

Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist Program

The purpose of the Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist (ECMHS) program is to increase the availability of mental health services to young children, birth through 5 and provide consultation and coaching/training to families and early learning programs. The ECMHS program focuses on developing and strengthening the social emotional skills of young children through timely screening and assessment, increasing the parent and the early learning provider's ability to manage difficult behaviors, and providing outreach and connecting families to other community resources.

ECMHS in Colorado

The ECMHS program in Colorado is currently funded solely by State funds and is managed by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Early Childhood, Division of Community and Family Support. There is one Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist based out of each of the 17 Community Mental Health Centers across Colorado. The ECMHS provides services in the community, home, and the early learning environment. Funding for the State Fiscal Year 2013-2014 is \$1,169,609.

Program Services

Developmental Screening – Screening can help detect potential social-emotional, health, and developmental difficulties early on. It typically entails the use of a screening tool such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and observation.

Developmental Assessment/Evaluation – Developmental assessments are completed using parental insight, teacher observations, and the child's records. The assessment will aid in the discovery of learning, developmental, and other delays and can be used as a guide for future actions.

Consultation – Consultation services are individualized according to the client, situation and need. They are collaborative in nature and provided by a professional with expertise in early childhood mental health. Consultation is provided in a natural setting for the family or child such as the home or early learning environment. Consultation is also provided to early care and learning providers.

Parent Services – Early Childhood Mental Health Specialists provide training to parents in a group setting or one-on-one coaching either in the community or in the home. The ECMHS can help bridge the gap between the educational setting and the home.

Kindergarten Readiness – Research shows that children who have pro-social skills tend to have a more positive school experience which leads to better and more productive learning. The ECMHS work with children to enhance their ability to make friends, share and take turns, follow directions, care about other people's feelings, and regulate emotions.

What this means for Colorado...

- Improved early learning environment
- Improved child and family relationships
- Improved early learning provider retention
- Decrease in expulsions from early learning programs
- Children will be socially and emotionally ready for kindergarten