Early Childhood Mental Health and School Readiness

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand research showing relationship between early childhood mental health and school readiness

2. Be able to explain to someone else how to define early childhood mental health and school readiness

3.

4. Identify specific strategies early childhood systems, administrators and educators can use to support children and families to have increased mental health and increased success in school

Recent Data on school readiness

- Just under 2/3 of U.S. Children ages 3-5 were "school ready" in 4 to 5 domains (early learning skills, social emotional development, self-regulation, motor development, and health) based on parent/caregiver report.

- Children with disabilities were least likely to be considered "school ready"

- Other groups less likely to be "ready": home language other than English, lower parental education, lower parental mental health

- Protective factors: Children are 20% to 30% more likely to be "ready" if they attended preschool, lived in neighborhoods with amenities and had access to a "medical home"

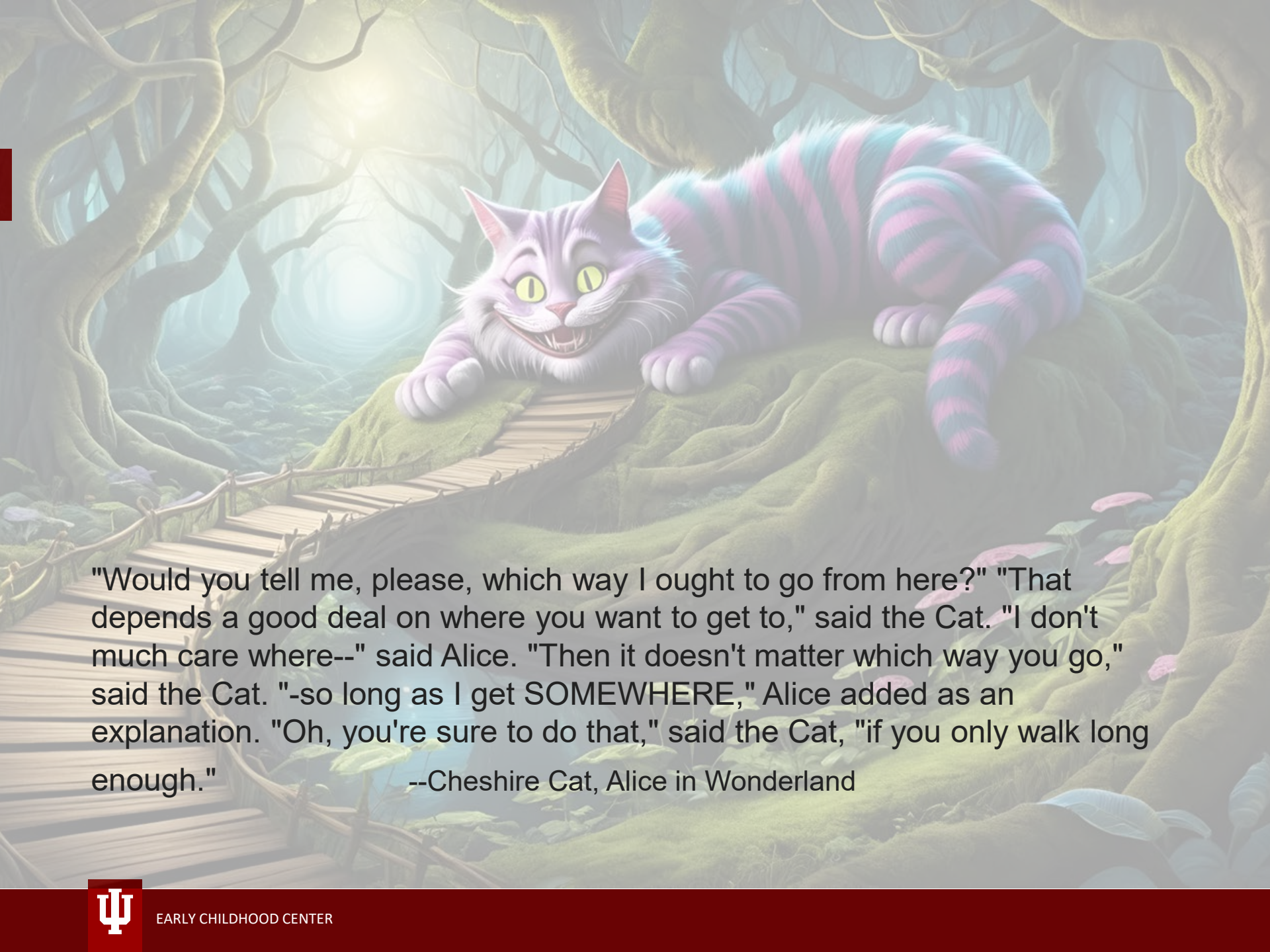- Anything we notice about this definition of school readiness?

School Readiness shouldn't just be about child factors

School Readiness is a three-way street:

- Children ready for school

- Schools ready for children

- Communities ready with services and supports that contribute to school success

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where--" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat. "-so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation. "Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."
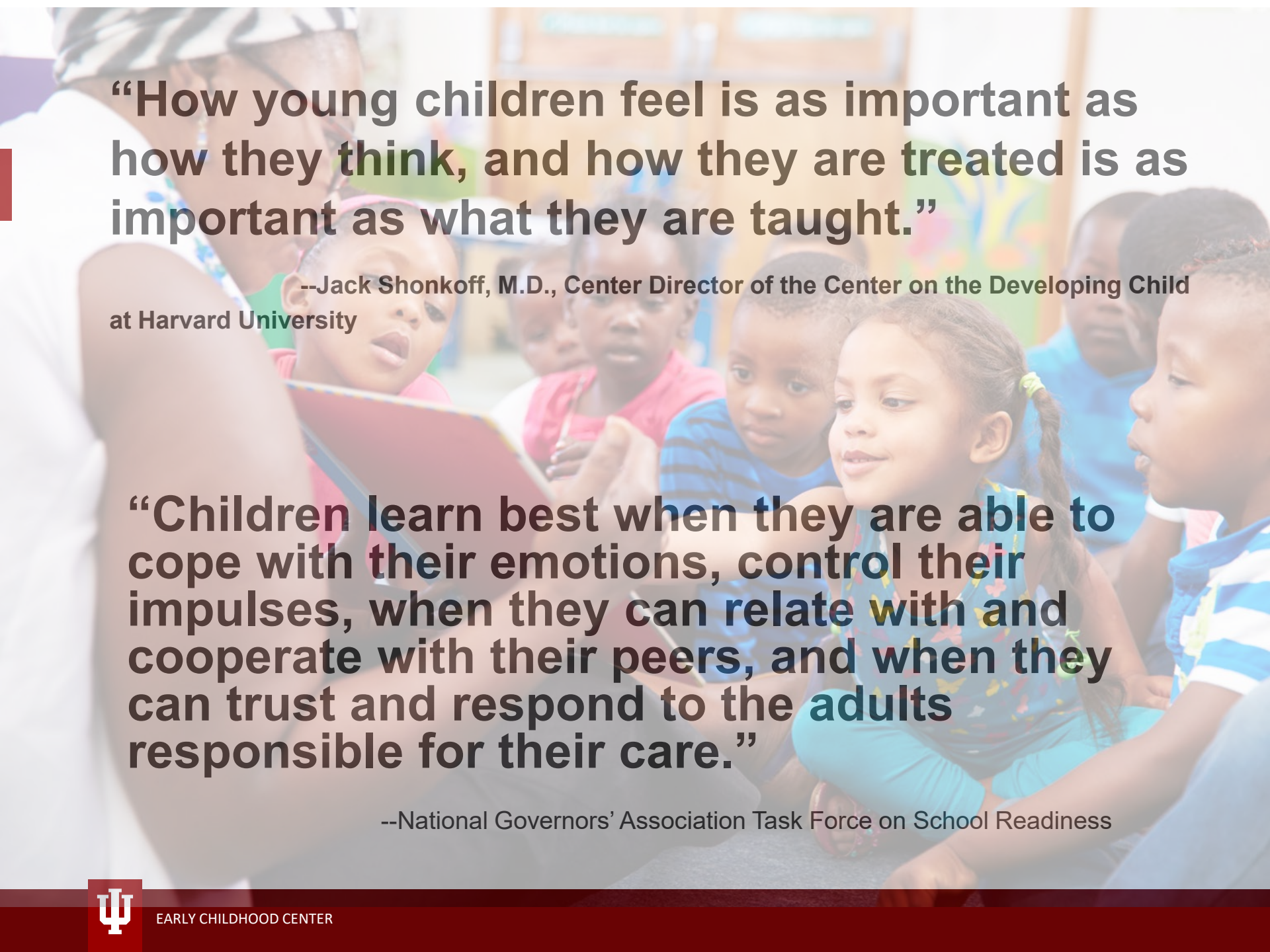
--Cheshire Cat, Alice in Wonderland

Where do we want to get to? What is our long-term goal?

1. We want to support children to become good, productive adults, good citizens, good employees?

2. Big picture: Companies are increasingly automating routine tasks. Humans are needed that can do things like think critically, be empathetic, problem-solve, be assertive, manage relationships, negotiate.

3. 92% of executives (Wall Street survey) said "soft skills" equally or more important than technical skills

4. 91% of a survey of 5000 "talent professionals" said that social emotional skills were more important than any other workplace skill

"How young children feel is as important as how they think, and how they are treated is as important as what they are taught."

--Jack Shonkoff, M.D., Center Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

"Children learn best when they are able to cope with their emotions, control their impulses, when they can relate with and cooperate with their peers, and when they can trust and respond to the adults responsible for their care."

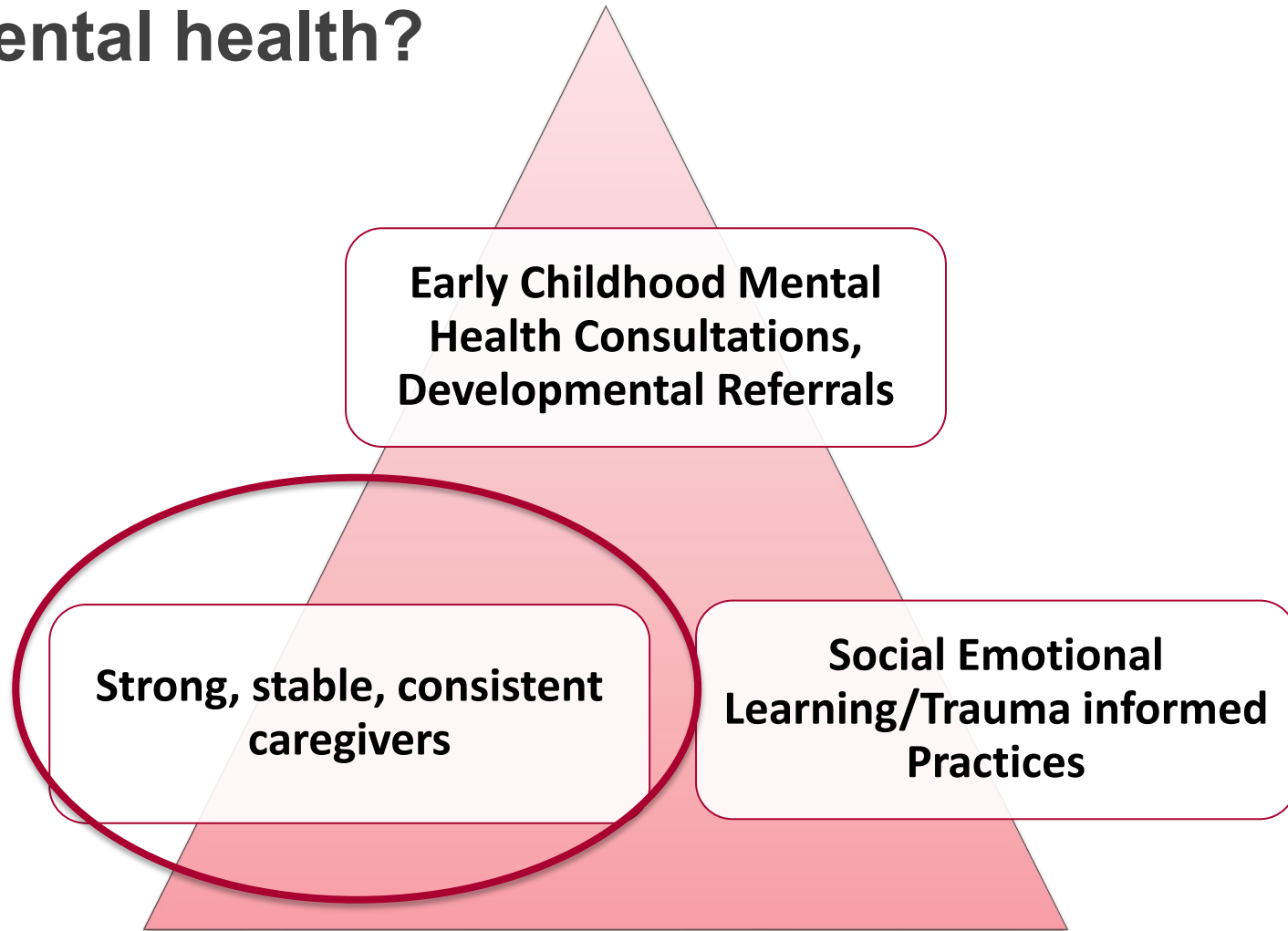--National Governors' Association Task Force on School Readiness

Early Childhood Mental Health Definition:

"Infant Early Childhood Mental Health is the developing capacity of the infant/young child to form close and secure relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture."

–Zero to Three

If school readiness is important and mental health is a key component, how can we support young children to have strong mental health?

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations, Developmental Referrals

Strong, stable, consistent caregivers

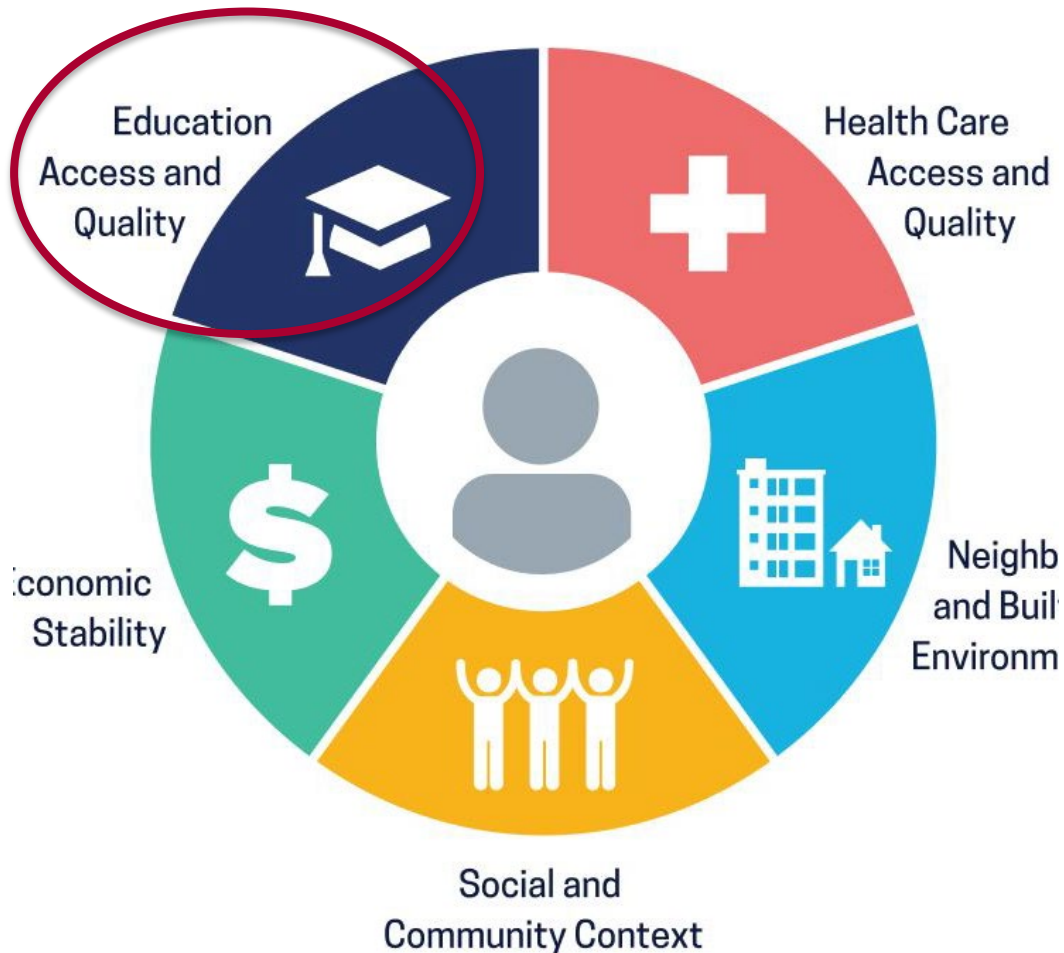**Social Emotional Learning/Trauma informed Practices**

Strong, Stable, Consistent Caregivers

- 30% of adults in IN households with children reported having little interest or pleasure in doing things more than half the days[2]

- 24% of adults in IN households with children reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless[2]

- 32% of IN adults with children in the household report feeling nervous, anxious or on edge more than half the days[2]

- Only 16.8% of IN adults with children received mental health services in the past year[2]

- More than 1.1 million adult Hoosiers experience mental illness every year and 56% of adult Hoosiers with mental illness did not receive treatment in 2022.[18] Untreated mental illness costs IN at least 4.15 billion annually.[18]

- More than half of infants in low-income households live with a mother experiencing some form of depression.[16]

- Childcare-same challenges, add staff turnover

Caregivers need support

Social Determinants of Health

Education Access and Quality

Health Care Access and Quality

Economic Stability

Neighb and Buil Environm

Social and Community Context

Early Childhood Education (ECE) System:

- Reduce turn-over

- Reduce staff stress by paying living wage

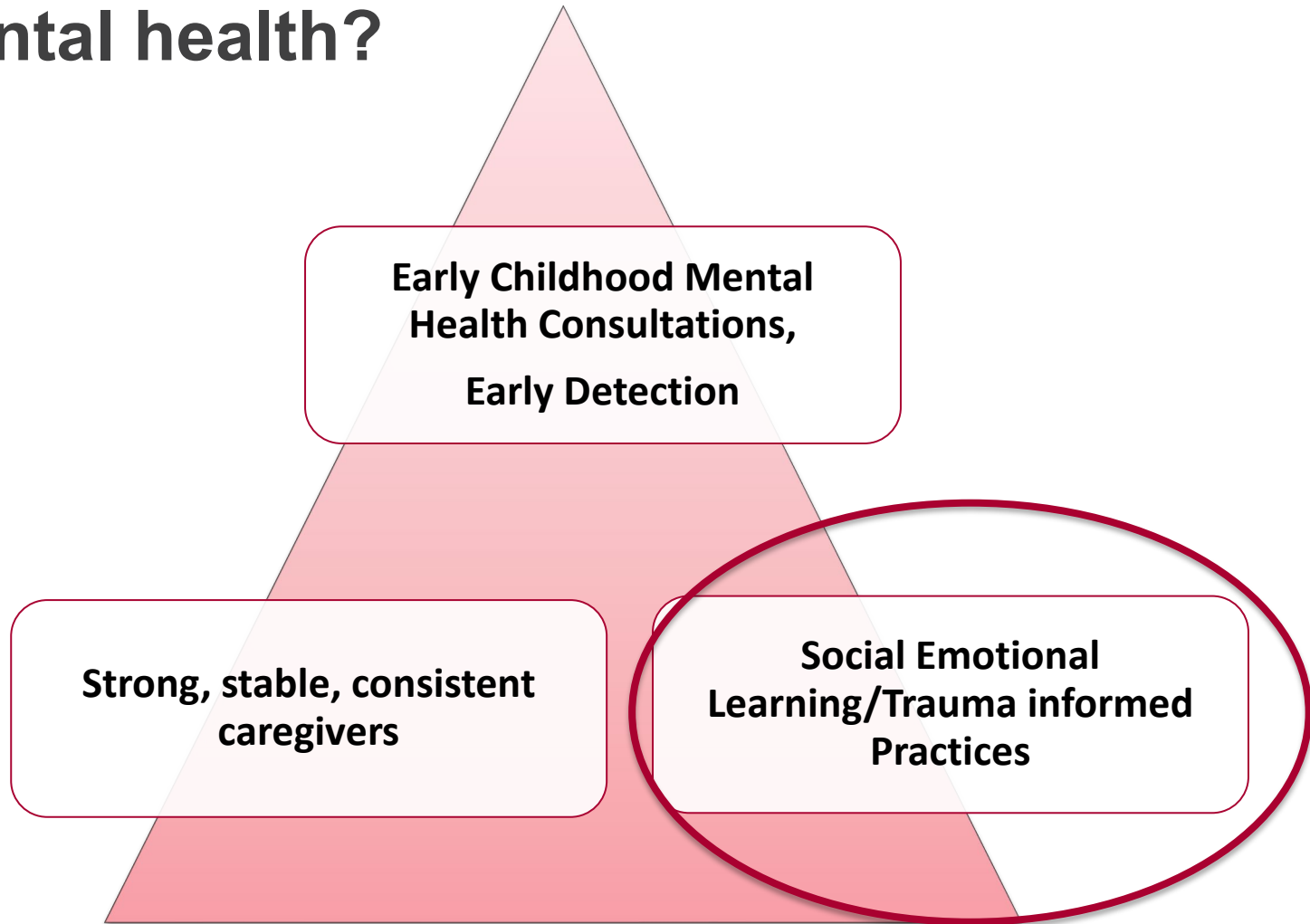- Provide evidence-based professional development on managing behavior

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# If school readiness is important and mental health is a key component, how can we support young children to have strong mental health?

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations,

Early Detection

Strong, stable, consistent caregivers

Social Emotional Learning/Trauma informed Practices

Children must learn to experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions.

- 26% of IN children 3-17 have one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions, compared to 22% nationally.[6]
- 17% of IN parents reported that their child was anxious/clingy[2]
- 12% reported that their child was sad/depressed[2]
- 13% reported a change in their child's ability to focus[2]
- 10% reported more anger/outbursts[2]
- 5% reported more problematic child behavior.[2]
- Behavior concerns from SPARK between 10/1/20 to 12/30/22 make up 24% of all referrals.[7]
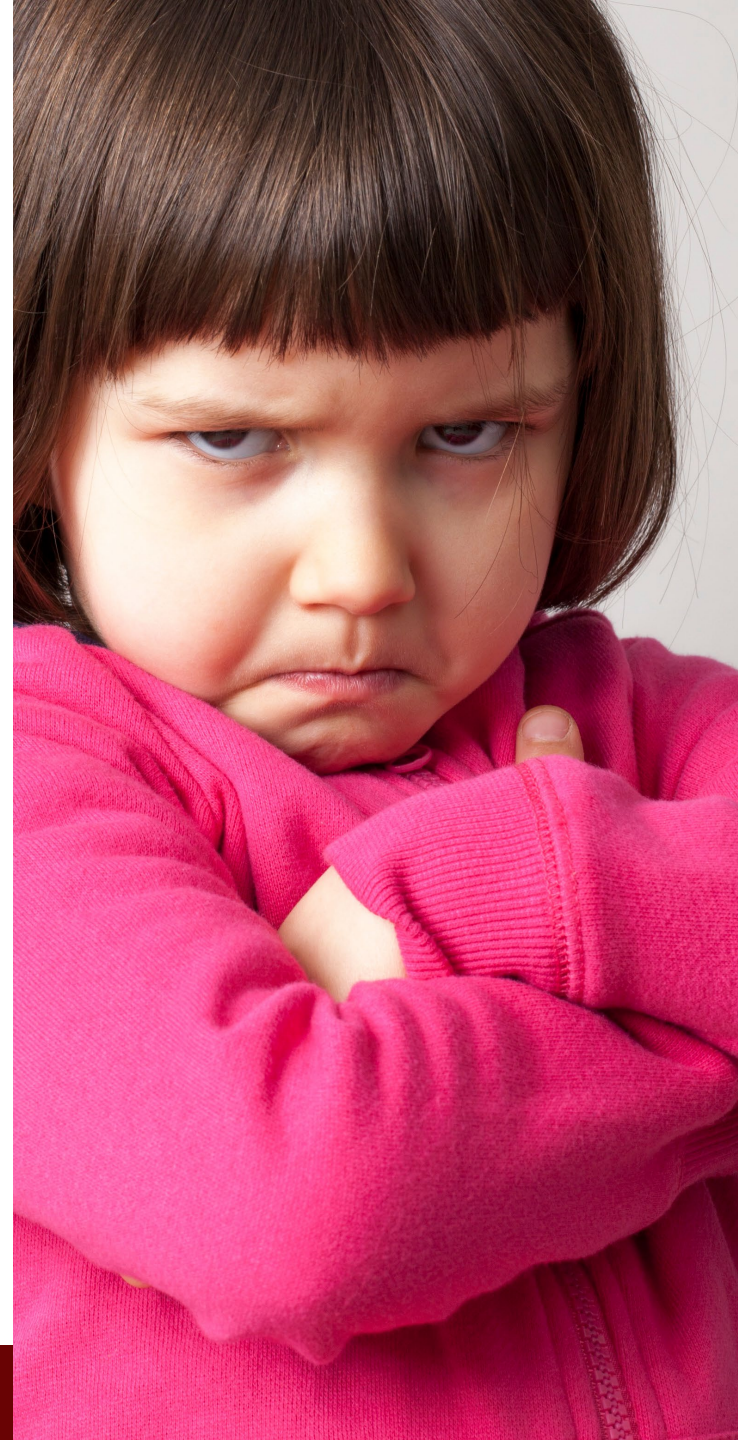
How does social emotional learning (SEL) help children succeed in school?.

1. SEL can cultivate "protective factors" that buffer against mental health risks.

- Participation in SEL programs is linked to decreased emotional distress, enhanced emotion identification, and fewer externalizing behaviors and discipline problems.

2. Students who engage in SEL programs see consistent improvements in social and emotional skills, and stronger social and emotional skills contribute to positive lifetime outcomes up to 18 years later. Students with stronger social and emotional skills are more likely to reach milestones including:

- High school graduation

- Postsecondary enrollment and completion

- Stable, full-time employment

3. SEL benefits adults, too: Focusing on SEL can help educators build and maintain stronger relationships with students and manage classrooms

www.casel.org

Find an evidence-based curriculum that includes:

GOAL: For children to begin to understand their own feeling, for children to begin to understand the feelings of other and for children to begin to understand how their feelings affect others

Sample Activities:

– Label feelings when you or child is feeling them

– Acknowledge feelings (don't talk children out of them)

– Use stories and pictures to show different emotions, non-verbal communication and to model words for children to use in conflict situations (Mine! Stop!)

– Model calming or self-soothing strategies (deep breathing, how to use calm corner)
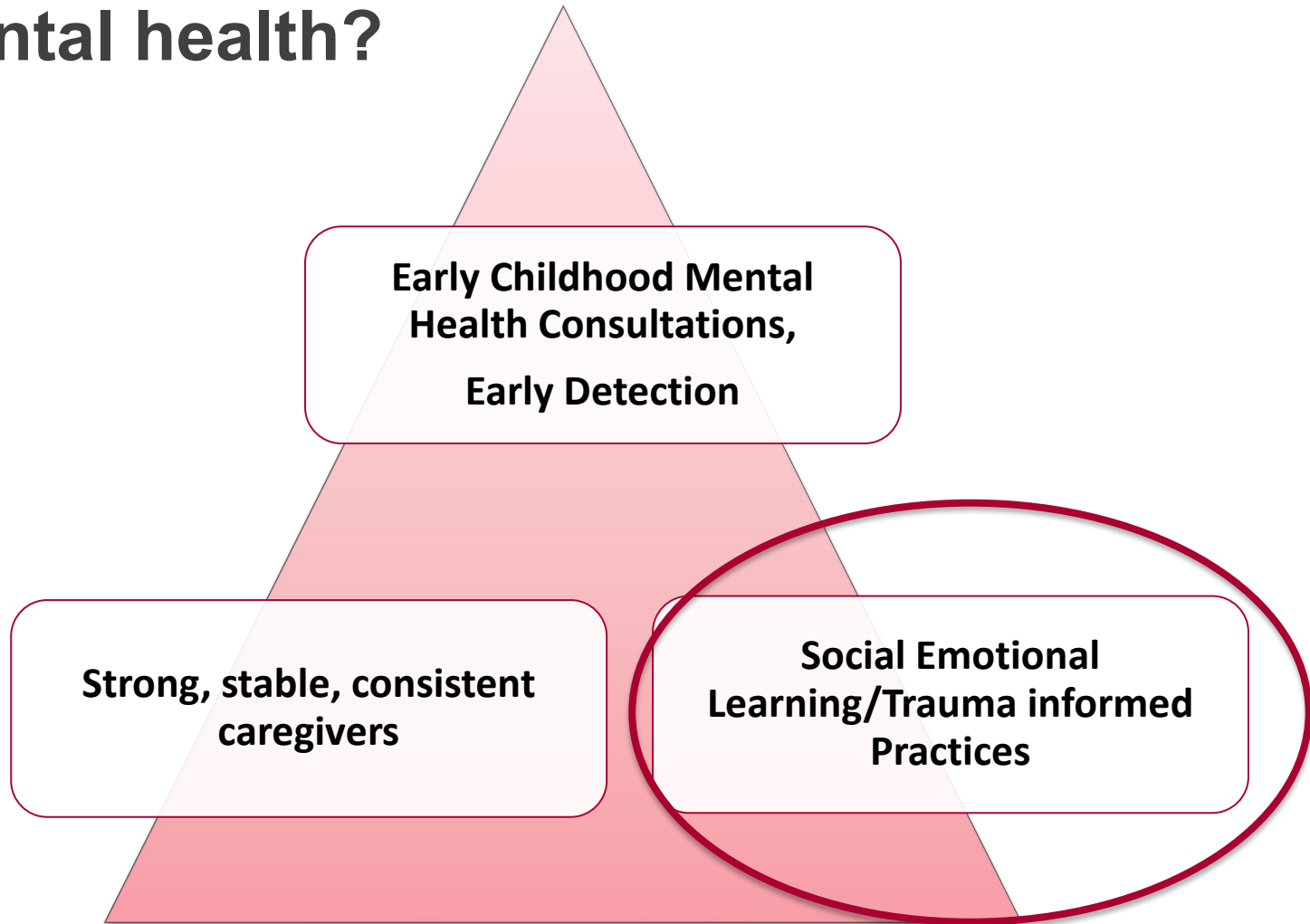
Find a SEL curriculum that includes:

- – Directly teach taking turns

    - Role play/Pretend play

    - Pair up children for classroom tasks

- – Time for free play

- – Intentional time to work on a joint task

- – Being a helper

- – Offer choices throughout the day

Most importantly—consider how children's behavior impacts YOU. Administrators need to allow time for teachers to reflect on what behaviors they find triggering and how they can regulate throughout the day and after.
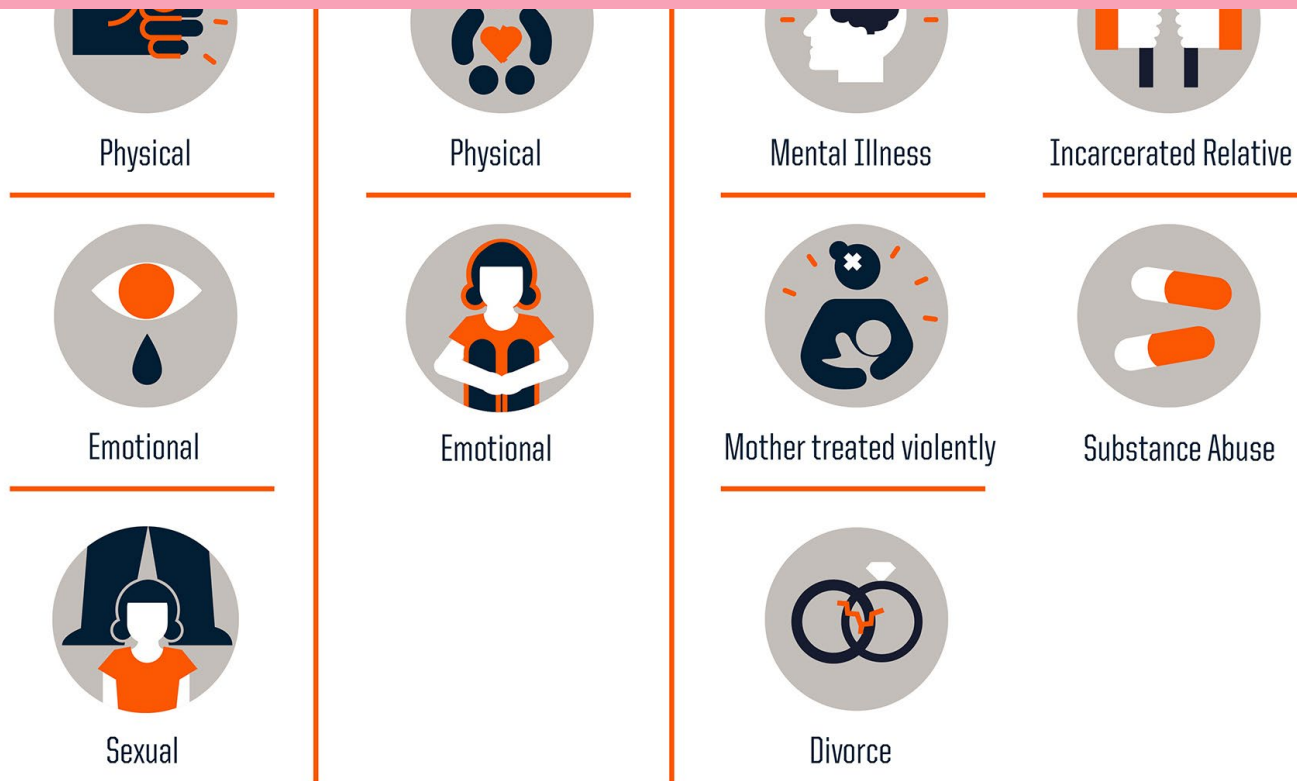
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Potential Barriers to Children Forming Close Relationships: Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs)

- 21% of IN children under 18 have experienced 2 ACEs.[3]
- 91% of child removals in Indiana in 2021 were due to neglect.[11]
- Majority of removals happen in early childhood.[11]

Physical

Physical

Mental Illness

Incarcerated Relative

Emotional

Emotional

Mother treated violently
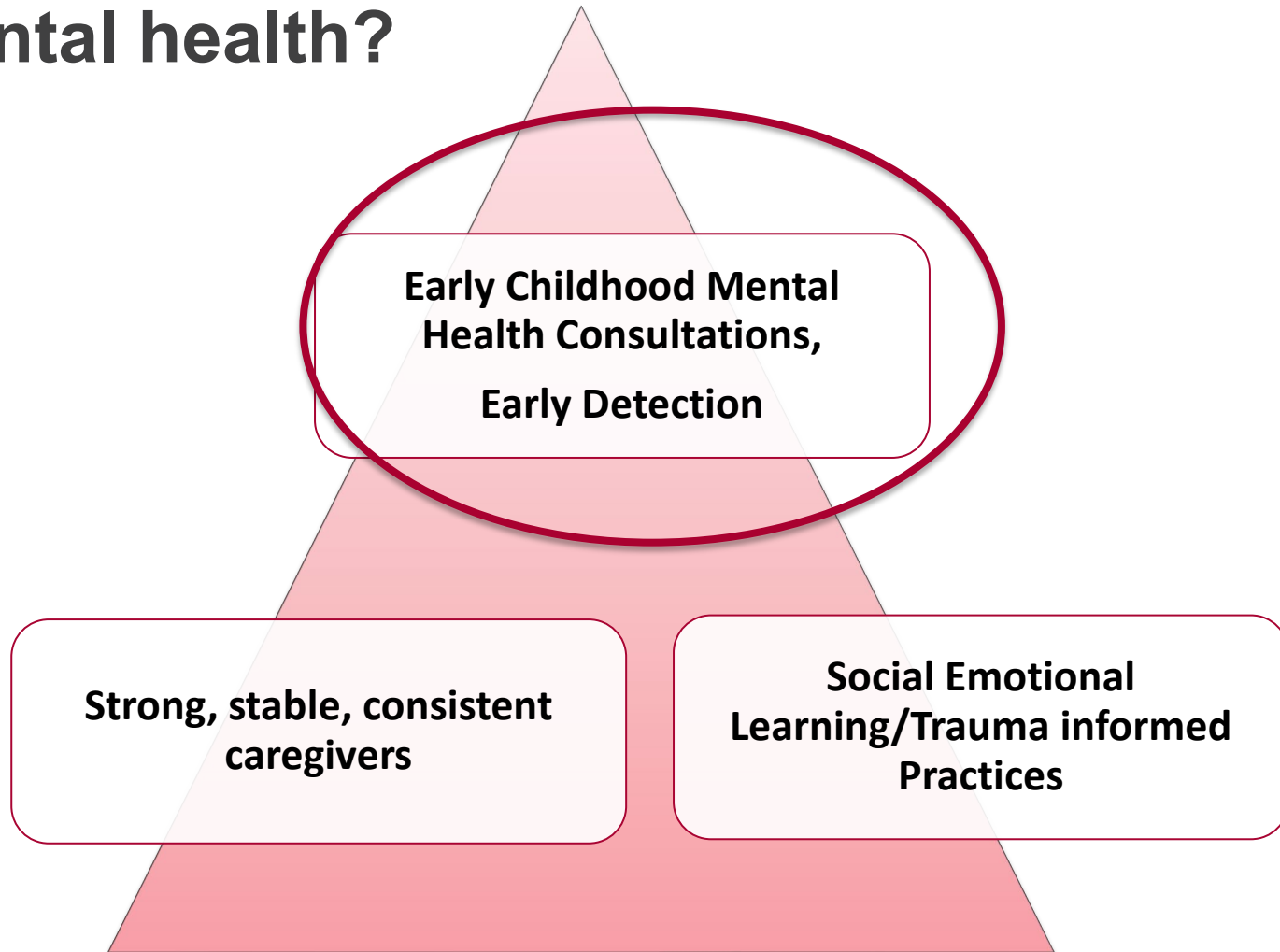
Substance Abuse

Sexual

Divorce

Trauma informed practices

1. Create and maintain consistent daily routines

2. Tell children when something out of the ordinary is going to occur

3. Offer children developmentally appropriate choices (which song to sing, which book to read, where to sit)

4. Anticipate difficult periods and transitions during the day and offer extra support during those times

5. Use techniques to support children's self-regulation

6. Understand that children may reenact negative events through interactions with peers, adults

7. Be warm and affectionate but also sensitive to impact of physical contact on individual children

https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2015/trauma-sensitive-classrooms

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Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

"IECMHC is a prevention-based approach that pairs a mental health consultant with adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as childcare, preschool, home visiting, early intervention and their home. Mental health consultation is not about "fixing kids." Nor is it therapy. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to facilitate children's healthy social and emotional development." *-Center of Excellence for Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation*

1. https://indianaspark.com/iecmhc/

2. https://www.infancyonward.org/

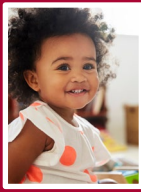3. https://medicine.iu.edu/psychiatry/clinical-care/integrated/behavioral-health

Early Detection is not only about detecting the presence of a developmental delay or disability.

As many as 1 in 4 children through the age of 5 are at risk for a developmental delay or disability.

Healthy Child Development Framework

Developmental Promotion

Developmental Monitoring

Developmental Screening

Referral for Services

Evaluation/ Intervention

https://helpmegrownational.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/A-Roadmap-for-Advancing-Family-Engaged-Developmental-Monitoring-FINAL.pdf

Developmental Promotion

- Oral Health/Well Child Checks
- Physical Activity
- Literacy
- Naming Feelings
- Nutrition
- Healthy Sleep

Developmental Monitoring

- Done regularly; not just when there is a concern

- Allows for early detection of developmental concerns

- Ask, don't tell

- Build into existing processes

- Use CDC's Milestone Tracker app and or CDC checklists

https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones-app.html

Relational Health Developmental Milestones

1. https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/milestone-timeline/

Developmental Screening

- Uses a formal validated tool (e.g., ASQ-3)

- Done at key times or whenever there is a concern

- Increases rate of detection of developmental concerns—leads to referrals

- What we know (SPARK 2022 PD Needs Assessment, n=1242):

  - 48% (n=601) reported using a developmental screening tool

  - 54% of those who use a tool use the ASQ-3

For more in the 2024 Early Childhood Relational Health Webinar Series

https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/ecc/resources/mental-health/index.html

Four more webinars in the series- earlier webinars will be posted on the website.

Coming up next:

- CARE Program Highlight

- Friday, May 24, 2024

- Noon - 1:00 PM (Eastern Time)

- Speaker: Courtney Crockett, American Academy of Pediatrics, Indiana Chapter

- Register: https://go.iu.edu/7x4U

Dr. Katie Herron

kgherron@iu.edu

1.https://linktr.ee/earlychildhoodcenter