

Child Care and Development Services

CHILDREN AND MENTAL HEALTH



Children develop their mental health through their daily environments and experiences. A child who grows up in a safe and secure environment, with strong and loving relationships, and whose daily life experiences are mostly positive, will have good mental health. This child will be able to make friends, behave appropriately in social situations, focus on tasks, cope with change, express emotions in positive ways, solve problems, be resilient, and keep a positive attitude.



There are a variety of factors that affect the mental health of children. The most important is physical health. Children need a safe, clean, and healthy place to live. They also need nutritious food, adequate sleep, exercise, and access to doctors for health checks, immunizations, and treatment of illness or injury. Children who experience good physical health and feel safe will be able to develop good mental health. Paying attention to a child's physical health and well-being can give you information about how their mental health is developing. When appropriate, guide parents to community assistance programs where they can get help. This is one way to support better mental health not just for the children, but for the whole family.

In addition to monitoring the physical health and development of children, educators can support the development of good mental health by building positive relationships with children, creating a safe, welcoming environment, developing a consistent routine, and giving specific praise. Providers can also encourage cooperative play and friendships, model social skills and conflict resolution techniques, teach coping skills and appropriate ways to express emotions. They can also explore the arts, spend time in nature, and encourage parents to enjoy time together as a family.

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DEEP BREATHING

We all experience stress every day. It is important to find ways to reduce stress in order to maintain good mental, physical, and emotional well-being. One of the easiest and most effective ways proven to immediately decrease stress is deep belly breathing. You can do the following breathing exercise anywhere, and you can teach children to do it too!

1. You can do this standing up or sitting in a chair.
2. Let your arms and hands hang relaxed at your sides.
3. Place one hand on your belly (lower stomach) to feel your breathing.
4. Close your eyes and focus on your belly.
5. Imagine there is a small balloon inside your belly.
6. Imagine the balloon filling up as you breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose.
7. Hold the breath for a few seconds.
8. Slowly exhale through your mouth as you imagine the balloon deflating.
9. Do this at least three times

Source: <http://ecmhc.org/relaxation.html>



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PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Children learn and grow to their full potential when they have opportunities to move. When children are physically active all their senses are engaged in learning, both hemispheres of their brains are working together, their hearts are beating stronger, their lungs are pulling in more oxygen, and their muscles are getting a workout. In other words, movement builds healthier bodies and minds.

Movement activities can include obstacle courses, dancing, yoga, climbing, running, walking, jumping, swinging, hand-clapping games, kneading playdough or clay, and playing sports. Include a variety of planned movement activities to do as a group, but also set aside time for free play outside. Consider creating a movement space inside with a poster showing yoga or stretching poses, a basket of scarves or ribbons for dancing, and homemade yarn balls or sponges for inside toss and catch. Think about the ages and abilities of the children you work with while you consider the following questions for reflection from the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume II*:

- How can you increase young children's participation in moderate to vigorous physical activities on a regular basis in your program?
- How can you make physical activities purposeful, meaningful, and fun?
- How can you adapt the program environment, materials, or activities to ensure that children with disabilities can participate with their peers?

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume II* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2011).



CARING FOR KIDS

STEM FOR ALL

Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers – both boys and girls – often engage in activities that teach science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) concepts. However, as children proceed through school, they often encounter a gender bias regarding STEM topics. A study from the National Bureau of Economic Research has found that as children progress through school, the number of girls who pursue computer science and other STEM studies drops significantly by the time they enter high school. Further studies show that this trend continues through college and into the workforce where only twenty five percent of the people working in STEM careers are women.

As educators of young children, we must ask ourselves what we can do to dispel these biases and develop equity in learning between boys and girls. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping how a child sees herself. Once children enter elementary school their learning becomes more formal and they receive constant feedback on their abilities through homework assignments and tests. In the above mentioned study, boys pursued STEM learning and STEM careers because they were praised for their science and math abilities, but girls were not. It is likely that many teachers are not even aware that they are reinforcing dated stereotypes.

Early educators can help develop better equity, or fairness, in learning by being aware of gender bias and creating an environment that supports STEM learning by providing all children the opportunity to engage in STEM based activities. If you are working with school aged children, talk to them about their studies and encourage their interests. Praise them when they do well on a math or science test, and be available for them when they are struggling. There are online websites that provide math and science support, and most public libraries offer one night a week where they provide tutoring services.

Source: www.nber.org/papers/w20909 and scienceclubforgirls.org/race-and-gender-gap

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

As an early childhood educator you take care of children, parents, and your own family. How much time do you spend taking care of yourself? There is a lot to be gained by investing in your own physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Your body will be healthier, you will feel more energized, be better equipped to handle stress, and find it easier to maintain a positive attitude.

Stay healthy by eating nutritious meals, getting enough sleep, and being active. It is also important to schedule a yearly physical with your doctor, keep vaccines updated, maintain a safe and clean environment, establish a health and wellness policy for your program, and role-model healthy habits such as hand-washing. Participate with the children when you have dancing, yoga, or other movement activities planned. Making healthy lifestyle choices will help you feel more focused, energized, and physically fit.

Working with children, parents, and other adults on a daily basis and being attentive to their needs can take a toll on your mental and emotional health. Taking the time to release the stress you have encountered throughout the day will make sleep more restful and help you re-group for the next day's challenges. Including activities you enjoy into your daily routine, such as reading, drawing, taking a ten minute walk, writing in a journal, or listening to music, will help keep things positive and reduce stress.

Try not to rush through your day, and remember to take advantage of peaceful moments. For example, during children's nap time take fifteen minutes to do a deep breathing exercise, relax with a magazine, or call and talk to a friend. Those fifteen minutes of self-care will help you keep a positive outlook. If you are looking for more inspiration, the book *Heart-Centered Teaching Inspired by Nature* by Nancy Rosenow offers insight about how taking care of yourself enhances your ability to nurture and teach others.

For preschoolers, plan for STEM activities every day. Take photographs of both boys and girls as they work in the garden, build castles, conduct science experiments, or play math games. Place these photos where children and their parents can see them, and give parents handouts and information that explains the STEM concepts children are learning. This will help parents understand that all children are equally capable of learning STEM concepts. Talk to parents about what STEM means and how they can help support their child's learning, regardless of gender. By educating parents you help create a support system for children that will follow them all the way through school.



CITRUS BIRD FEEDERS

This cooking project gives children of all ages the opportunity to recycle food, care for wildlife, and learn about birds. These feeders last for about a week. When the rind begins to mold, you can put it in your compost bin for gardening, or discard it in the trash. Try challenging preschoolers and school agers to think of other ways they can make bird feeders.

Ingredients:

- 4-6 pipe cleaners, or pieces of string, per child
- Ballpoint pen (to poke holes through the orange peel)
- 1/2 an orange or lemon per child, hollowed out
- Peanut butter
- Birdseed
- Raisins
- Popped popcorn

Instructions:

1. Slice the orange or lemon in half and use a spoon to scoop out the fruit. It is not necessary to scrape it clean; the birds will enjoy having some pulp to eat.
2. Attach pipe cleaners by poking them through the peel and bending them. Twist the other ends of the pipe cleaners together and bend them into a hook shape to make a hanging basket. If you do not have pipe cleaners, use a ballpoint pen to poke the holes and thread string through instead.
3. Spread 2 tablespoons of peanut butter inside the orange half.
4. Add one tablespoon of birdseed.
5. Add one tablespoon of raisins.
6. Add one tablespoon of popped popcorn.
7. Hang the feeder outside for birds and enjoy the view!



MENTAL HEALTH continued from page 1

Everyone from the youngest infant to the oldest adult needs to know they are loved. Taking time to greet each child with a smile, talking to him throughout the day, and creating personal routines based on that child's needs or interests helps create positive attachments. Experiencing strong attachments with loving adults helps children, of all, ages feel safe and secure. Giving children specific praise can help boost self-esteem and confidence. This helps increase the child's confidence in his own capabilities. For example, "Robert, you saw Megan was having trouble opening the paint bottle and you helped her. What a kind friend!"

Create a welcoming space that includes a variety of activities and a quiet spot with pillows where children can engage in quiet reflection. Including pictures of children's families, displaying artwork, using natural lighting, and placing plants around the room can all help make the environment feel warm and inviting. Add books about relationships, emotions, and social skills to your book corner. Offer children the opportunity to explore writing, art, playdough, music, and dance every day. These are wonderful opportunities for children to express themselves creatively and work through tough emotions. Label emotions as they happen, read books about emotions, and support children in learning how to work through them in a positive manner. Use the same routine every day, and if you have to change the routine for a field trip or event, talk to the children the day before so they are mentally prepared.

Some ways to encourage friendships and cooperative play include: saying infant's names out loud when you talk to, or about them, inviting toddlers to play musical instruments and dance, or planning a group art project, like a mural, for preschoolers and school-age children. When conflicts arise, role model the language they can use and help mediate as they discover solutions on their own.



Today's children experience more stress than past generations. Research shows that time spent exploring nature reduces stress and promotes mental health. Take children outside as much as possible for nature walks and play. Help children learn deep breathing exercises as means of coping with stress and encourage them to pursue hobbies they enjoy.

To promote parents spending time with children, send home small projects they can do. For example, you could send home a bag with a couple of books to read and talk about, or a bag with a plastic cup, some soil, a seed to plant, and a log for them to record the seed's growth. Supporting the child in creating relationships with their family members gives that child the gift of a support group that will always be there for him. Supporting the healthy development of good mental health will help the children in your care weather life's storms, become life-long learners, and achieve success.

Source: *Children, Nature, and Mental Health* by Bobbie Rose (Child Care Exchange, Sept./Oct. 2014).

Creative Curriculum



CHILDREN'S
HOME
SOCIETY OF
CALIFORNIA

Water is a wonderful learning tool. Try the following activities with children and watch their scientific understanding of water grow! Remember that *all* water activities should be closely supervised to prevent injuries or drowning.

LEARNING WITH WATER

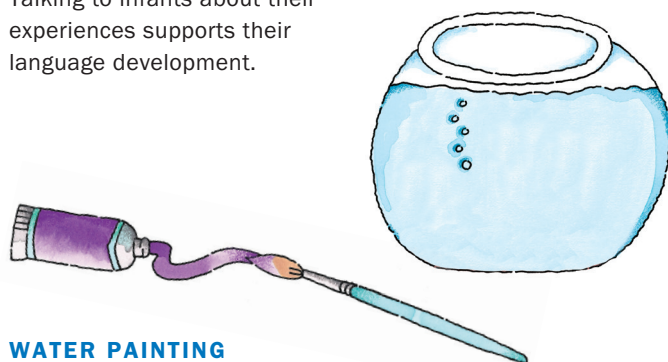
THE FEEL OF WATER

Age group: Infants

What you need: Small spray bottles and a bucket of water-soaked sponges. Use new sponges and clean, drinkable water.

What you do: Choose a shady area outside and dress infants for water play. Remove water-soaked sponges one at a time and offer them to infants. Allow infants to squeeze and manipulate sponges. As water is released from the sponges, talk to infants about the water. Describe how it feels, looks, sounds, and tastes. Use spray bottles to spray infants' feet with water and re-wet the sponges. Talk to them about the differences between the water in the sponges, and the water from the spray bottles.

What they learn: Infants use their senses to process information and learn. By squeezing sponges they practice using their muscles while exploring the scientific properties of water. Talking to infants about their experiences supports their language development.



WATER PAINTING

Age group: Toddlers

What you need: Small sand buckets, water, different sized paint brushes, and an outdoor space with sun and shade. You may also want to add sidewalk chalk for older toddlers.

What you do: Fill the buckets with small amounts of water and let children select paint brushes. Encourage children to "paint" pictures both in the sunshine and the shade. This works best on sidewalks or block walls. Talk to children about their paintings and what happens to the water. For older toddlers, you can let them draw with chalk and see what happens when they paint over their drawings with water.

What they learn: Toddlers practice fine motor skills and increase their cognitive understanding of the properties of water and heat from the sun. They also develop their language skills by talking about the experiment.

ICE SCULPTURES

Age group: Preschool

What you need: Different sized bowls (that can go in the freezer), water, salt, food coloring or water colors, a large tray or dish tub, spoons, and eye droppers.

What you do: Fill the bowls with water and put them in the freezer. After they are frozen remove them from the freezer and use a small amount of warm water to separate the large blocks of ice from the bowls. Set the ice bowls on a large tray, or inside a dish tub. Prepare small bowls of warm water with food coloring. Invite children to touch the ice and use spoons to sprinkle salt in patterns on top. Ask children what they think the salt will do. Once the ice starts to melt, children can use eye droppers to place colored water into the holes created by the salt. Talk about the different patterns made and what happens to the ice.

What they learn: Children learn that water has more than one form, and that salt can melt ice. They also have the opportunity to see how colors mix, view different patterns, make predictions, and strengthen fine motor skills.

WATER FILTERS

Age group: School Age

What you need: 2 liter soda bottle cut in half (by an adult), paper towels, gravel, sand, cotton balls, and coffee filters. You will also need dirty water. To make dirty water add cooking oil, food coloring, pieces of paper and tiny pieces of Styrofoam to a bucket of water.

What you do: Put the top half of the soda bottle upside-down (like a funnel) inside the bottom half. The top half will be where you build your filter; the bottom half will hold the filtered water. Layer the filter materials inside the top half of the bottle. Think about what each material might remove from the dirty water and in what order you should layer the materials. Pour the dirty water through the filter. What does the filtered water look like? Take the filter apart and look at the different layers. Can you tell what each material removed from the water? Wipe the bottle clean and try again. Try putting materials in different layers or using different amounts of materials.

What they learn: Children build their understanding of social sciences when they learn about water pollution and the different processes water goes through to be cleaned. Experimenting with different solutions and comparing and contrasting outcomes strengthens mathematical reasoning skills.

For more than a century, Children’s Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community’s children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

To fulfill our mission, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, educational, and resource services, which include Community Education, Child Care and Development, and Family Resource Services. Along with helping children and their families, CHS is an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level.

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Children’s Home Society of California’s (CHS) Resource and Referral (R&R) Program provides child care referrals to parents within CHS’s designated service area to all parents requesting services regardless of income level or other eligibility requirements. Referrals are provided to parents based on their specific needs. CHS refers to child care centers, license-exempt child care centers, and licensed family child care homes.

In order to promote quality child care for children, CHS will:

- Assist parents seeking child care, but will not make recommendations.
- Provide written information about selecting quality child care.
- Recommend that parents visit facilities before making a decision.
- Inform parents of their right to review licensing information about providers.
- Maintain confidentiality of all information received from the parent.
- Not discriminate against any individual or group based on race, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, handicap, or income.

CHS reserves the right to discontinue referrals to a provider when:

- Licensing, law enforcement, or another regulatory agency has substantiated a complaint involving the health, safety, or personal rights of children; or actions that would impact the care or services to children.
- CHS is informed of an ongoing investigation regarding the health, safety, or personal rights of children; or actions that would impact the care or services to children.
- CHS has received a complaint regarding the health, safety, or welfare of a child and CHS is waiting for a response from the local licensing agency regarding the results of the complaint.
- The provider has been issued a probationary license or a corrective action plan.

CHS will notify the provider in writing when it is determined that CHS will discontinue referrals to the provider because of one of the above items.



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