



Children's Mental Health Toolkit: Sample Editorial

The following is an example of incorporating the framing research into the format of a guest editorial.

Our state's future prosperity is at stake when all of our children don't share in the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. The Better Futures for Children project has just released a report calling for better evaluation of programs for children with mental health problems. Making wise investments in these programs ensures that the next generation will pay them back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

As the report *Future Directions in Children's Mental Health* notes, children's early experiences shape the developing architecture of the brain, providing either a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health that follows. When this architecture is supported, children can experience good mental health. One way to think of children's mental health is that it's like the levelness of a piece of furniture, such as a table. The levelness of a table is what makes it usable and able to function, just like the mental health of children is what enables them to function well in all areas of life. Some children's brains develop on floors that are level. These children have access to good nutrition and health care, and have healthy, supportive relationships with caring adults. Other children's brains develop on more sloped or slanted floors. Perhaps they are exposed to abuse or violence, have unreliable or unsupportive relationships, and don't have access to key programs and resources. For these children, the emotional or behavioral issues that result frequently require mental health services.

We have many opportunities in our state to provide this levelness for more children, by working to stabilize the environment of relationships and experiences that form the contexts for children's development. This means making sure children and their families have access to comprehensive,

integrated, quality services, either before a mental health problem becomes serious or once a mental illness develops. However, the report found that less than a quarter of the state's children younger than 5 were screened by their health care providers. This lack of screening means that thousands of children are not assured the necessary stability from which to grow and thrive.

The new report is important for what it can tell policymakers as they make funding decisions about children's mental health programs. There are dozens of initiatives and programs, some of which appear to have good results. But we need to measure the effectiveness and evaluate the outcomes of all of the state's many public and private mental health services for children, so that we can expand and replicate the most effective programs. By identifying the effectiveness factors that make programs successful, Better Futures for Children has done a great service with this report. It's a welcome voice toward creating a shared and prosperous future.