



Milwaukee County Birth to 3 Program

Five Ways to Reduce Early Childhood Mental Health Stigmas

Mental health problems are common — even in young children. Possible issues include anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, among others. An early diagnosis can make all the difference in treating and managing early childhood mental health issues. Unfortunately, the social stigma attached to mental illness often creates stereotypes and prejudices that prevent caregivers from getting their child the professional help they need. **Here are five ways to combat the stigma around early childhood mental health.**

- 1 Acknowledge its Existence**

Many people think of children as inherently happy and healthy, and don't take time to consider the possibility of mental health issues. If issues exist, it's important they're addressed. Mental health impacts a child in many ways, including their ability to feel and appropriately express emotions, form healthy relationships and problem-solve in new or stressful situations.
- 2 Be Aware of Your Own Attitudes and Behaviors**

Before looking to others, take time to understand your own emotional state. Children's mental health is linked to the wellbeing of their caregivers. When you're unpacking how you feel, know that having a child with a mental health problem is not a sign of failure. It is, however, important to address.
- 3 Learn the Facts**

One of the best ways to reduce stigma about early childhood mental illness is by educating yourself. Addressing mental health concerns with children when they're young is more effective (both cost and treatment-wise) than simply mitigating the issue when the child is older or when the problem becomes overwhelming. Early intervention — ideally before age three — will help your child build a strong foundation for lifelong learning, success and happiness.
- 4 Talk With Others**

After you've learned the facts, don't be afraid to share them. You and your child are not the only ones struggling. The US Department of Health and Human Services estimates that between 9.5% and 14.2% of children under five experience a disturbance in their mental health.
- 5 Share Your Story**

Don't let stigma make you feel doubt or shame. Stigma starts to go away when people openly talk about their own stories and open up discussions about subjects they've previously avoided. When you model an accepting, proactive attitude about early childhood mental health, others will follow.