



Children's Mental Health as a Public Health Issue: What a difference it could make

The Public Health Approachⁱ

1. Defines the health problem
2. Identifies risk factors associated with that health problem
3. Develops and tests community-wide interventions to control or prevent that health problem
4. Aims to improve the health of the population of people overall
5. Constantly uses data to track the problem and the success of the intervention

The Problem:

The current rate of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among children and youth - and the broken systems that fail to meet their needs - has immense negative consequences for our families, communities, and society in general.

Risk Factors decrease the likelihood of positive outcomes

Risk factors for children's mental health include some things that can be changed, such as community violence, poverty, insufficient housing, and poor nutrition.

Protective Factors increase the likelihood of positive outcomes

Protective factors for children's mental health include some things that can be built around children, such as safe and supportive communities, neighborhoods and schools with clear rules and consequences as well as high expectations for their children.

The Results can include:

- Community wide awareness that children's mental health matters
- Community wide awareness that mental health is part of overall health
- Community wide support for the mental health of ALL children, youth and families
- School and community-based resources for ALL children and their families
- Promotion of respect for cultural preferences and traditions in creating models of support for children and families
- Improved mental health for ALL children, youth, their families, and their communities

The difference can be a healthier & more productive society!

ⁱ Adapted from a presentation by Dr. Glyn G. Caldwell, University of Kentucky College of Public Health (2006)