

## Mental Health Issues in Young Children

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### Developmental Framework

Age	Stage of Development	Behaviors
0 to 12 months	Attachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Regulation</li> <li>•Recognizable states</li> <li>•Attachment</li> <li>•Communication</li> </ul>
12 to 30 months	Autonomy and Self Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Differentiates between self and others; real and make believe</li> <li>•Use of pronouns</li> <li>•Exploration</li> <li>•Self control; rules</li> </ul>
30 months to 7 years	Establishing Peer Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Empathy</li> <li>•Gender differences</li> <li>•Identification of friends</li> <li>•Interest in other children</li> </ul>

Behavioral Areas	Definition
<b>Self-Regulation</b>	Ability/willingness to calm, settle, or adjust to physiological or environmental conditions
<b>Compliance</b>	Ability/willingness to conform to the direction of others and follow rules
<b>Communication</b>	Verbal/nonverbal signals that indicate feelings, affect, internal states
<b>Adaptive</b>	Ability/success in coping with physiological needs
<b>Autonomy</b>	Ability/willingness to establish independence
<b>Affect</b>	Ability/willingness to demonstrate feelings and empathy for others
<b>Interaction with People</b>	Ability/willingness to respond or initiate social responses with caregivers, adults, peers.

### Major Differences when Assessing Young Children

*“There is no such thing as a baby, there is only a baby and somebody.”* -Donald Winnicott

A child must be assessed and treated in the context of it’s primary relationships.

Information about presenting problems

Subjective and objective reports about the quality of the child’s significant relationships and living environment.

Children are integrated wholes not a collection of traits

- The worse a problem is the more likely it is to affect a range of areas, and to be expressed in a number of ways.

During assessment watch for “loaded language,” parental understanding of the child’s motives, parents’ developmental knowledge and expectations.

- Useful later in formulating and treating the family

Tease apart what the parent and the child bring to the relationship and the interactions that result

The assessment is the beginning of the therapeutic process so it is imperative to “focus on the emerging relationship with the family.” (Hirshberg 1996)

- Creating a working alliance with parents is critical

### **Investigating Presenting Problems**

What are some of the common reasons a young child would present for treatment?

How do we understand the genesis, presence, and maintenance of these problems through our assessment?

How can we adapt current assessment protocols to be able to gather relevant information needed in assessing a child?

### **Developmental History**

Parental reactions to pregnancy and early feelings about parenting. Why is this important?

Temperament and developmental milestones to help in clarifying diagnoses

### **Screening and Assessment Measures**

Ages and Stages Questionnaire Social Emotional

Observational Guides for Symptom Patterns in Young Children

Psychological and Behavioral Development of Children

Preschool Outcome Questionnaire

### **Mental Status Exam/Play Interview**

Appearance

Appearance

Activity level

Social relatedness

Affect/Mood

Attention span/Distractibility

Adaptability

Cooperativeness

Response to challenges/Frustrations

Thought process/Play content

Language

Self confidence

Interactions with Caregiver

Caregivers behavior during the assessment

### **Core Features of ADHD**

Inattention  
Hyperactivity  
Impulsivity

### **Pervasive Developmental Disorders/Autism**

Communication  
Social Interaction  
Stereotyped Behaviors/Interests/Activities

### **Anxiety Disorders**

What are normal fears, anxieties, worries and rituals?  
Separation Anxiety Disorder  
Generalized Anxiety Disorder  
Posttraumatic Stress Disorders

### **Mood Disorders**

Mood  
Interest/Pleasure  
Changes in appetite or weight  
Sleep disturbance  
Psychomotor agitation or retardation  
Fatigue or loss of energy  
Feelings of worthlessness  
Difficulty thinking or concentrating  
Thoughts of death or suicidal ideation