

- Lack of fear or has many fears.
- Refuses to eat or hoards food.
- Unusual eating habits.

Mood

- Unprovoked mood swings.
- Has a lot of temper tantrums that last long.
- Hard to soothe when upset.
- Always upset by change.
- Doesn't seem to enjoy activities, few smiles.
- Fretful or fearful (all the time or when separating from parents).
- Is often worried.

Play/Social Skills

- No interest in pointing out things or sharing a pleasurable moment with a parent.
- Little interest in communicating, either with words or gestures, except for the basic wants.
- Little make-believe play by age 3.
- Small number of interests.
- Repetitive behaviours.
- Poor eye contact, little interest in others.
- Doesn't usually want to play with others.

Sensitivity and Self-Control

- Disturbed by light, noise, or touch.
- Trouble settling or staying asleep, nightmares.
- Bowel or bladder control problems.
- Rocking, thumb sucking, self-stimulation.

If you have questions or concerns, please call Access Mental Health at 403-943-1500 or your family doctor.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.

health information

Red Flags in Early Childhood Mental Health



Red flags are signals that a child might have problems or develop problems with the way she thinks, feels, or behaves.

As parents, we want the very best for our children. We know that dealing with problems early can help children succeed in the years to come. Children with mental health problems usually show early warning signs in four areas. If we recognize these signs, we can help them before the problems get too big. The sooner we start the more likely we are to succeed.

The four areas are:

1. ***Relationships with family members*** – (especially parents) – Does your child see you as a support and believe that you are on her side?
2. ***Parenting skills*** – Do you have a plan for handling behaviour challenges, other than spanking? Are you willing to change your approach if it isn't working?
3. ***Family situation*** – How many worries and problems do you have that make it hard to focus on your child?
4. ***Child characteristics*** – Does your child have special traits that make her more challenging to care for or discipline?

Relationship with Family Members

A child who has problems in a number of areas has a greater chance of having problems with her emotions and behaviour later in her life.

Pre-schoolers have a good relationship with their parents when they:

- look to parents for comfort when hurt, ill, or upset
- show affection only to people they know well
- are not too clingy
- need reassurance when separating and are happy to see the parent on return

Parenting Skills

- Are you able to understand your baby's facial expressions, gestures, or sounds?
- Can you tell when your baby is hurt, ill, or upset? Are you able to comfort your baby at these times?
- Are your expectations of your child, appropriate for your child's age?
- Are you able to look at things from your child's point of view?
- Do you often feel very angry with your child? Do you find you hit or slap your child?
- Do you feel you use harsh words, scold, or yell at your child more than you would like?

Family/Situation

Everyone has problems. Some parents have so many that it is hard for them to pay attention to their children. Children can suffer emotionally, even if they aren't aware of the problems.

Some common sources of stress:

- separation or divorce
- conflict or violence in the home
- physical or mental illness in another family member
- alcohol or drug abuse
- no support from friends, family, church
- no family recreation or family fun
- financial problems, illness, death, housing problems, moves, etc.

Child Characteristics

Each of the traits below, by itself, might not be a concern. A collection of these features in one child could be a red flag that tells parents they should ask for help. Ask your family doctor if you are worried.

Health/Development

- Chronic health problems and/or developmental delays.
- Child loses skills she had before (e.g., may stop talking, may start wetting the bed).

Behaviour

- Short attention span, acts without thinking, much more active than children her age.
- Negative, defiant behaviour.
- Bites, hits, and kicks often.
- Screams or yells often.
- Demands attention.
- Has a lack of empathy for others.