



# The Pyramid Model for Early Childhood

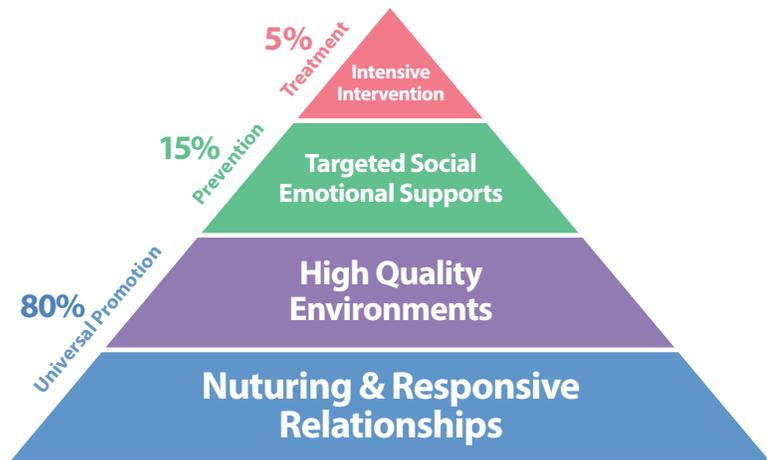
A pyramid model is helpful in depicting the range of experiences and practices that should be included in a comprehensive system of early childhood supports.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR THE CONTINUUM OF PRACTICES NEEDED TO SUPPORT THE HEALTHY SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

In an ideal world, every young child from infancy through age 5 will experience the nurturing and support needed for healthy social and emotional development, the foundation of lifelong mental health. High-quality experiences early in life help propel children toward a life characterized by physical and mental health and the ability to cope successfully with life's challenges.

Most young children do, in fact, receive the nurturing they need. But when problematic life experiences or the architecture of the complex web of neuronal patterns in the brain disrupt healthy development, a range of programs and interventions should exist to identify problems early and mitigate the potential damage. Multiple levels of prevention and treatment practices are needed to meet the needs of all children – those with normal development, those at risk of developmental problems, and those with persistent challenges.

### Pyramid Model to Promote Social-Emotional Competence in Infants & Young Children



Source: Adapted from the [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#)

A pyramid model<sup>1,2</sup> is helpful in depicting the range of experiences and practices that should be included in a comprehensive system of early childhood supports. The illustration depicts the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children, developed by researchers based on evidence-based practices. It illustrates the continuum of practices<sup>3</sup> necessary for children's healthy social and emotional development:

- nurturing and responsive relationships and high-quality, supportive environments for all children (promotion);
- targeted social-emotional supports for children at risk for behavioral problems (prevention); and
- intensive treatment for children with developmental delays or other special needs (intervention).<sup>4</sup>



## PROMOTION

At the foundation of the pyramid are the universal practices needed to promote the healthy development of children. These practices should be available to all children as they encompass the **Nurturing and Responsive Relationships** at the root of children's mental health and **High Quality Environments**, both inside and outside the home, which children should experience.

Promotion practices "support the social-emotional well-being of infants and toddlers by ensuring that parents and other adults who care for them provide a safe, nurturing, and responsive environment."<sup>5</sup> They should begin with all expectant families and apply to all children 0-5.

### Nurturing and Responsive Relationships

Examples of these "building blocks of secure social and emotional development" include:<sup>6</sup>

- building relationships between children and their parents, caregivers, and teachers
- promoting communication of children with language delays and disabilities
- praising and encouraging appropriate behavior to promote skill learning and development
- supporting children's play
- responding to children's conversations
- embedding instruction within the child's routine, planned, and play activities<sup>7,8</sup>

### High Quality Environments

Examples of practices in childcare settings that provide "predictable and supportive environments and family interactions that will promote the child's social and emotional development" include:<sup>9</sup>

- adopting a curriculum that enhances all areas of child development
- using developmentally and culturally appropriate teaching strategies
- safe physical environments that promote active learning and appropriate behavior
- positive, clear directions
- guiding and teaching social skills
- adequate materials
- defined play centers
- balanced schedule (large and small groups)
- structured transitions
- individualized instructions for children who need support
- teaching and promoting a small number of rules
- children with or at risk for delays or disabilities receive instruction and support in inclusive environments
- activities that are engaging to children<sup>10,11</sup>
- having well-trained early childhood caregivers
- a small group size and ratio
- having a primary responsive caregiver
- providing continuity of caregivers





## PREVENTION

Prevention strategies “identify and reduce conditions that lead to mental health problems, thereby reducing the likelihood that a problem will emerge.”<sup>12</sup> These **Targeted Social-Emotional Supports** for at-risk children will be needed for an estimated 15% of children who need support in developing social skills. Examples include:

### Practitioners

- partnering with families in teaching social-emotional skills
- providing extra support to targeted groups of infants and their families to develop more positive, secure relationships
- supporting a child’s self-regulation
- teaching and support strategies for handling anger and disappointment

### Children

- learning social problem-solving
- learning cooperative responding
- practicing friendship skills
- initiating and maintaining interactions
- practicing collaboration with peers<sup>13,14</sup>
- learning how to identify and express emotions appropriately
- understanding the emotions of others

An example of prevention programs is home-visiting programs like Early Head Start, Healthy Families, and Parents as Teachers.

## INTERVENTION

Intensive interventions may be required for about 5% of children. Interventions support families of children with delays, disabilities, health problems or multiple risk factors such as prenatal health challenges, family trauma or disruption, parental depression or mental illness, poverty, abuse, or exposure to violence.<sup>15</sup> Intervention activities may include:

- convening a multi-disciplinary team
- using a trauma lens to understand the extent of the child’s and family’s problem
- developing individualized behavioral support strategies
- consistently implementing the supports as planned
- monitoring progress
- revising the plan when needed
- partnering with families and colleagues in implementing the plan<sup>16</sup>
- providing mental health consultation for childcare or other settings
- providing mental health treatment for young children and their families

Examples of intensive intervention programs are Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC), Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT).

The range of supports children need encompasses **promotion** of healthy social and emotional development, **prevention** of problems in children who need help to develop social and emotional skills, and **intervention** (treatment) for those with persistent needs.

## SUMMARY

The Pyramid Model for Supporting Social-Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children – encompassing Promotion, Prevention, and Intervention – illustrates the practices and interventions needed in a comprehensive system for children ages 0-5. These programs and interventions are designed to promote healthy development of each child, prevent or mitigate damage to a child’s development, and treat social-emotional problems when they occur. See companion document *Ensuring the Provider Network is Trauma-Informed and Includes Evidence-Based Practices for Young Children* for more detailed information.



## RESOURCES

- 1 Fox, L., Dunlap, G., Hemmeter, M.L., Joseph, G.E., & Strain, P.S. (2010). The teaching pyramid: A model for supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior in young children. The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. Retrieved from Vanderbilt University website <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/infTodd/mod4/4.7.pdf>
- 2 [Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children](#)
- 3 Fox, L., & Hemmeter, M.L. (2014) Implementing positive behavioral intervention and support: The evidence-base of the pyramid model for supporting social emotional competence in infants and young children. Pyramid Model Consortium. Retrieved from Pyramid Model website [http://www.pyramidmodel.org/uploads/9/5/6/3/9563066/implementing\\_positive\\_behavioral\\_intervention\\_and\\_support.pdf](http://www.pyramidmodel.org/uploads/9/5/6/3/9563066/implementing_positive_behavioral_intervention_and_support.pdf)
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