



Resources for Partners

Mental Health and Social-Emotional Supports: A Whole Child Focus



Healthy social-emotional development in young children is important to their physical, academic, and socio-economic outcomes.

For at-risk children, healthy social-emotional development is crucial.

The Office of Early Learning (OEL) is committed to giving children the support they need to reach their full potential.



Children who struggle with chronic toxic stress find focusing, regulating emotions and behaviors, and learning difficult. [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACEs) cause stress and long-term negative health and social effects. The population of children enrolled in the School Readiness (SR) Program may have experienced one or more ACEs including poverty, food insecurity, parental separation, experiencing or witnessing violence, abuse or neglect, foster care, and homelessness, among others.

The research of the impact of trauma and toxic stress is vast and indicates that chronic stress caused by ACEs may cause a disruption in neurodevelopment; social, emotional and cognitive impairment; adoption of unhealthy coping behaviors; disease and disability; and early death¹. Additional findings from ACEs research include:

- Child behavioral self-regulation and school effectiveness were positively associated with both reading and math performances in less-effective schools.²
- Traumatic stress can lead to absenteeism, school failure, behavioral issues, school expulsion, and suspension.³
- Overwhelming stress drives the brain into “fight or flight” response, releasing hormones that increase fear and anxiety, which affect memory and information readily accessible during active learning.⁴

Help may be in the classroom. OEL serves children birth to age 13 and supports the whole child by establishing measures to ensure families have access to high-quality childcare and afterschool programs; collaborating with community support programs; and providing early childhood educators access to training in early childhood development, healthy social-emotional development, trauma-informed practice and positive classroom strategies. Nurturing relationships with caregivers, parental training and support programs, and home visiting are additional strategies that may reduce the impact of ACEs and positively impact children’s skill development.

While interconnected and overlapping, OEL’s infant and early childhood *Mental Health and Social-Emotional Supports* projects may be summarized under three closely aligned pieces centered on the whole child:

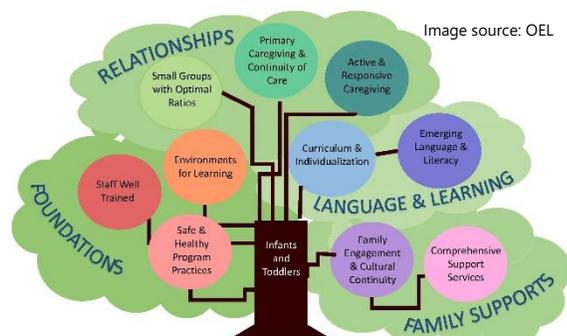
1. **Healthy Attachment and Development** - understanding the importance of healthy attachments and children’s growth and development. This understanding informs expectations of a child’s behavior and provides insight to potential red flags or concerns that may need evaluation and/or early intervention.
2. **Inclusion Services** - providing early intervention and other inclusive services and products. Ensuring equitable access to services, including mental health services, is fundamental to the healthy development of the whole child.
3. **Support Systems** - recognizing that children are products of their environments. Their healthy social-emotional development is dependent upon the supports provided by their families and communities.

With funding from the [Child Care and Development Block Grant](#) (CCDBG), coupled with the [Preschool Development Birth through Five Renewal Grant](#) (PDGR), OEL implemented the following initiatives to help teachers and caregivers mitigate ACEs and establish a healthy learning environment.

Healthy Attachment and Development

■ **The Florida State University (FSU) 10 Components of Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers (10 Components of Quality)**

is a quality improvement tool, developed by the FSU Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy (CPEIP), that focuses on infants and toddlers in the areas of school readiness, infant mental health, home visiting and quality childcare practices. The 10 Components system addresses gaps between existing levels of quality in infant and toddler care and the higher levels of quality needed to support their unique developmental needs. Each component focuses on the social-emotional and relationship needs of infants and toddlers, identified by the latest research as the foundation for all future development. The OEL launched a [10 Components of Quality](#) train-the-trainer initiative in 2019 for early learning coalition (coalition) infant/toddler specialists, coaches and professional development staff.



- **Infant/Toddler Specialist Network** supports coalition staff who manage local infant/toddler initiatives or work in a direct support role to providers serving young children from birth to 36 months old. OEL established the [Infant/Toddler Specialist Network](#) (Network) in 2017 with the goal of deepening the learning and engagement of the network to support its work with infant/toddler programs and educators. The Network promotes and provides community connections to state and local resources, increased access to quality care to supports responsive relationships between teachers, infants/toddlers and their families, and support for access to quality initiatives conducted statewide and in local areas.
- **CLASS Group Coaching-MMCI** - The statewide capacity-sustaining Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS) is an observation-based [program assessment](#) that measures the strength of teacher-child interactions. Quality measure requirements include a minimum threshold for SR contracting purposes and program improvement through a quality improvement plan. CLASS trainings are available to early learning coalition and Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) staff, Head Start/Early Head Start staff, OEL staff, training partners and early education representatives from various provider associations. The CLASS Group Coaching-MMCI (formerly Making the Most of Classroom Interactions or MMCI) training provides educators with a deeper understanding of each CLASS measure and how to use these measures to improve classroom interactions. Positive interactions between teachers and children establish trusting relationships that influence the classroom environment and students' learning. These relationships also help establish a connection for children, especially those who have experienced trauma and toxic stress.
- **Trauma-Informed Care Director Endorsement** - Offered through the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Office of Child Care Regulation with support from OEL and the PDGR, the [Trauma-Informed Care for Child Care Program Directors](#) (TICD) aims to assist child care programs in implementing trauma-informed care for families they serve. Focus is on recognizing the signs of trauma to help children regulate emotions and behaviors, evaluation of the physical learning environment for trauma-sensitive supports, and examination of the importance of self-care.

Inclusion Services

- **Screening and Referral** - Identification of potential learning delays makes a difference when a child is in need of early intervention services. All children ages birth to 5 who enroll in School Readiness (SR) must receive an annual developmental screening. The purpose of a developmental screening is to capture a snapshot of a child's development at a single point in time, to provide parents information on their child's development and to track progress over time. Currently, the Brookes Publishing *Ages & Stages Questionnaires®*, *Third Edition (ASQ®-3)* and the *Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ®: SE-2)* are the [developmental screening tools](#) used in the SR program. The screeners are easy-to-use, family-friendly and create the snapshot needed to catch delays and celebrate milestones. Each coalition employs an inclusion specialist to work with children, families and early childhood educators to make referrals for additional assessment and services. Additionally, the inclusion specialist may work with teachers and center directors to ensure the classroom environment supports each child's individual needs.



Image source: helpmegrowfl.org

- **Help Me Grow Florida** – Sponsored by the OEL and the Children’s Forum, [Help Me Grow Florida](#) (HMG) is located in 37 counties throughout Florida and serves all children birth to age eight (regardless of income). HMG ensures that children have the best possible start in life by providing free developmental and behavioral [screenings](#), care coordination and connection to resources and services. HMG also uses a collective impact strategy to help Florida communities leverage existing resources to identify vulnerable children, link families to community-based services, and empower families to support their children’s healthy well-being through implementation of four Core Components; *Centralized Telephone Access Point, Family and Community Outreach, Healthcare Provider Outreach, and Data Collection and Analysis*.
- **Inclusion Specialist Network** - The [Inclusion Specialist Network](#) has more than 120 members, including early childhood inclusion specialists from each of the 30 coalitions. The OEL coordinates monthly webinars and one Inclusion retreat a year to share information, learn from guest speakers and discuss current needs related to children with developmental delays and disabilities.
- **Warm Line Services** - Each early learning coalition offers [Inclusion Warm Line](#) services to assist parents and providers with information and referrals for child evaluations and inclusive services. If a developmental screening indicates an area of concern or if a warm line call comes through the coalition, the Inclusion Specialist will contact the childcare provider to offer observations of the child in their early learning environment and will rescreen the child as part of the inclusion services. The Inclusion Specialists also support childcare providers and parents with technical assistance, planning focused interventions for individual children who require additional supports and linking children to early interventions services prior to kindergarten entry.
- **Baby Navigator** - The [Baby Navigator](#), a technology-supported platform, provides resources and tools for families to celebrate and support their baby’s early learning and nurture the development of language and success in school. FSU’s College of Medicine, Autism Institute will use the Baby Navigator to support the professional development of early learning coalition staff. Professional development courses will provide training to teachers and providers to support families in tracking their babies’ growth and development from birth to 24 months and screening babies for communication delay and early signs of autism.
- **Pyramid Model** - University of South Florida (USF) is supporting OEL in the statewide implementation of the *Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children* (Pyramid Model), which is a positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) framework that uses systems thinking and implementation science to promote evidence-based practices. Research has demonstrated that when implemented with fidelity, the [Pyramid Model](#) helps early educators build skills for nurturing and responsive caregiving and to create positive learning environments by:
 - reducing challenging behavior and the use of inappropriate discipline practices,
 - promoting family engagement,
 - using data for decision-making,
 - integrating early childhood and infant mental health consultation,
 - fostering inclusion and improving social skills in young children.

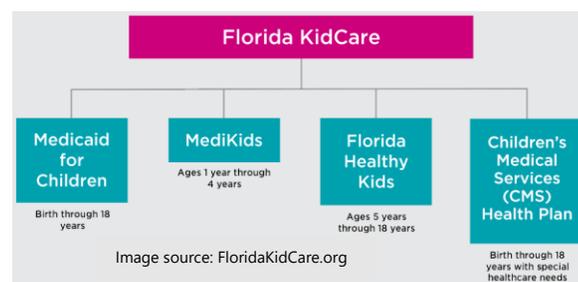


Image source: NCPMI

Support Systems

- **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)** provides services to families, childcare providers and communities at no cost and include information about available financial and community resources; early learning options for families; parent and consumer education; and training and technical assistance for current and prospective childcare providers. Integrating state and local efforts ensures that all families in Florida have equal access to quality childcare information and resources. OEL is responsible for the statewide [CCR&R Network](#) and contracts with the coalitions/RCMA to ensure services are available in each of Florida’s 67 counties.

- **Online Digital Supports** connects families with programs and services that meet children’s unique needs and with tools for supporting children’s development through an educational program or mobile application. Specific focus is on supports for dual language learners, children with unique abilities, at-risk, homeless, and rural populations. The [Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters](#) (HIPPY) program is conducting a pilot of the mobile application utilizing their program’s home visitors and families already enrolled.
- **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health** - Educators being able to understand a child’s healthy social-emotional development is key to identifying when a child should be screened for possible concerns, when to employ classroom strategies, and knowing when a child needs additional services. OEL is working closely with the [Florida Association for Infant Mental Health \(FAIMH\)](#), the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg (USFSP), and the Panhandle Area Education Consortium (PAEC) to provide stipends, memberships and other supports for early childhood educators in attaining the [Florida Infant Mental Health Endorsement \(FIMH-E®\)](#). OEL is also collaborating with University of South Florida-Tampa to conduct a statewide infrastructure study to identify current infant and early childhood mental health and social-emotional supports and work with related agencies to establish a strong statewide system of supports for children and their families.
- **Florida Healthy Kids Targeted Outreach** ensures families know about [Florida KidCare](#) to reduce the number of children who are uninsured and to increase families’ health literacy. The targeted outreach will increase parent knowledge regarding child-health insurance availability, provide targeted activities and materials to inform and train early learning coalitions, Head Start and Early Head Start and other partners on available health insurance programs in Florida and how to connect families who are eligible for, but not accessing health insurance, particularly in underserved areas.
- **Early Learning Professional Development System** - Florida’s [Early Care and Education Professional Development System](#) is a framework with four key element; *core knowledge, career pathways, registry and financial incentives* that define pathways tied to credentials, certifications and qualifications to meet the needs of adult learners in the field. Florida has updated its core competencies and career pathways, continues to enhance its [Early Childhood Professional Development Registry](#), and is developing informal credentials to build the capacity of well-trained early childhood educators statewide. In addition, each early learning coalition provides professional development based on the needs of local providers, and in support of both local and state initiatives. Specialized knowledge of how young children develop and learn is critical for those who work in early care and education and supports young children’s social-emotional development and mental health.
- **Social-Emotional and Mental Health Sub-grants** - Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic has added stress to the lives of many, OEL awarded coalitions these sub-grants to identify and provide mental health and/or social-emotional supports for SR and Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) children, their families, contracted childcare providers, and early learning coalition/RCMA staff in each coalition and RCMA area. Coalitions/RCMA identified local community needs and created plans to provide assistance for products and services that best support providers, children, and their families.



For more information on any of the initiatives or projects, please contact the Office of Early Learning at oel.questions@oel.myflorida.com.

¹ Center for Disease Control. (2018). Adverse childhood experiences presentation graphics. Retrieved October 5, 2020, from https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/ACE_graphics.html.

² Caughy, M.O., Mills, B., Brinkley, D., & Owen, M.T. (2018). Behavioral self-regulation, early academic achievement, and the effectiveness of urban schools for low-income and ethnic minority children. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 61(3-4), 372-385.

³ The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2007). *Basic facts about child trauma*. Retrieved October 6, 2020, from http://tsafor schools.org/static/tsa/uploads/files/child_trauma_basic_facts_april_2007.pdf.

⁴ Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. (n.d.) *Stress and the developing brain: Overwhelming stress and young children*. Retrieved October 6, 2020, from https://www.ecmhc.org/tutorials/trauma/mod2_3.html.