



# **WORKING WITH BIRTH THROUGH FIVE POPULATION PRACTICE TOOL**

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## **BIRTH THROUGH FIVE**

### **I. GOAL/WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE THROUGH THE USE OF THIS PRACTICE TOOL?**

To strengthen the capacity of Arizona's behavioral health behavioral health system in responding to the unique needs of children age birth through five through strong clinical assessment, service planning and treatment that identifies and intervenes in situations that impede infants'/toddlers' ability to:

- A. Form close parent/caregiver relationships,
- B. Experience, regulate and express their emotions, and
- C. Explore their environment.

#### **TARGET AUDIENCE**

This Tool is specifically targeted to Contractors, Regional Behavioral Health Authorities (RBHAs) and their subcontracted network and provider agency behavioral health staff who complete assessments, participate in the service planning process, provide therapy, case management and other clinical services. This may also include supervising staff that provide service delivery to children age birth through five and their families.

#### **TARGET POPULATION(S)**

All enrolled behavioral health recipients, birth through five years of age (up to age five), in collaboration with their caregiver(s).

### **II. BACKGROUND**

The promotion of behavioral health in infants and toddlers is critical to the prevention and mitigation of mental disorders throughout the lifespan. Over the past decade, the research has demonstrated mounting evidence pointing to the detrimental impact that early, negative childhood experiences can have on the developing brain. A well-known example of that research is a study conducted by a California Health Maintenance Organization.<sup>i</sup> This longitudinal study, known as the ACES study (Adverse Early Childhood Experiences), showed a positive correlation between frequency of negative early childhood events (e.g. neglect, violence, trauma) and development of physical and behavioral health challenges in adulthood. The more negative events that occurred during early childhood, the more adults tended to have physical and behavioral health conditions in adulthood such as depression, alcoholism, obesity, and heart disease.<sup>ii</sup> Although the ACES study points to the negative impact of adverse early childhood experience, the field of infant behavioral health has promulgated the knowledge in intervention techniques designed to mitigate negative effects of early abuse, trauma or violence.

Early childhood experiences can build strong foundations or fragile ones and can affect the way children react and respond to the world around them for the rest of their lives. The early social and emotional development of infants and toddlers is vulnerable to factors such as

repeated exposure to violence, persistent fear and stress, abuse and neglect, severe chronic maternal depression, biological factors such as prematurity and low birth weight, and conditions associated with prenatal substance exposure.<sup>iii</sup> Without intervention, these risk factors can result in behavioral health disorders including depression, attachment disorders, and traumatic stress disorders, which can have an effect on later school performance and daily life functioning.<sup>iv</sup>

Children who have been maltreated are at an increased risk for behavioral health concerns, poor psychological adaptation and lifelong health difficulties.<sup>v</sup> Children entering the child welfare system have higher rates of exposure to traumatic events with most victims of child abuse and neglect being under the age of five. Important assets such as health attachment, social and emotional competency, self-assurance, confidence, and independence can be undermined as a result of trauma.<sup>vi</sup>

An effective approach to promoting healthy social and emotional development shall include equal attention to the full continuum of behavioral health services including promotion, prevention and treatment, plus improvement in system capacity for effective service delivery. Essential components of a comprehensive system include:

1. Supporting the use of evidence-based early childhood service delivery models,
2. Increasing the quality and capacity of trained infant and early childhood behavioral health professionals, and
3. Improving access to services.

Untreated behavioral health disorders can have disastrous effects on children's functioning and future outcomes.<sup>vii</sup> Unlike adults, infants and toddlers have a fairly limited repertoire of coping responses to stress and trauma.<sup>viii</sup> Behavioral health disorders in young infants might be reflected through physical symptoms such as poor weight gain, slow growth and constipation, as well as overall delayed development and inconsolable crying. In older infants, excessive tantrums, eating and sleeping problems, aggressive or impulsive behavior and developmental delays can be present. Toddlers may also present with paralyzing fears and withdrawal from social interaction.<sup>ix</sup>

Early attachment disorders (including those resulting from early traumatic separations from parents and placement in foster care) can predict subsequent aggressive behavior. Some early behavioral health disorders have lasting effects and may appear to be precursors of behavioral health problems later in life. Early signs and symptoms of behavioral health disorders may include withdrawal, sleeplessness or lack of appetite due to depression, anxiety, and trauma stress reactions.<sup>x</sup>

Increasingly, young children are being expelled from child care and preschool for behavior problems, including biting, tantrums, hitting, throwing objects, or inconsolable crying.<sup>xi</sup> Even if they do remain in a program, young children with behavioral concerns are challenging to teach and quickly lose motivation for learning. Additionally, they may withdraw from their peers or face social rejection.<sup>xii</sup>

Healthy social-emotional development is strongly linked to success in elementary school. Children who are not secure in relating to others and do not trust adults are not motivated to learn. Furthermore, children who are unable to respond to calming influences initiated by themselves or others will not be responsive to teaching methods nor benefit from their early educational experiences and may lag behind their peers.

Parent's behavioral health can affect young children. Maternal depression, anxiety disorders and other forms of chronic depression often disrupt the parent-child bond as parents with an untreated mental disorder are less able to provide developmentally-appropriate stimulation and parent-child interactions.<sup>xiii</sup> Parenting and child development are most affected when depression simultaneously occurs with other factors such as extreme poverty, substance abuse, adolescence, and maltreatment.<sup>xiv/xv</sup> Infants of clinically depressed mothers often withdraw from their caregivers, which ultimately affects their language skills, as well as their physical and cognitive development. Older children of depressed mothers show poor self-control, aggression, poor peer relationships, and difficulties in school.<sup>xvi</sup> Although these sources cite maternal depression as a factor, these effects can also be attributed to relationships the young child has with other primary caregiver(s).

Increased training in early childhood behavioral health is necessary and essential. In-depth knowledge of child development systems and multi-disciplinary approaches, as well as possession of diagnostic and clinical skills are critical components for professionals who assess and treat young children.<sup>xvii</sup> Additionally, practitioners need to acquire and demonstrate a range of interpersonal skills in their work in order to build individualized, respectful, responsive and supportive relationships with families. These skills include:

1. The ability to listen carefully,
2. Demonstrate concern and empathy,
3. Promote reflection,
4. Observe and highlight the child-parent/caregiver relationship,
5. Respond thoughtfully during emotionally intense interactions, and
6. Understand, regulate, and use one's own feelings.<sup>xviii</sup>

Scientific advances in neurobiology have provided birth through five practitioners with greater insight into the complex system of the brain. The development of the central nervous system begins with the formation of the neural tube, which nears completion by three to four weeks of gestation and is the basis for all further nervous system development.<sup>xix</sup> Genes determine when specific brain circuits are formed and each child's experiences then shape how that formation develops. Stable and responsive relationships along with proper sensory input through hearing and vision are what build healthy "brain architecture". Thus, the most important relationships begin with the child's family and extend outward to other adults important in that child's life such as day care and educational providers.<sup>xx</sup>

Empirical evidence has shown that young children are greatly impacted by their early development and experiences. By understanding how specific events impact a young child's brain functions, the behavioral health professional is able to formulate individualized

interventions. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all practitioners to become educated about brain development, functions of the various parts of the brain and their role in the physical and emotional development of the child. Some additional resources in the area of brain development include:

1. “Brain Facts, A Primer on the Brain and Nervous System” through the Society for Neuroscience,<sup>xxi</sup>
2. “Starting Smart—How Early Experiences Affect Brain Development”,<sup>xxii</sup>
3. “From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development”,<sup>xxiii</sup>
4. C.H. Zeanah, Jr., (Ed.). (2009). Handbook of Infant Toddler Behavioral health.<sup>xxiv</sup>

## **A. PROCEDURES**

In an ongoing effort to improve the delivery of behavioral health services in an effective and recovery-oriented fashion, the Arizona Vision, as established by the Jason K. Settlement Agreement in 2001, implemented the use of the Child and Family Team (CFT) practice model and the 12 Arizona Principles, both of which strongly support the critical components of behavioral health practice with children birth through five and their families. Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral health practice integrates all aspects of child development such as organic factors (genetics and health) with the child’s experiences (relationships, events, opportunities for exploration). This is especially important in the first three years of life when changes in social-emotional development and adaptive functioning are rapid and significant.

The nature and pace of these changes, as well as the preverbal nature of this young population present the behavioral health professional with uniquely complex challenges. They shall rely on the knowledge of the parents/caregivers and the expertise of a multidisciplinary team of professionals to provide them with information when conducting behavioral health evaluations, developing service plans, and implementing clinical interventions. Qualified professionals will have an understanding of the correct use and interpretation of screening, assessment and evaluation tools and processes, and how to use these results for service planning and implementing clinical interventions.

Assessment and treatment of children age birth through five is based on the philosophical orientation that work is done on behalf of the child, predominantly through his/her parent or caregiver(s). Child development takes place within the context of the caregiving relationship, which is strongly influenced by child characteristics, parent/caregiver characteristics, and perhaps most importantly the unique match or “fit” between a child and his/her caregivers. It is important that trained personnel:

1. Have comprehensive knowledge of early childhood development,
2. Possess excellent observational and relationship-building skills with children and adults,

3. Be able to identify resources and needs within the family/caregiving environment, and
4. Communicate assessment results in a comprehensible manner to parents/primary caregivers and other professionals.

For children involved with Department of Child Safety (DCS) who are referred through the Rapid Response process, it is important for the behavioral health provider to consider a full range of services at the time of removal. Multiple AHCCCS policies provide additional information regarding expectations for working with children served by DCS:

- ACOM Policy 417,
- ACOM, Policy 449,
- AMPM Policy 310-B, and the
- AHCCCS Covered Behavioral Health Services Guide

As part of the assessment process, ongoing evaluation of the child after the initial removal is needed to assess the child's physical appearance, areas of functioning, his/her relationships, and adjustment to the new environment. If the child is placed with a different caregiver, re-assess again to monitor the child's adjustment to the new setting. When assessing children involved with DCS who are showing delays which can be due to the trauma of removal, neglect, or abuse, determine if a referral for additional services or any other type of assistance is needed. Refer to Attachment A, Child's Adjustment to Out of Home Placement Template for use with children living in a kinship placement, DCS resource parents (foster or adoptive), or congregate care (shelter or group home). Additional information outlining special considerations for providing services to infants, toddlers and pre-school aged children involved in the child welfare system can be accessed through the Guidance Tool: "The Unique Behavioral Health Service Needs of Children, Youth and Families Involved with DCS". This document is available within the AHCCCS website under Guides - Manuals - Policies.

## **B. EVALUATION**

Evaluation practices with respect to children age birth through five involve awareness on the part of the behavioral health practitioner that all children have their own individual developmental progression, affective, cognitive, language, motor, sensory and interactive patterns. All children age birth through five are participants in relationships, their most significant relationships being those with their primary caregiver(s). A full evaluation requires a clear understanding of how the child is developing in each area of functioning and the quality of his/her most significant relationships. This is best done over several sessions and whenever possible with all significant caregivers, and in different settings (e.g., home, child care, clinic). In order to support a child in demonstrating his/her true capacities, screening and assessment processes are best done in natural and non-threatening settings, in the presence of a familiar and trusted caregiver, with materials and activities that are culturally sensitive and reflect their daily life experiences. Identification of all significant caregivers and the child's relationship with each person is a critical part of assessment practice.

## 1. Developmental Screening

Screening for sensory, behavioral and developmental concerns initially begins an ongoing process that organizes continuous observations regarding the needs, challenges, strengths and abilities of the child and parent/caregiver. Screening or testing instruments become part of comprehensive assessment practice, are intended to be used for the specified purpose they were designed for, shall be reliable and valid, and are not to be used in isolation to render a diagnosis.

The use of Attachment B, Developmental Checklist for Children Age Birth Through Five, provides assessors and caregivers with a set of dimensional milestones (e.g., movement, visual, hearing, smell, touch, speech, social and emotional, language, cognitive, hand and finger skills), as well as growth and developmental “red flags”. As part of the assessment process for infants and young children, developmental checklists establish a baseline to which subsequent screenings during the course of treatment can be compared. Developmental checklists provide opportunities to assess the degree to which children are meeting developmental milestones. Should there be delays in meeting standard developmental milestones, it may be necessary to refer to the child’s PCP for further evaluation. For children birth to three, a referral to Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) may be warranted; for children three to five, a referral to the public school system may be more appropriate. Multiple developmental screening tools are available. Some are suggested directly within this document and others are provided as attachments. These tools are available on the AHCCCS website under Guides - Manuals – Policies.

## 2. Assessment Considerations

It is essential that behavioral health practitioners continually evaluate their screening and assessment tools because the practice of infant and early childhood behavioral health is dynamic and continually changes due to improved technology and newly developed research techniques, strategies and results. While AHCCCS does not require the use of a specific assessment tool, minimum elements have been established that shall be included in any comprehensive behavioral health assessment as outlined in AMPM Policy 320-O, (refer to Attachment C), as one example of an assessment tool for children age birth through five).

There is no single tool that encompasses the full range of social, emotional and developmental skills and challenges that can occur in young children. The following tools and resources can provide additional information when assessing developmental milestones, behavioral, emotional and social concerns, trauma and attachment:

- a. Attachment D: descriptive analysis of behavior,
- b. Ages and Stages Questionnaire<sup>xxv</sup> (ASQ): developmental and social-emotional screening for children age one month to five and ½ years,

- c. Hawaii Early Learning Profile<sup>xxvi</sup> (HELP): curriculum-based assessment covering regulatory/sensory organization, cognitive, language, gross and fine motor, social and self-help areas for children birth to three years, separate profile available for three to six year olds,
- d. Infant-Toddler Social-Emotional Assessment<sup>xxvii</sup> (ITSEA): measures social-emotional and behavioral domains for children one to three years of age,
- e. Connor's Early Childhood Assessment:<sup>xxviii</sup> aids in the early identification of behavioral, social and emotional concerns and achievement of developmental milestones for children two to six years of age,
- f. Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status<sup>xxix</sup> (PEDS): evidence-based screening of developmental and behavioral concerns for children birth to eight years, and
- g. Trauma-Attachment Belief Scales<sup>xxx</sup> (TABS<sup>TM</sup>): measure cognitive beliefs about self and others for parents/caregivers age 17 and older to assist with identifying possible trauma history and its potential impact on the attachment relationship between the parent/caregiver and the child.

Considerable skill is required in the administration of the assessment process, integration of the data obtained from the assessment, and development of initial clinical conceptualizations and intervention recommendations. Refer to Technical Assistance Paper No. 4, "Developmental Screening, Assessment, and Evaluation: Key Elements for Individualizing Curricula in Early Head Start Programs" for further information on other resources and test reviews of screening and assessment instruments.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Assessment with children age birth through five is a specialty area that requires specific competencies. Competent providers recognize the limitations of their knowledge and scope of practice. When necessary, they make use of the expertise of more experienced behavioral health practitioners, as well as the range of disciplines that address questions related to early development (e.g., pediatrics, speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, etc.) through collaboration, consultation, and referral practices.

Behavioral health practitioners shall demonstrate competence for the services they provide. Reference AMPM Policy 950, for further information on requirements for validating that relevant training, experience, qualifications and ongoing competence has been demonstrated by practitioners who provide behavioral health services to infants, young children and their families. The Behavioral Health Services Guide and AMPM Policy 320-O provide additional information on the types of behavioral health providers that may conduct assessments.



Assessment practice with children age birth through five typically involves:

- a. Interviewing the parent/primary caregiver(s) about the child's birth, developmental and medical histories,
- b. Direct observation of family functioning,
- c. Gaining information, through direct observation and report, about the child's individual characteristics, language, cognition and affective expression,
- d. Assessment of sensory reactivity and processing, motor tone, and motor planning capacities,<sup>xxxii</sup>
- e. Observation of how the child uses the primary caregiving relationship to develop a sense of safety and security, to support exploration/learning, and to help regulate emotions,
- f. Obtaining information on how the child and parent/caregiver think and feel about each other and themselves within the context of the relationship, and
- g. Interviewing the parent/primary caregiver(s) with respect to their own history and experiences (e.g., medical, behavioral health, parenting, legal, educational, domestic violence, military, etc.).

### 3. Diagnostic Considerations

The diagnostic process consists of two aspects: the classification of disorders and the assessment of individuals. In classifying disorders practitioners are able to communicate with one another about descriptive syndromes using universal terms and language. The diagnostic process is ongoing rather than a onetime "snapshot" of symptoms. Behavioral health practitioners collect information over time in order to understand multiple aspects of the presenting concerns, as well as variations in adaptation and development that are revealed on different occasions within various contexts.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

It is suggested that clinical personnel who conduct assessments of young children receive training to become proficient in the use of the Diagnostic Classification of Behavioral health and Developmental Disorders in Infancy and Early Childhood (DC: 0-5). This diagnostic manual, which draws on empirical research and clinical practice that has occurred worldwide since the manual was first published in 1994 as the DC: 0-3, and revised in 2016. The DC: 0-5 is designed to help behavioral health and other professionals recognize behavioral health and developmental challenges in young children, understand how relationships and environmental factors contribute to behavioral health and developmental disorders, use diagnostic criteria effectively for classification and intervention, and work more effectively with parents and other professionals to develop effective service plans. The updated version provides clear and specific criteria for all diagnostic categories. Examples include:

- criteria for identifying Autism Spectrum Disorders in children as young as 2, introduces,
- new criteria for disorders of sleep, eating, relating and communicating,
- clarifies the Parent-Infant Relationship Global Assessment Scale (PIRGAS), and

- checklists for identifying relationship problems, psychosocial and environmental stressors.

Copies of the *DC: 0-5* manual are available through the Zero to Three Press.<sup>xxxiv</sup> This manual contains the DC: 0-5 codes that correspond to DSM-5 codes, as well as THE ICD-10 codes.

#### 4. Annual Assessment Update

While assessment is an ongoing process that offers new information throughout the continuum of service delivery, a formal assessment update shall be completed on an annual basis, or sooner, if there has been a significant change in the child's/family's status. A child's response to treatment might be affected by significant events or trauma that have occurred since the last assessment/update, such as changes in the child's living environment, childcare arrangements, death of a primary caregiver, as well as medical/developmental conditions and hospitalizations. Input from the family/caregiver, as well as observation(s) of the child in conjunction with a review of the clinical record provides information necessary for summarizing their response to treatment and progress toward meeting goals over the past year.

A review of the child's current level of functioning would include updating information related to the child's emotional and behavioral regulation, quality of the parent-child interaction, relationships with caregivers/significant others, living environment, family stressors, safety concerns, and stability of home/relationships. Developmental screening as part of the annual update, and during the course of treatment, will assist the behavioral health provider with identifying any potential developmental concerns that may require additional intervention or referral. The demographic data set is also updated when assessment updates are done whether it is an annual or changed status update.

### C. SERVICE PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

#### 1. Use of CFT Practice

The early development of an engaged relationship with the child, parent/caregiver, and family as part of the CFT process is required practice when working with children age birth through five, as the work directly involves the entire family and the family guides the therapeutic process. Please refer to the Child and Family Team Practice Tool on the AHCCCS website under Guides - Manuals - Policies, for additional information on the specific components and the required service expectations of this practice model.

Infants and young children benefit from planning processes that support the inclusion of the following components:

- a. Ongoing and nurturing relationships to one or two deeply attached individuals,

- b. Physical protection, safety and regulation at all times,
- c. Experiences suited to individual differences to include regular one-to-one interaction between the caregiver and the child,
- d. Developmentally appropriate experiences (e.g., one-to-one interaction that encourages an emotional dialogue that fosters a sense of self, problem solving, communication skills and a sense of purpose),
- e. Limit setting, structure and expectations (e.g., clear messages and routines), and
- f. Stable, supportive communities and cultural continuity which can be met through solid relationships between the child and one or two primary caregivers.

Families with young children are often socially isolated especially if they have a child who is exhibiting behavioral concerns and/or developmental delays. An essential part of the therapeutic process is to help reduce this social isolation. Encouraging the exploration of natural supports can spur a family to begin thinking differently about their support system(s).

Whenever possible, the utilization of natural environments for clinical intervention is recommended. If the natural environment is not a conducive setting due to a lack of privacy, site of traumatic event for the child/parent and/or safety concerns, alternative settings need to be considered with input from the family. In addition to location, natural environments also include the everyday routines, relationships, activities, people and places in the lives of the child and family.<sup>xxxv</sup>

## 2. Community Collaboration

Starting with the assessment process, intervention strategies include information from all involved providers serving the child, parent, or caregiver, such as healthcare, childcare and early intervention providers, the parent's/caregiver's behavioral health provider(s), as well as friends and extended family who are important in the family's life. Examples of several early intervention providers include Head Start/Early Head Start, the Arizona Early Intervention Program, Early Childhood Education through the Arizona Department of Education, and the Division of Developmental Disabilities. These individuals, if the parent/caregiver wishes, then become part of the Child and Family Team who will develop an effective service plan that employs natural supports in conjunction with formalized services (See "Child and Family Team Practice Tool" on the AHCCCS website under Guides - Manuals – Policies.). The size, scope and intensity of involvement of the team members are determined by the objectives established for the child and the needs of the family in providing for the child.

In order to make informed referrals as part of the service planning process it is imperative that behavioral health professionals and technicians (BHPs & BHTs) who work with children age birth through five and their families, become familiar with community services and programs that serve young children, as well as the local school district programs for children three to five years of age. At minimum, BHPs

and BHTs should have familiarity with AzEIP, Head Start, Division of Developmental Disabilities, ADHS Office of Children with Special Health Care Needs, First Things First, and school district services that may be available for children eligible for preschool.

If at any time throughout the assessment, treatment delivery, or service planning processes a behavioral health practitioner believes that a child is or has been the victim of non-accidental physical injury, abuse, sexual abuse or deprivation, there is a duty to report that belief to a peace officer or Department of Child Safety per A.R.S. §13-3620. Behavioral health staff is to consult with their supervisor if they are unclear about their duty to report a situation.

Duplicative medication prescribing, contraindicated combinations of prescriptions and/or incompatible treatment approaches could be detrimental to a young child. For this reason, communication and coordination of care between behavioral health providers and PCPs shall occur on a regular basis to ensure safety and positive clinical outcomes for young children receiving care. For non-enrolled children who are not Medicaid eligible, coordination and communication should occur with any known health care provider. Refer to the “Psychiatric and Psychotherapeutic Best Practice for Children Birth through Five Years of Age” on the AHCCCS website under Guides - Manuals – Policies for additional information on the use and coordination of psychotherapeutic and psychopharmacological interventions.

Documentation in the clinical record is required to show the communication and coordination of care efforts with the health care provider related to the child’s behavioral health treatment (refer to AMPM Policy 560 for further information).

#### **D. SERVICE PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

While a comprehensive and accurate assessment forms the foundation for effective service planning and is required before a service plan can be fully developed, needed services should not be delayed while the initial assessment process is being completed. In addition to consideration of clinical disorders, findings from a comprehensive assessment of children birth through five years of age should lead to preliminary ideas about:

- The nature of the child’s pattern of strengths and difficulties, risk and protective factors,
- Level of overall adaptive capacity and functioning in the major developmental areas as compared to age-expected developmental patterns,
- Contribution of family relationships, environmental protective factors, stress, interactive and maturational patterns, etc. to the child’s competencies and difficulties, and
- How the service planning process will address these areas.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Service plans should be strength-based in addressing needs and whenever possible draw upon natural supports. For young children, home-based services, which virtually always

include the child's principal caregiver, may be especially well-suited to enhancing parents' well-being and the child-parent relationship.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

A comprehensive and intensive approach to service planning would include attention to those factors that place young children's healthy attachment and social-emotional development at risk. Critical planning includes interventions that address a parent's/caregiver's behavioral health concerns and how these may affect the ability of that parent/caregiver to interact and respond sensitively to his/her child's emotional and physical needs. Prematurity, low birth weight and conditions associated with prenatal substance exposure may require specific interventions when they affect the early social and emotional development of infants and toddlers.

Service planning also needs to address a child's ability to form close parent/caregiver relationships. These relationships can be undermined by traumatic events such as repeated exposure to violence, abuse or neglect, or when children experience multiple caregiver changes. When the child/family has multi-agency involvement, every effort should be made to collectively develop a single, unified plan that addresses the needs and mandates of all the parties involved. Additionally, planning would address collaboration with early intervention service providers and early education programs especially for those children who are experiencing expulsion from childcare or preschool settings due to behavioral concerns.

The use of all service settings, the full array of covered services, and skilled and experienced providers are to be considered as indicated by the Child and Family Team during the service planning process. Service planning that includes the use of Support and Rehabilitative Services is often an essential part of community-based practice and culturally competent care, which focuses on helping young children to live successfully with their families as part of their community. For guidance on how to integrate these types of services with CFT practice to enhance behavioral health outcomes for birth through five children and their families, a Practice Tool, Support and Rehabilitation Services for Children, Adolescents and Young Adults Practice Tool is available on the AHCCCS website under Guides - Manuals – Policies.

All service plan development with children age birth through five is completed collaboratively with the child's parent or primary caregiver. Development and prioritization of service plan goals are not focused solely on the child, but include the parent, caregiver and the needs of the family as a whole. Due to the age of the birth through five population and the rapid changes in the growth and development of children during this time, monitoring activities need to include frequent reviews of the service plan goals and objectives. At the time of the Annual Update, the service plan is modified to align with the needs identified in the updated Assessment. Refer to AMPM Policy 320-O for further information on the minimum elements of a service plan and required timeframes for completion.

## 1. Clinical Practice

The guiding principle in the practice of infant and early childhood behavioral health is to “do no harm”. Clinical intervention assumes a preventative, early intervention treatment focus is based on sound clinical practice, delivered in a timely manner across all settings, and is implemented in accordance with the Arizona Vision and 12 Principles. Relationship-based models of intervention have been found to be the most effective in working with young children and their caregivers.

- a. Infant and early childhood therapeutic approaches are supported by the following conceptual premises:<sup>xxxviii</sup>
  - i. The child’s attachment relationships are the main organizer of his/her responses to danger and safety in the first five years of life,
  - ii. Emotional and behavioral problems in early childhood are best addressed within the context of the child’s primary attachment relationships, and
  - iii. Promoting growth in the child-caregiver relationship supports healthy development of the child after the intervention ends.
- b. The following skills and strategies are fundamental to the work of infant and early childhood behavioral health:
  - i. “Building relationships and using them as instruments of change,
  - ii. Meeting with the infant and parent/caregiver together throughout the period of intervention,
  - iii. Sharing in the observation of the infant’s growth and development,
  - iv. Offering anticipatory guidance to the parent/caregiver that is specific to the infant,
  - v. Alerting the parent/caregiver to the infant’s individual accomplishments and needs,
  - vi. Helping the parent/caregiver to find pleasure in the relationship with the infant,
  - vii. Creating opportunities for interaction and exchange between parent/caregiver(s) and infant or parent/caregiver(s) and practitioner,
  - viii. Allowing the parent/caregiver to take the lead in interacting with the infant or determining the ‘agenda’ or ‘topic for discussion’,
  - ix. Identifying and enhancing the capacities that each parent/caregiver brings to the care of the infant,
  - x. Wondering about the parent/caregiver’s thoughts and feelings related to the presence and care of the infant and the changing responsibilities of parenthood,
  - xi. Wondering about the infant’s experiences and feelings in interaction with and relationship to the caregiving parent,
  - xii. Listening for the past as it is expressed in the present, inquiring and talking,
  - xiii. Allowing core relational conflicts and emotions to be expressed by the parent/caregiver; holding, containing and talking about them as the parent is able,

- xiv. Attending and responding to parental histories of abandonment, separation and unresolved loss as they affect the care of the infant’s development, the parent/caregiver’s emotional health and the early developing relationship,
- xv. Attending and responding to the infant’s history and early care within the developing parent/caregiver-infant relationship,
- xvi. Identifying, treating and/or collaborating with others if needed, in the treatment of the disorders of infancy, delays and disabilities, parental mental illness and family dysfunction, and
- xvii. Remaining open, curious and reflective.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

While all the skills and strategies noted above are pertinent in working with children and families, item “xi” through “xvii” are of unique importance to the practice of the infant and early childhood behavioral health practitioner. These seven strategies address the emotional health and development of both the parent/caregiver and the child. The practitioner focuses on past and present relationships and the complexities many parents/caregivers encounter when nurturing, protecting, and responding to the emotional needs of their children. Within this context, the practitioner and parent/caregiver may think deeply about the care of the young child, the emotional health of the parent/caregiver, the many challenges of early parenthood, and the possibilities for growth and change.<sup>xl</sup>

## 2. Clinical Approaches

Information obtained through the assessment process will guide infant and early childhood trained practitioners in determining which intervention(s) is most conducive in meeting the needs of the young child and his/her family. More than one approach may be utilized and integrated into the service plan.

Support is the most basic intervention, where behavioral health personnel function as a resource to assist primary caregivers in accessing community resources, such as housing, employment, child care, health services and food. Emotional support may also be provided to families when they are faced with a crisis related to the care of their child(ren). This support can be shown by the clinician’s attention to the expressed concerns of the caregiver, acknowledgement of the caregiver’s needs and strengths, and showing empathy in response to the situation. Support and Rehabilitation services can also assist with reducing the family’s distress so that they are able to focus on the care requirements of their young child.

Advocacy can take the form of helping caregivers find their voice in expressing their needs and navigating systems of care. It can be challenging for clinicians to know when and how to speak effectively on behalf of young children and their families, especially those who may be involved with the child welfare system.

Developmental Guidance provides information to the primary caregiver(s) on a young child’s abilities, developmental milestones and needs, as well as practical caretaking

guidance that may be delivered individually or in a group format. The clinician can offer the caregiver opportunities to strengthen positive interaction and playful exchange with his/her child within a therapeutic environment. These exchanges reinforce what the caregiver is able to do with his/her child that promotes a mutually pleasurable experience and purposeful response.

Relational Guidance helps primary caregivers to increase their knowledge of and experience with their infant or young child through spontaneous interactions. Caregivers are taught how to attend to their child's distinctive cues with clinicians modeling parenting behavior. When using guided interaction strategies, clinicians can then provide feedback directly or can review videotapes with the caregiver.

The following two approaches to therapy focus on the relationship between the primary caregiver and the infant. Child-parent psychotherapy offers the opportunity for thoughtful exploration with the caregiver of his/her ideas about parenthood and the continuing needs of the infant or toddler. The clinician assists the primary caregiver in gaining access to repressed early experiences, re-experiencing the feelings associated with them and achieving insight into how these experiences may affect the caregiver's capacity to be responsive to his/her infant. Relational difficulties with his/her infant may take the form of a caregiver's inability to hold or feed his/her baby, set limits that are appropriate in keeping young children safe, or interacting in ways that will arouse the child's curiosity. The infant is included as a catalyst for change, with the clinician guiding the caregiver to interact in a different way with his/her infant. A second approach, child-parent dyadic therapy, reflects the perspective that infants contribute to relationships and holds that the infant is able to use the time therapeutically for him/herself, same as the caregiver.

Several approaches incorporate and utilize an internal working models construct. This concept of self in relation to others is set down throughout life and unconsciously guides and filters attention and processing of experiences with regard to attachment and can impact the course of future relationships. Interventions based on this construct are consistent with attachment theory if they include the following elements:

- a. Provide emotional and physical access to the mother/caregiver,
- b. Focus directly on maternal/caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness to the infant's behavior and emotional signals,
- c. Place the mother/caregiver in a non-intrusive stance,
- d. Provide space in which the infant can work through relational struggles through play and interaction with the mother/caregiver, and
- e. Provide a clinician who functions as a secure base for the dyad.

Developmental approaches to therapy offer an alternative to the traditional behavioral approach. Modalities under this approach can provide a framework for understanding and organizing assessment and intervention strategies when working with children with developmental delays and behavioral health concerns.



Reference materials on infant and early childhood behavioral health practice have been provided as a supplemental resource. This resource list is not meant to be exhaustive as research and clinical practice in this area continue to evolve.

#### **E. TRAINING AND SUPERVISION RECOMMENDATIONS**

Behavioral Health over the past several decades, there have been significant advances in the understanding of early child development and the effects of trauma on early brain development. The need to have providers with trained expertise in this area has risen dramatically and is well recognized nationally and in Arizona. AHCCCS is focused on efforts in several areas to build workforce expertise and availability of services to children age birth through five and their families.

#### **F. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The Infant and Toddler Behavioral health Coalition of Arizona (ITMHCA) has adopted the Michigan Association for Infant Behavioral health Endorsement<sup>®</sup> for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Based Practice Promoting Infant Behavioral health. Endorsement<sup>®</sup> recognizes the professional development of practitioners within the diverse and rapidly expanding infant and family field. This endorsement<sup>®</sup> model describes the areas of expertise, responsibilities, and behaviors that demonstrate competency and verifies that professionals have attained a specified level of understanding and functioning linked to the promotion of infant behavioral health. Of additional importance, endorsement provides an organized approach to workforce development that identifies competency-based trainings and reflective supervision experiences that enhance confidence and credibility among infant, toddler and family clinicians (Behavioral Health Professionals), as well as other professionals who work with this population (Behavioral Health Technicians/Behavioral Health Paraprofessionals). While competency-based training and reflective supervision supports behavioral health practitioners who work primarily with young children and their families, this expertise may also be applied to professionals working with adults with a serious mental illness or substance use concerns who are parenting their own infants/toddlers.

It is recommended that provider agencies have practitioners endorsed as appropriate to the mission of the agency. Endorsement<sup>®</sup> through the ITMHCA includes four levels of competency:<sup>xli</sup>

1. Level 1: Infant Family Associate- Individuals who possess a CDA or any academic degree, two years of infant and early childhood-related paid work experience; recommended for childcare or respite workers.
2. Level 2: Infant Family Specialist- Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral (e.g. Social Work, "Applied" studies, nursing, behavioral health related) degree and a minimum of two years' work related experience with infants/toddlers and families; recommended for

- behavioral health staff involved in service planning and delivery such as case management and peer/family support, support and rehabilitation service provider personnel, parent educators, childcare consultants, and Department of Child Safety workers.
3. Level 3: Infant Behavioral health Specialist- Masters, MSN (Nursing), PhD, PsyD, EdD, M.D. or D.O. with two years post-graduate work and training in infant, early childhood and family fields; recommended for behavioral health clinicians and supervisors, infant behavioral health specialists, clinical nurse practitioners, psychologists, and early intervention specialists. Reflective Supervision is required.
  4. Level 4: Infant Behavioral health Mentor (Clinical, Policy, or Research/Faculty)- Individuals at the mastery level (Master's, Post Graduate, Doctorate, Post Doctorate or MD) qualified to train other professionals; recommended for infant and early childhood program supervisors, administrators, policy specialists, and physicians/psychiatrists.<sup>xlii</sup>

Endorsement information and application materials are available through the local Infant Toddler Behavioral health website: Infant Toddler Behavioral health Coalition of Arizona ([www.itmhca.org](http://www.itmhca.org)).

## **G. TRAINING**

This Practice Tool applies to Contractors and RBHAs, and their subcontracted network and provider agencies, including the behavioral health staff that provide direct service delivery to children age birth through five and their families. However, behavioral health practitioners working with this population require specialized training. Professional development in the area of infant and early childhood behavioral health is necessary at all levels of the behavioral health system, along with the personnel of service systems that interface with behavioral health professionals, such as Department of Child Safety, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) and other community-based early intervention programs.

Behavioral health practitioners seeking increased knowledge in this area are encouraged to attend infant and early childhood behavioral health trainings that include:

1. A multidisciplinary approach that is strengths-based,
2. Effective interviewing and observational techniques,
3. Assessment of parent-infant relationships,
4. Screening and diagnostic measures for infants and toddlers,
5. Early childhood development,

6. Effects of early adverse experiences and trauma,
7. Understanding parent-child interactions and healthy attachment,
8. Cultural influences in parenting and family development,
9. Building a therapeutic alliance,
10. Treatment and intervention strategies/modalities endorsed by AHCCCS,
11. Collaboration practices with other providers/caregivers, and
12. A reflective practice focus.

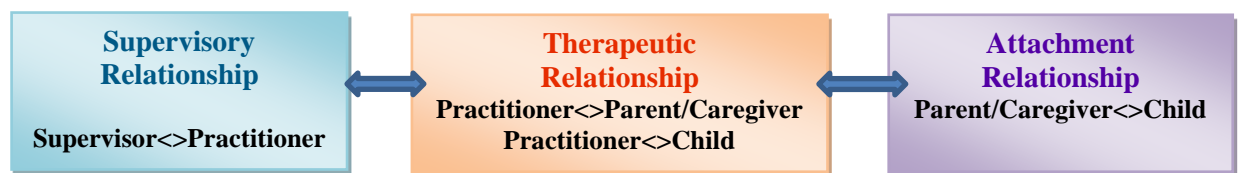
It is the expectation of AHCCCS that behavioral health staff who complete assessments, participate in the service planning process, provide therapy, case management and other clinical services, or supervise staff that provide service delivery to children age birth through five and their families be well trained and clinically supervised in the application of this tool. Each Contractor and RBHA shall establish their own process for ensuring that all agency clinical and support services staff working with this population understand the recommended processes and procedures contained in this tool. Whenever this Practice Tool is updated or revised, each Contractor and RBHA ensures that their subcontracted network and provider agencies are notified and required staff are retrained as necessary on the changes.

**H. SUPERVISION**

Supervision regarding implementation of this Practice Tool is to be incorporated into other supervision processes which the Contractor or RBHA and their subcontracted network and provider agencies have in place for direct care clinical staff, in alignment with A.A.C. R9-20-205 Clinical Supervision requirements.

Reflective Supervision, as one aspect of Reflective Practice, is a distinctive style of professional development that focuses attention on supporting the growth of relationships that are critical to effective infant and early childhood behavioral health practice. How each of these relationships interrelates and influences the others is explored through reflective supervision and is referred to as the “parallel process” (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1**



In each of these relationships there is an emphasis on learning, personal growth, and empathy. Through supervision, supervisors assist practitioners in professional skill development and ensure that practitioners are maintaining the agency's standards for clinical performance.<sup>xliii</sup>

Key elements of reflective supervision include reflection, collaboration, and consistency. With supervisory support, the practitioner reflects on the emotional content of the work and how one's reaction to this content affects his/her work. Supervisors support a practitioner's professional development through the acquisition of new knowledge by encouraging the supervisee to assess his/her own performance. The supervisor's ability to listen and wait allows the practitioner an opportunity to analyze his/her own work and its implications, and to discover solutions, concepts or perceptions on one's own without interruption. Collaborative supervision is characterized by the development of a trusting relationship between the supervisor and practitioner in which both parties can safely communicate ideas and share responsibility for decision-making without fear of judgment. Establishment of a consistent and predictable schedule of supervisory sessions supports the professional development of infant and early childhood behavioral health practitioners.

It is the recommendation of AHCCCS that personnel who supervise staff that provide service delivery to children age birth through five and their families, receive adequate training in the elements of Reflective Practice and Supervision before implementing this approach in their supervisory activities. Criteria for provision of reflective practice is outlined on the Michigan Infant Toddler Behavioral health<sup>xliv</sup> website, but at minimum, Reflective Supervision requires Endorsement<sup>®</sup> Infant Behavioral health Specialist or Infant Behavioral health Mentor with a minimum of 50 clock hours within a one to two year timeframe. Additional information is also available within Attachment E, Recommended Resources, for additional resource materials on reflective supervision and consultative practices.

Training and supervision support the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills, and competencies critical to delivering effective relationship-based services to children age birth through five and their families. While training and other academic learning venues build the practitioner's understanding of core concepts, it is through supervision that practitioners can assess their level of competency when applying these concepts within their scope of practice. When evaluating a practitioner's level of knowledge as part of supervisory activities, supervisors can compare the skills of the clinician with Endorsement<sup>®</sup> Competency Guidelines and Requirements available on either the Arizona<sup>xlv</sup> or Michigan<sup>xlvi</sup> Infant Toddler Behavioral health websites. However, possession of similar knowledge and skills does **not** equate to actual Endorsement<sup>®</sup>, given the proprietary nature of the Endorsement<sup>®</sup> process (e.g. evidence-based training standards, testing, ethical standards).

## **I. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES**

1. Increased community and professional awareness of infant and early childhood behavioral health,
2. Improved use of effective screening, assessment and service planning practices specific to the needs of children age birth through five and their families,
3. Increased knowledge and referrals to early intervention resources in the community, and
4. Improved outcomes through the use of accepted approaches in working with children age birth through five and their caregivers.

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