



Mental Health and Parenting

Public Policy Brief Summary

Children, Youth and Family Consortium
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...Research clearly shows that maintaining good mental health means better outcomes for parents and their children, and enables individuals to cope with the challenges associated with parenting.

The mental health of parents matters. Children need caring adults to guide their social and emotional development. Mental health problems can compromise a parent's ability to adequately or consistently meet those developmental needs. It is neither fair nor useful to blame parents for the mental health problems of their children. It is reasonable to hold parents accountable to address their own and their children's mental health needs, provided they have the support and resources to do so.

Poverty, social disadvantage and lack of education are three leading contributors to parental stress. Stress contributes to anxiety, depression and other mental health problems.

Workplace issues are significant. Self-worth and personal well-being are strongly influenced by the work environment. Policies such as parental leave, sick time, and opportunities for family time during traditional work hours directly affect family life.

Adolescents who are parents face special challenges such as lack of maturity and negative environmental conditions, and their babies are more at risk for low birth weight and developmental difficulties.

Policy Recommendations From Research

- β Build the capacity of parents to succeed and improve outcomes for their children with strong public policies.
- β Advance all efforts to eliminate racial disparities in the incidence and treatment of mental health needs of the parenting population.
- β Coordinate services to address the needs of the entire family, resulting in less duplication and fragmentation.
- β Offer community-wide mental health education, support, services and screening to identify problems before they become serious.
- β Promote workplace policies that allow flexibility for employees to address their own mental health needs and those of their families.
- β Provide routine screening of pregnant women, parents and children for depression and other mental health problems, incorporating such screening into obstetric, pediatric and other medical care.
- β Maintain accessible early childhood and parent education programs.
- β Deliver mental health programs that help support healthier families within local communities.

Federal and state child welfare policies often result in parents with mental health disorders losing custody of their children. Many parents avoid seeking help for fear of losing their children.