-visiting> Updated: February 2022. Accessed February 1, 2024.

Upcoming Events

Save the Date 2024 Pennsylvania Strengthening Families Conference

May 7-9 | State College, Pennsylvania

[Notify Me When Conference Registration Opens](#)

Family Support Webinar

Supporting Families with Children with Autism

April 10 | 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM ET

[National Social and Emotional Learning Conference](#)

May 21-23 | King of Prussia

Share Your Story

Please send your success stories or program news to share in future News Briefs to [Drewanne Kline](#).

Follow us on social media

To stay up to date, join us online at the [Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers Facebook page](#) or at the [Pennsylvania Strengthening Families Facebook page](#).



Spreading the Word about Strong Families through Community Activities

Springtime brings renewed opportunities to connect with families, community partners, champions, and legislators. Family Support organizations may be planning outreach activities. What is your meaningful, concise statement about your work and the families you work with each day?

Community resource fairs

Community resource fairs can create fun opportunities to share information about family support, health, education, and economic resources in the community with families and community partners.

- Invite a family support champion or a legislator to participate.
- Ask families to create messages about their strong family.
- One program created a photo booth for families, printed the photos, and gave a frame as a lasting memory of that moment in the family's life.
- Remember to have healthy snacks for all.

Food demonstrations

Food demonstrations can be conducted online or in a place-based group as a promotion for the family support services.

- Engage community champions and partners to help supply the necessary food and equipment.

- Supply families with recipes, ingredients, and sources for these in the future.
- Use fresh foods and herbs emerging in backyards and porch plant containers.
- Ask families to contribute their favorite recipes and stories about how the dish or meal became a family favorite.
- Share ways that healthy foods contribute to strong families.

PAT "Roll and Read"

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) "Roll and Read" activity typically takes place outside with different stations for families to stop and read a story and take part in an activity.

- PAT programs can learn more in the advocacy section of OLIVER.
- Promote ways parents and caregivers keep their families strong including physical activity and literacy activities that build on curiosity.



Family Support Team

Family Support at Center for Schools and Communities provides training and technical assistance to Parents as Teachers providers, Children's Trust Fund grantees, and the Strengthening Families Leadership Team.

[Alexia Brown](#)

Family Support Technical Assistance Coordinator
(717) 763-1661, ext. 146

[Jennifer Esposito](#)

Family Support Data Coordinator
(717) 763-1661, ext. 161

[Christine Felicetti](#)

Family Support Coordinator
717-763-1661, ext. 104

[Drewanne Kline](#)

Family Support Project Specialist
717-763-1661, ext. 169

[Rijelle Kraft](#)

Family Support Managing Coordinator
(717) 763-1661, ext. 221

[Karen Shanoski](#)

Family Support and Community Engagement Director
(717) 763-1661, ext. 139

[Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers](#) at Center for Schools and Communities

[Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund](#)

[Pennsylvania Strengthening Families](#)

Family Support at Center for Schools and Communities

275 Grandview Avenue
Suite 200, Camp Hill, PA 17011
(717) 763-1661

centerforschoolsandcommunities.org



Safe Kids Corner: Bike

There are so many great reasons to ride your bike: It offers fun, freedom, and exercise, and it's good for the environment. We want kids and families to ride their bikes as much as possible, while staying safe.

The Hard Facts

Properly fitted helmets can reduce the risk of head injuries by at least 45%, yet less than half of children 14 and under usually wear a bike helmet.

Top Tips

- **Wear a properly fitted helmet.** It is the best way to prevent head injuries and death.
- **Ride on the sidewalk when you can.** If not, ride in the same direction as traffic as far on the right-hand side as possible.
- **Use hand signals and follow the rules of the road.** Be predictable by making sure you ride in a straight line and do not swerve between cars.
- **Wear bright colors and use lights,** especially when riding at night and in the morning. Reflectors on your clothes and bike will help you be seen.
- **Ride with your children.** Stick together until you are comfortable, and your kids are ready to ride on their own.

Learn More

The ride is just beginning. Check out [more bike safety tips](#).

[Read full article on Safe Kids Worldwide website.](#)