



Catalyst for positive community
change in Johnson County, Kansas



Early Childhood Mental Health Dialogue May 18, 2009

In response to growing interest in early childhood mental health, on May 18 United Community Services (UCS) convened a meeting of early childhood providers to discuss early childhood mental health issues including how to identify those children, and resources available for Johnson County children and their families. Presenters represented a variety of available resources in the community.

Symptoms and Signs of Mental Health Issues

Mental Health for Young Child, Helen Imel, Jo. Co. Mental Health Center

Imel discussed signs of possible mental health problems for young children. These included behaviors related to eating problems, sleeping problems, emotional problems, and specific behaviors. She also cautioned in trying to determine if a child has mental health problems, all signs must be considered in the context of the child's normal temperament, the child's culture at home, their age developmentally, and whether external circumstances (e.g. death, a recent move, separation or divorce of parents, economic instability and related stressors) might be affecting current behaviors.

Mental Health Consultation, Shelley Mayse, The Family Conservancy

Mayse spoke about mental health consultation in the context of The Family Conservancy's Early Solutions program. She said they were often contacted by either the parents or providers for an early childhood mental health consultation in response to a child's possible expulsion from a childcare facility. The focus of consultation is on the relationships impacting the child's behavior, so information is gathered by observation, assessment, and working with the provider and family. Interventions may include classroom environmental changes, teacher/provider training, parent education, behavior strategies, child/parent therapy, and or referrals out for additional community services.

It is very helpful for the consultant to have staff and parents' journal observations of behaviors/responses including their length, level of intensity, and historical context. Trauma often manifests like PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), and other mental health problems, so understanding patterns and context informs the consult. Timeframe for a consultation can be anywhere from 2 to 6 months. Mayse reports around 5% of cases are in need of more intensive services for mental health/disabilities diagnoses; most cases can be managed by home/class behavior intervention strategies for prevention, and to build up resiliency skills.

Developmental Disorders & Resources

Autism, Phyllis Young & Cathy Smith, Univ. of Kansas Medical Center, Center for Child Health and Development (CCHD)

Young and Smith spoke about autism and the CCHD's diagnostic clinic. They spoke about the evidence of the importance of early identification of developmental disorders and

autism, in that early identification of symptoms could result in a better outcome for the child, and referred attendees to the related CDC (Center for Disease Control) site (www.cdc.gov/actearly). It emphasizes knowing the signs through screening tools, etc. The frontline offense/defense – what can be done – included: increasing awareness and knowledge of child development, identifying those at risk due to environment or biology, and to differentiate between delayed and disordered behavior.

Three areas were the most common within which to observe atypical behaviors – socialization (child plays too much alone, child does look at you when you interact with them), communication (echoing, not verbal but frequent sounds), and behavior (unusual interest in activity such as fan or garage, toys spinning). One should look for a combination of disordered behaviors- such as lots of vocalizations with no communicative qualities, echoing – so much so that it interferes with other interests. Often these children have difficulty with transitions, and changing activities is difficult due to intense focus. A lot of children with autism also have sleep problems, unusual fears, fears of sounds, and a differential between their cognitive abilities and their adaptive abilities.

What to do once you believe that there is a problem? Begin the intake process –have information gained from observation and anecdotal info, and any formal assessments. There is a need for timely assessments – currently there is about a three month wait at CCHD. They are trying to expand pre-clinic assessments and evaluations in order to speed diagnosis.

Resources include the CCHD’s “Developmental Disabilities Pediatric Problem Behavior Clinic” which helps parents develop strategies and learn methods for solving problem behaviors, and the Kansas Center for Autism Research and Training (K CART) resource library located on KU’s Edwards Campus. The CCHD also has a new family support group called Next Steps – an informal get together for families after getting an initial diagnosis.

Additional Disorders, Amy Owens, Infant Toddler Services Johnson County (ITSJC)

Owens spoke about additional types of disorders beyond autism spectrum disorders. These include speech delay – delays vs. disorder – and sensory-motor integration. In order to address these, the family’s everyday routine must be examined and recommended behaviors can be incorporated into the course of the day each day; family education is a must. HELP is a good screening tool for the social emotional part of the assessment. If child is having eating and feeding issues, ITSJC can help figure out why the toddler/child is not eating.

Mental Health Resources for Young Children

Johnson County Mental Health Center (JCMHC) Step Ahead, Helen Imel

Children come to the JCMHC’s Step Ahead program before entering kindergarten (ages 3-5). The program currently serves children in Gardner Edgerton and Olathe school districts. Usually referrals come through Child Find (school district), Parents as Teachers, daycares, and other mental health providers. Assessments and evaluations are requested if needed. In the program children are taught social skills such as how to make friends, share toys, resolve conflict and stay on task. Case Managers also work with families to build their skills so that the child has the same environment at home as at school. Family and outpatient therapy is also offered with referrals out for medications and psychiatrists if needed.

Johnson County Mental Health Center Family Focus, Janie Yannacito

JCMHC’s Family Focus serves children and youth 3-18 years of age. There are six teams based upon school district boundaries. Each enrolled child has a case manager who works with the family to determine the child’s and family’s needs. The program has a parent support specialist (Becky Reising) who has her own child with a serious emotional disturbance (SED),

and who facilitates monthly parent support groups. There is an in-home family therapist who works with families to set up a behavior system in the home. Case manager assistants work one-on-one with children after school and in the home to build capacity of their skills.

The Family Conservancy, Shelley Mayse

The Family Conservancy, with five offices in the metro area, offers counseling services which are fee based using a sliding scale based on income. Insurance can be used. Early Solutions is one of their free programs and they have a Child Services Department that is a resource center for parent and early childhood education.

Intensive Family Counseling (IFC) – Play Therapy, Alana Titus

Intensive Family Counseling's new service is Child-Centered Play Therapy. IFC prefers to do this therapy in the homes of the children and integrates filial therapy into the process. IFC has a sliding scale for payment and accepts Medicaid. IFC recently began collaborating with Head Start of Shawnee Mission to identify children who may need assistance. IFC then conducts parent meetings in their homes. Play Therapy provides a way for kids to work out issues that they can't talk about.

Updates and Next Steps

Kansas Association for Infant Mental Health (KAIMH), Shelley Mayse

KAIMH is part of the Kansas Early Learning Collaborative which is funded through the Children's Cabinet. Services will include consultation in nine counties across the state. KAIMH is also continuing its work on a professional infant mental health endorsement for providers.

Kansas Coalition for School Readiness, Marya Schott

Kansas Coalition for School Readiness is going to be housed at Kansas Action for Children (KAC) and will have a new Executive Director, Tiffany Fisher.

Univ. of Kansas Medical Center, CCHD, Phyllis Young

Dr. Matt Reese, Director of KU Center for Child Health and Development (CCHD), is conducting a research study about children and mental health. Phyllis will send a link to everyone and asks that people complete it on-line.

Discussion & Questions

Q: What is the age range of children served by Family Focus?

Family Focus serves children and youth 3-18 years of age. There are different groups for different ages. Children must have an Axis 1 diagnosis plus functional deficiencies in more than one setting to qualify. Contact the Mental Health Center and ask for a Family Focus Team leader.

Q: How to deal with parent child relationship attachment/issues and emotional child development issues?

Family Conservancy can be of help. Parent may say "fix my child," however, essentially what they mean is "fix our relationship or how we relate to each other." Family Conservancy offers Early Solutions program for prenatal through age 6, and counseling for all ages. On July 15 there will be a diagnostic assistance training held at the Kauffman Center entitled "A Relationship Based Approach: Using the DC:0-3R Manual in Diagnosis and Treatment of Infants and Toddlers." There is also an early childhood

mental health website (www.challengingbehaviors.org) that has webinars which are usually free and are archived.

Q: Where can parents go for support after their children are newly diagnosed with life long disabilities?

There are many parent support groups related to specific disabilities and chronic illness/disease. Two are Families Together and Families Voices. A journal entitled “Zero to 3” is also recommended.

Q: How do I find out more about post partum depression and its affect on infant mental health and development?

Postpartum Resource Center of KS is located in Prairie Village.
<http://www.kansasppd.org>

Q: What are some recommended readings or websites for parents who refuse to have their children immunized because they fear immunizations are linked to autism.

It is difficult to persuade parents who have this fear. Website recommended by Jo. Co. Public Health: www.immunize.org. (A link to “Clear Answers and Smart Advice About Your Baby’s Shots” by Dr. Ari Brown is on the website. Under “vaccine concerns,” click on autism.)

Attending (in addition to Presenters listed above): Emma Bart-Plange (The Family Conservancy), Sue Bass (Open Arms Lutheran Child Development Center), Betty Choi (Head Start of Shawnee Mission), April Chronister (Jo. Co. Public Health), Amittia Davis (Wyn. Co. Infant Toddler), Jamie Fink (PAT De Soto), Meg Fuehn (The Family Conservancy), Kathy Griffin (Jo. Co. Public Health), Stacey Habrich (Head Start of Shawnee Mission), Susi Hann (Olathe School District), Jody Headrick (Open Arms Lutheran Child Development Center), Elaine Hester (Olathe Head Start), Caren Howes (Shawnee Mission School District Smart Start), Anne Keller (Jo. Co. Public Health), Alysha Lews (Head Start of Shawnee Mission), Melissa Marrow (Wyn. Co. Infant Toddler), Coco McAtee (OP Regional Medical Center), Patty McCullom (Kansas Children Service League), Jamie Mull (The Family Conservancy), Becky Parrott (PAT Olathe), Stacy Pate (Infant Toddler Jo. Co.), Ann Porter (Hillcrest Christian Child Development Center), Elaine Riordan (OP Regional Medical Center), Ann Rogers (PAT Gardner), Mary Margaret Saxon (The Family Conservancy), Jennifer Schumaker (Head Start of Shawnee Mission), Cheryl Tolbert (SRS), Mary Williams (The Family Conservancy)

Brochures from other agencies that provide services to young children with mental health issues were available at the meeting. These included KVC Behavioral HealthCare, MidAmerica Nazarene University Play Therapy and others.

This document was prepared by Marya Schott. Send comments or corrections to maryas@ucsjoco.org.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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United Community Services of Johnson County
12351 West 96th Terrace, Suite 200, Lenexa, KS 66215
913-438-4764 www.ucsjoco.org