

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE INFORMATION FOR EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

Promoting Positive Mental Health

Mental Health is about physical and emotional well being and having the capacity and strength to live a full and creative life. It means that you have the flexibility to deal with the ups and downs of life or frustrations when things do not go so well.

For children and young people this is about getting on with others, participating, having a positive self esteem and adjusting to the demands of growing up .

Basis for a child's good Mental Health:

Apart from basic physical needs such as food and shelter , children need

- Unconditional love from their family
- Self confidence and high self esteem
- The opportunity to play with other children
- Safe and secure surroundings
- Appropriate guidance and discipline

Children who are mentally healthy are able to:

- Develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually
- Initiate ,develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships
- Use and enjoy solitude
- Become aware of others and empathise with them
- Play and learn
- Develop a sense of right and wrong
- Face problems and set backs and learn from them

Risk Factors in the child

- Specific learning difficulties
- Communication difficulties
- Developmental delay
- Genetic influence
- Difficult temperament
- Physical illness
- Academic failure
- Low self esteem

Risk Factors in the family

- Overt parental conflict
- Family breakdown

- Inconsistent or unclear discipline
- Hostile or rejecting relationships
- Failure to adapt to a child's changing needs
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- Parental psychiatric illness
- Parental criminality, alcoholism or personality disorder
- Death and loss including loss of friendship

Good Practice in pre schools

- Home Visiting
- Parent Drop in to help parents on parenting/literacy etc
- Work with small groups of vulnerable children around positive behaviour, social development, self esteem
- Compensatory nurturing experiences for vulnerable children
- Stable child care arrangements, children only interact with a few carers each day.
- Low staff turnover so that children can be cared for by the same individuals over several years
- Good staff training in child development
- Effective pre school curriculum
- Adequate staff – child ratio

Qualities needed by a key person/worker

- Able to respond sensitively to the child's feelings, ideas and behaviours
- Shows genuine enthusiasm, warmth and interest in the child
- Looks for and sees the worth of each individual child. Values the child's capabilities
- Accepts the child for who they are and avoids making value judgements
- Empathises with the child, tries to see the world through the child's eyes
- Realistic expectations related to the child's age and stage of development
- Sets and maintains clear boundaries and limits
- Aware of his/her own feelings, strength and limitations
- Copes calmly under pressure
- Seeks support from colleagues when necessary
- Values difference and diversity. Is positive about his/her own ethnicity and that of the child and others in the setting