



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness



Parental Depression

Parental depression negatively affects the health and well-being of parents and their children. The rate of parental depression is higher in Early Head Start (EHS) than the general population; 52% of mothers and 18% of fathers of children in EHS meet the clinical criteria for depression.¹

Early Head Start and Head Start (EHS/HS) staff should be comfortable working to engage every parent—especially parents experiencing depression.

The ECLKC has resources to support EHS/HS staff in recognizing depression, assisting families obtain treatment for depression, fostering resilience, and supporting parents as they receive treatment.

¹ http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/research_brief_depression.pdf

Effects of Parental Depression on Young Children

Maternal depression interferes with a mother's ability to be responsive to her new baby. It also makes parenting toddlers and preschoolers more difficult. Children who have a parent with depression are more likely to have behavior problems, struggle in school, and experience poor health. Untreated parental depression can lead to poor outcomes for children.

Evidence from early childhood research and practice shows a strong link between parents' health and well-being and their children's development.



*Raising a family is a tough job.
Parenting with depression can be
even more difficult.*

Most EHS/HS staff members are not therapists, and are not expected to serve as therapists. In the Head Start setting, supporting mothers and fathers who have depression may take the form of recognizing and screening for depression, referrals, education, encouragement, and addressing obstacles to treatment completion.

Resources to Help EHS/HS Staff Address Parental Depression

- [Talking about Depression with Families: A Resource for Early Head Start and Head Start Staff](#)
This resource provides effective strategies for starting the conversation about depression with families and assisting families in getting help.
- [Depression in Mothers, More Than Just the Blues—A Toolkit for Family Service Providers](#)
This toolkit provides information about the importance of addressing maternal depression, an overview of depression, ways to recognize depression, and tips for working with mothers experiencing depression.
- [Five Action Steps to Address Maternal Depression in Head Start Programs](#)
Staff can use five action steps and the listed resources for each step to reduce the effect of depression on the families they serve.
- [Fostering Resilience in Families Coping With Depression: Practical Ways Head Start Staff Can Help](#)
This short paper provides Head Start staff with an understanding of resilience and strategies for promoting it within families.
- [Short Papers for Families](#) and [Staff](#)
This series of short papers shares information on topics central to understanding depression, resilience, and best practice in engaging parents facing adversities. They work as standalone handouts for parents and staff as well as materials for training workshops and in parent groups.
- [Supporting Families' Mental Health: A Special Focus on Maternal Depression](#)
View this webinar for information and resources on how staff can support families' mental health, including families experiencing mental health concerns such as depression.
- [Tell Me a Story](#)
The "Tell Me a Story" series supports mental health outreach to families and children, with a focus on adversity and parental depression. The guide provides books to read with children and training on their use in the early childhood setting.



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Contact Us: The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback as well as your suggestions for topics for future resources!

Please forward your comments to: health@ecetta.info or call us at 888-227-5125.

School readiness begins with health!