Collaborative Mental Health Care

Our Mandate

Collaborative Mental Health Care (CMHC) is a service within the Child & Adolescent Addiction & Mental Health Community Services, Alberta Health Services. Our mandate is to build capacity within the community, to decrease the risk factors and increase the protective factors that relate to mental health outcomes for young children, birth to kindergarten entry. The transactional model originally described by Sameroff and Chandler (1975) is central to how we approach this mandate by directing us to consider both nature and nurture in the domains of child characteristics, family/environmental factors, parenting, and parent-child relationship.

Two key areas identified from research in the fields of infant mental health, child development, and early childhood education that support our mandate are:

- Strong support that there is an increase in positive outcomes when services provide early identification and intervention for infants and young children presenting with, or at risk for, developing mental health problems
- There will never be enough resources to provide one-to-one mental health support; therefore, using the “multiplier effect” by having the mental health professionals share their knowledge and expertise with community partners working with young children in health, mental health, childcare, education and social services fields will have greater long term impact

What is Collaborative Mental Health Care?

CMHC is a community-based program to improve the conditions for young children’s mental health through a variety of strategies, including consultation, education and advocacy, in partnership with community service providers who work with children birth to kindergarten entry and their families. (It is not a treatment or case management program).

Who provides the service?

A team of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants, from the disciplines of nursing, psychology and social work provide the service. They can also request further support from developmental pediatricians, child psychiatrists, a child psychologist, a speech-language pathologist, adult mental health specialists and an occupational therapist.

What services are provided?

The CMHC’s “client” is the primary care provider who is requesting the consultation, not the family. The service providers include: family physicians, pediatricians, public health nurses, child protection/welfare workers, daycare/child care providers, early childhood educators, in-home support workers, mental health therapists and others.

Consultations are either case-centered (a consultation about an individual child/family) or agency-centered (an agency has identified a learning need or common challenge, and the consultant works with the whole agency to address that need).
When should I consult the program?

The Red Flags or reasons a provider may request a consultation when they have concerns in a number of areas:

- Mood concerns; difficult temperament
- Difficulties coping with frustration; poor emotional regulation
- Excessive fears and anxiety
- Aggressive or destructive behaviours
- Demanding and non-compliant behaviour
- Excessive activity, impulsivity, and short attention
- Low energy, withdrawal, passivity
- Sleep, feeding or elimination problems
- Difficulties socializing and getting along with others
- Poor eye contact, little interest in others
- Poor play skills for age
- Developmental concerns
- Parenting challenges, such as overly controlling parental style, too lenient, limited skill or knowledge, parental substance abuse, parental mental illness
- Parent-child relationship difficulties
- Family or Environmental concerns such as: domestic violence, poverty

How do I contact the Program?

The case-centered consultation is accessed by completion and submission of a “CMHC Request for Consultation” form by the community service provider. Forms may be obtained by calling 403 955-1102 or via e-mail at cmhc@albertahealthservices.ca

Our service may also be requested through Access Mental Health: 943-1500.

Agency centered consultation or education presentation requests are accessed by calling 403 955-1159.

What is the process of the consultation?

The consultation is offered at the provider’s place of work – office, child care setting, preschool or family home. While the consultation can be limited to a session between the CMHC consultant and the service provider, it most often involves a joint session with the service provider and the child & parents.

This direct contact with the family is not to provide direct therapy or to case manage, but is done to demonstrate to the provider the type of information to gather in order to develop early childhood mental health impressions and recommendations.

Consultants on the team can assist care providers (and families) with: observing and understanding the child’s behaviors, assessing strengths and needs, screening development, and/or by facilitating a referral when specialized services are needed.

Consultants can assist service providers to identify the early signs of emotional distress and behavioral problems, and identify intervention strategies to support young children at risk of developing mental health problems. In a few specific cases the provision of several additional sessions with the provider and family for further discussion and implementation of the interventions (such as those strategies related to parent-child relationship & supporting the child’s emotional regulation) may be considered.

If needed the CMHC consultant can request additional consultation from professionals connected to the program, such as: pediatricians, child psychiatrists, psychologist, speech-language therapist, occupational therapist and adult mental health professionals.
Consultations are not done for the purpose of providing evidence for court proceedings, although occasionally the information provided through the consultation process may be helpful in making legal decisions.

The team of early childhood mental health consultants provide educational sessions for community service providers on ways to promote healthy emotional development, strong caregiver-child relationships, enhance the skills in behavior observation, early identification, dealing with challenging behaviors, impact of family/environmental factors on a child’s mental health, and impact of parental mental illness. In addition a number of other specific topics related to Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health are offered.

CMHC consultants keep abreast of the resources available in the community that promote the mental health and well-being of young children and advocate for new resources where gaps are identified.

**Workshops Available**

The Collaborative Mental Health Care team offer a variety of free workshops on early childhood mental health for professionals/services providers in the community, including:

- Red Flags in Early Childhood Mental Health
- Infant Mental Health
- Risk and Resilience in Early Childhood
- Understanding Attachment
- Early Brain Development
- Early Social / Emotional Development
- Reading Infants & Toddlers Cues
- Supporting Relationships & Communication
- Connecting before Correcting
- Healthy Development for Foster Children
- Sensory Processing in Young Children
- Prenatal Substance Exposure
- FASD & Brain Development
- Managing Challenging Behaviour
- Sleeping and Eating Challenges
- Infant Mental Health & Family Law
- Infant emotional trauma
- Impact of chronic neglect on young children
- Impact of parental mental illness
- Other topics considered when requested

Please contact us if you are interested in one of these workshops, or if would like to discuss other possible workshop topics for your staff or team.

**Information Pamphlets for Parents**

These pamphlets, designed to inform families and helping professionals on a variety of developmental issues and emotional concerns, have been in circulation since March, 2005 and have recently been reviewed and revised as needed.

Pamphlet topics include:

- Child-led play
- Separation and divorce: helping the young child cope
- Sensory difficulties and behaviour in young children
- Early brain development
- Trauma: how it affects young children
- Reactive attachment disorder: what can I do to help my foster child or adopted child?
- Early signs of developmental disorders of communication and socialization
- Helping the young child cope with grief and loss
- Attachment: what is it and what can I do to promote healthy attachment?
- “Red flags” in early childhood mental health: what should I be concerned about?
- Managing aggression in young children
○ Is my active, inattentive young child normal?
○ Helping young children cope with emotions: fear and anxiety
○ Having a parent with a mental illness: how does it affect young children
○ Family violence: how it affects young children

The creation of these pamphlets was funded through an Early Childhood Development grant from Calgary & Area Child and Family Services and FCSS Calgary. We appreciate their support to our team in the development and distribution of these resources.

We invite you to download and print your own copies of the pamphlets, which are now available in ’pdf’ format at: http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/healthinfo/library/index.htm