



**ECPAC**  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
PARTNERSHIP  
OF ADAMS COUNTY

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood professionals may feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive related to child development. In order to cut through the clutter and be relevant to busy professionals, we need to ensure our messages and materials address a pressing need or a “pain point.”

## OUTREACH GOALS

When conducting outreach to early childhood professionals keep in mind these three goals:

1. Deepen their understanding of children’s social and emotional development and their role in supporting it.
2. Encourage early childhood professionals to talk about these issues with parents (and distribute our materials).
3. Educate early childhood professionals about about resources and support in the community (IECMH Consultation, ECPAC training, Community Reach Center, etc.).

## KEY MESSAGES

These messages can help you have effective conversations with early childhood professionals.

- The relationships young children have with the adults in their lives – including early childhood professionals – serve as building blocks of healthy development.
- All aspects of a child’s development – physical, cognitive, social and emotional – are connected. As early childhood professionals, we play a particularly important role in the healthy social-emotional development of the children in our care.
- Healthy social-emotional development builds a foundation for strong mental health throughout life.
- Just as we all have physical health, we all have mental health – and that includes very young children, even babies.
- In the same way that we nurture children’s physical health we must also nurture their mental health with positive experiences, loving, stable relationships and support to help them develop social-emotional skills.



- For infants and toddlers, symptoms of mental health problems may include difficulty managing or expressing emotions or a lack of secure attachments with caregivers. During preschool, mental health problems may result in challenging behaviors, including class disruption, acting out or withdrawal.
- Instead of viewing challenging behaviors simply as a disruption, early childhood professionals should be aware that these behaviors often are the result of social and emotional factors and represent a teaching opportunity (for both the parent and the child). Challenging behaviors can be effectively addressed by boosting social and emotional skills – at home and in the classroom – and also through external support programs available in our community.
- As early childhood professionals, parents trust us to provide compassionate care for their children. Part of this role is to refer parents who have concerns about their child’s development to screening, evaluation and appropriate support.
- Evidence-based support programs in the early years can dramatically help children who are struggling – and there are great resources right here in our community to help.

## OUTREACH TIPS

- Be clear about what you want early childhood professionals to do (talk to families, reach out for support, access training) and make sure they have all the information (and the confidence!) they need to take action. Emphasize that they don’t have to be a mental health expert to help families get the support they need.
- Make sure you emphasize how our information is relevant and impactful for early childhood professionals – we can help them support children’s social and emotional development, which leads to less challenging behavior and stronger relationships with children and families.
- Conversations about social-emotional development can be complicated by social stigma and cultural differences related to the understanding of mental health. Stress to professionals that they can reduce the stigma by talking openly with parents about these issues, distributing our materials, maintaining relationships and communication with parents, and learning more about the support available in the community. Reducing stigma requires improving professionals’ own understanding of mental health in early childhood and making it easy and comfortable for professionals and parents to reach out for help if they have concerns.
- Establish yourself as an ongoing resource to early childhood professionals. Listen carefully to understand how they support social and emotional development within their daily programming and what challenges they face. Then offer tips on how to address challenging behavior, access extra help if they need it, and further support the social and emotional development of the children they serve.
- Treat the conversation as the beginning of a relationship. Check back with the professional periodically (every other month at least) to see how it’s going and if they need additional help.