



# IDENTIFYING WHEN TO REFER YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

As an early childhood professional, you play an important role for the young children in your care. The following behaviors do not indicate a definite social and emotional health concern, but are listed here as potential “red flags” or warning signs that a child and family may need help.

## Infant (birth through one year)

- Excessive fussiness – very difficult to soothe/console
- Limited or no interest in things or people
- Failure to gain weight
- Consistent strong reactions to touch, sounds, or movement
- Sleep problems
- Feeding problems

## Toddler (one-to-three years)

(Includes the preceding concerns in addition to the following)

- Displays very little emotion
- Unable to calm self
- Does not turn to adults for comfort or help
- Excessive fearfulness or excessive sadness
- Withdrawal or excessive clinging
- Aggression toward self or others
- Impulsiveness and hyperactivity
- Excessive tantrums or defiance
- Language delays
- Interference with typical developmental tasks

## Preschool (three-to-five years)

(Includes the preceding concerns in addition to the following)

- Consistently prefers not to play with others or with toys
- Overly familiar with strangers
- Destructive
- Hurts animals
- Limited use of words to express feelings
- Regressive behavior
- Changes in eating habits
- Irritability, uncontrollable crying

The guidance above is reprinted from: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Resources and Services- A Guide for Early Education and Care Professionals. Children’s Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI), Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), May 2015.

### Additional possible warning signs include:

## Infant (birth through one year)

- Somber, worried, sad; flat affect or facial expression
- Does not coo, make noises, have reciprocal “conversations”
- Has history of major traumatic event or loss of primary caregiver (through death, incarceration, placement in foster care).

## Toddler (one-to-three years)

- Does not point, has difficulty with joint attention
- Appears hypervigilant, easily startled, anxious, excessively worried or frozen at time
- Regresses in development; loses skills previously gained.

## Preschool (three-to-five years)

- Reports traumatic event spontaneously or in general conversation
- Plays repetitively enacting a particular event
- Uses toys in unusual ways
- Displays sexual behaviors
- Engages in self-injurious behaviors
- Has new fears
- Shows no response to upset of others or takes pleasure in upset of others.

**You may also consider making a referral when:** Parent seems very anxious, sad, overwhelmed, rejecting of child, harsh or hostile to child, or speaks negatively about child.

The Early Childhood Mental Health Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC) is a partnership between New York Center for Child Development and McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research. Funded through the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in contract with Public Health Solutions, TTAC provides critical training and technical assistance on infant and early childhood mental health across child serving systems. E-mail TTAC.info@nyu.edu for more information.





# REFERRING YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**1. Know the resources** in your community. There are early childhood mental health clinics in every borough – See NYC Early Childhood Mental Health Network <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/mental/echmh-flyer.pdf> or call 1-888-NYC-WELL for information about other clinics and services.

**2. Know about the clinic's** services, hours of operation, intake process, cost, location and transportation options.

**3. Identify the appropriate person** on your team to talk to the family about the referral.

**4. Discuss the reasons** for the referral and benefits of mental health services and answer the family's questions.

**5. Ask the family** about their concerns or worries about the referral.

Some families may be uncomfortable using mental health services because of stigma, cultural beliefs or practical barriers such as transportation or cost. Discuss how to address these barriers.

**6. Talk to the family** about their needs and what the most appropriate service would be to meet those needs.

**7. Ask the family** what kind of support you can provide them. This may be to make the appointment, to be close by when they make the appointment or to attend the first appointment with them.

**8. If the family** agrees for you to make the appointment and to share information about the child, discuss what information they want you to provide and obtain the family's signed consent to share this information.

**9. Call the clinic** and share only the information the family has consented for you to share. This could be reason for referral, background and history, strengths and culture of the family.

**10. If the family** does not provide consent for you to make the appointment or to share information: give them contact information for the early childhood mental health clinic or other service so they can connect to the service themselves.

**11. Ask the family** how they would like you to follow up with them. Then continue to check on progress and help resolve problems that arise.

Adapted from: Facilitating a Referral for Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Within Early Head Start and Head Start. HHS/ACF/OHS/NCH. 2012.

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# NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

## Mental health services and supports for young children and their families

NYC Early Childhood Mental Health Clinics offer:

- Mental health treatment for children ages 0 to 5, and their families.
- Expert clinical staff using evidence-based and trauma-focused therapies.
- Short wait times for appointments.
- Services available in English, Spanish, and other languages.

\* All clinics accept Medicaid and other insurance and work with families to ensure access.

NYC Early Childhood Mental Health Clinics	
Serving	Call and ask for the "Early Childhood Mental Health Clinic"
<b>Bronx (South)</b>	<b>Phone: 929-288-4320</b> Association to Benefit Children
<b>Bronx (North)</b>	<b>Phone: 1-844-ONE-CALL or 1-844-663-2255</b> The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services
<b>Brooklyn (Central and Southern)</b>	<b>Phone: 1-800-603-OHEL or 1-800-603-6435</b> OHEL Children's Home and Family Services
<b>Brooklyn (Northern and Eastern)</b>	<b>Phone: 1-844-ONE-CALL or 1-844-663-2255</b> The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services
<b>Manhattan</b>	<b>Phone: 212-426-3403</b> Northside Center For Child Development
<b>Queens</b>	<b>Phone: 718-530-6892</b> The Child Center of New York
<b>Staten Island</b>	<b>Phone: 718-448-9775, ext. 551</b> Staten Island Mental Health Society

Call **1-888-NYC-WELL** for information about other mental health clinics and services for young children and their families.

In case of an emergency, please call **911**

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