



## Supporting Behavioral Health for Parents and Young Children During Early Windows Pays Off Big (01-27-20)

What happens for parents during their prenatal and post-partum experience overlaps and interacts with what happens for young children during their prenatal and early childhood development. Focused effort to support parents and children can pay big dividends.

### The Perinatal Behavioral Health Window (conception to one-year post-partum)

The time between conception and one year after birth (the perinatal period) is a time of incredible change – and risk – for parents, their young children, and the whole family.

Health care, peer support, and healthy adjustment to the life-changing experience of starting a family during this time are vitally important. Data show that both parents and children can be affected by perinatal mood and anxiety disorders [PMADs] (including postpartum depression) with alarming consequences – if untreated.

#### Parents are affected

**38% of**  
women of  
color  
experience  
post-partum  
depression

**1 in 7** moms  
**1 in 10** dads  
**1 in 8** adoptive  
mothers  
experience post-partum

Perinatal behavioral health challenges are the *leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths* in Washington

Untreated perinatal mental health issues can lead to *pre-term births* and interfere with breastfeeding

#### Children are affected

Infants born to mothers with untreated perinatal behavioral health challenges are more likely to have:

- preterm births
- low birthweight
- difficult temperament

### The Infant/Early Childhood Behavioral Health Window (prenatal to 5 years)

Babies form more than 1 million new neural connections every second. Their earliest relationships and experiences shape the architecture of their brain and create the foundation on which future physical health and development, cognitive development and learning, and socio-emotional development unfolds.

In the first 5 years, children develop foundational capacities to:

- experience, regulate and express emotions
- form close and secure interpersonal relationships
- explore the environment and learn

...all in the context of their family, community, and culture



*Decades of research show that children's behavioral health supports physical development and health, cognitive skills, language and literacy, social skills, approaches to learning and school readiness.*

The work of the Prenatal to Five Relational Health Subcommittee is supported by



WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION FOR  
Infant Mental Health

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## Impacts of Untreated Toxic Stresses

Adverse childhood experiences (including insecure attachment, caregiver mental health challenges, poverty, trauma, violence and maltreatment) can interfere with this healthy development and have long-lasting impacts, including:

- Poor mental, emotional, and behavioral health
- Poor physical health and increased special health care needs
- Reduced school participation and success
- Later juvenile criminal involvement

9.5%–14.2%

of children birth to 5 experience emotional, relational, or behavioral disturbance

**Children can be resilient despite these early adverse experiences.** During the early childhood years, there are many opportunities to promote behavioral health, to prevent behavioral disturbances from taking root, and to treat behavioral health problems before they can manifest into more severe problems later in life.

## The Costs of Inaction Are High

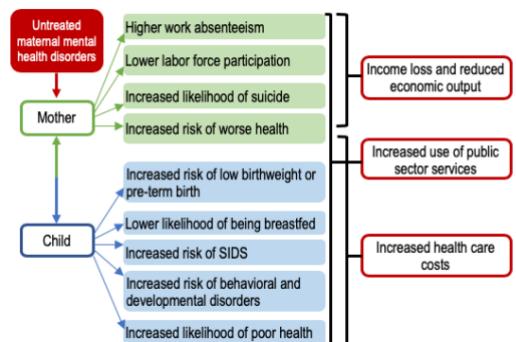
If we do not prevent or intervene in parent and infant/early childhood behavioral health early, the costs of untreated perinatal mood and anxiety disorders that affect parent and child can be considerable.

**\$247B**

**The annual cost of behavioral health disorders among young people in the U.S. 2007**



Untreated maternal mental health disorders influence maternal, child & societal outcomes



## There Are Ways to Support Parents and Children

The perinatal and infant/early childhood periods provide unique overlapping windows of opportunity to set families on healthy trajectories. Children are our most precious natural resource. Washington's future depends on healthy, productive children and communities.

**Families do their best when they have support.** Families need useful information, intervention if needed, and support from peers and the community.

**The right evidence-based treatment provided early can save later costs.** For example, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) has been found to effectively address trauma and return \$3.64 per dollar of cost.

In 2020, the Prenatal to Five Relational Health Subcommittee is recommending three important steps be taken:



**Recommendation 1** - Reauthorize the Children's Behavioral Health Work Group and include an emphasis on prenatal-five

**Recommendation 2** - Research what it would take to create a developmentally appropriate behavioral health system for children birth to five.

**Recommendation 3** - Train those uniquely positioned to help moms and children.

**\$3.64: \$1**

**Return on Investment**  
Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)

**\*Note:** The subcommittee also supports efforts to extend maternal Medicaid coverage to one-year post-partum to ensure families get the critical, high-quality care they need in the first year of baby's life.

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