

Extending the Reach of Home Visiting

Series on Home Visiting's Connections to Larger Systems of Support

Early childhood home visiting is a service delivery strategy that matches expectant parents and caregivers of young children with a designated support person—typically an early childhood specialist, a social worker, a nurse, or paraprofessional—who guides them through the early stages of preparing for and raising a family. Services are voluntary, may include caregiver coaching and connecting families to needed services, and are provided in the family's home or another location of the family's choice. It is a proven strategy that helps families support their children's development during the first five years of life. [Home visiting has demonstrated impacts](#) on **health, safety, and school readiness of children; maternal health; and family stability and financial security**. Studies have found a [return on investment](#) (ROI) of \$1.80 to \$5.70 for every dollar spent. This strong ROI is consistent with other types of early childhood interventions. As with other disciplines, findings are dependent on the context in which families are living.

Despite its promise, the true reach of home visiting is limited. According to the [2026 Home Visiting Yearbook](#), there were more than 16.7 million pregnant women and families with young children who could benefit from home visiting, and only 1.8% of all potential beneficiaries, or 3.9% of high priority families, received services.

It is well understood that to reach more families, home visiting cannot go it alone. Collaborative partnerships are needed across the early childhood ecosystem – **child care, elementary education, mental health, housing, and child welfare**. When home visiting is a service delivery strategy supported by or embedded within these other systems, both the reach and benefits of home visiting will grow.

This series of brief papers focuses on home visiting's connection to these other systems. Within each paper you will find a description of the intersection between the systems, examples from the field of how they can work together, tips for getting started with cross system collaboration, and a resource list for more information.

“We’ve worked hard to build home visiting into a field. Now, it’s time to build deep partnerships with our sister fields so that we can infuse the best of home visiting throughout the early childhood ecosystem.”

***~ Deborah Roderick Stark, Co-Facilitator
National Home Visiting Network***

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Home Visiting and Child Care

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Many young children spend time in nonparental care while one or both parents are working. For example, in 2019, 59% of children from birth through age 5 who were not yet in kindergarten were cared for in at least one weekly nonparental care arrangement, with the highest percentage attending center-based settings (e.g., child care centers, preschool, pre-K, Head Start).^{1 2} Families who are working and have their children in child care are often less able to participate in traditional home visiting programs.

With 90% of brain development happening during this time, and growing understanding of the importance of early relationships as the foundation for healthy development, linking child care and home visiting can be an effective strategy for reaching more families and supporting child, family, and provider development.

When these two systems – home visiting and child care – work together:

- Children can benefit from greater access to developmental support from both the adults and the environments that surround them.
- Families can benefit from the availability of high-quality child care, and from the support of home visiting staff who understand their strengths and challenges and can meet them where they already are to reinforce positive parenting practices, help families set and achieve their goals, and connect them to resources in the community.
- Child care providers can benefit from the coaching, support, and resources that a home visitor can provide. This can help to expand providers' understanding of child development; engage families in developmentally appropriate, responsive interactions with their children that foster strong parent-child connections; and provide an extra link between home and early learning settings. This can be especially important for home-based child care providers who often have limited opportunities for intentional, tailored professional development to improve the outcomes for young children.
- Home visiting programs can benefit as they are able to enroll more families – especially those who might not be part of a traditional home visiting program because visits typically take place during the workday – and they can help families connect to child care when that is needed.

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=4>

² <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020075REV.pdf>

In short, intentional collaboration between home visiting and child care creates a more connected developmental environment around the child that is grounded in strengths-based and relational support, is culturally competent, and enhances the quality of interactions and instruction. It meets families where they are, supports the adults in children's lives, and connects their home and early learning experiences.

Promising Examples

The National Home Visiting Network set out to uncover examples of collaboration between child care and home visiting. Several evidenced based home visiting models – ParentChild+, HIPPY (Home Improvement Program for Preschool Youngsters), Parents as Teachers – have created adaptations to work with child care providers. Among the many examples we discovered, the following two illustrate what is possible when home visiting and child care work together.

ParentChild+ Home-Based Child Care Model

ParentChild+ found that many families who rely on family, friend, and neighbor care or home-based care do not have access to quality school readiness supports. The ParentChild+ Home-Based Child Care Model³ was created to build upon the success of the core family home visiting model with its focus on adult-child interactions and learning, and to have the child care provider as the target recipient of service. This approach helps child care providers strengthen their interactions with the children in their care, enhance the learning environment, and develop effective ways to share materials and information with parents that can then enrich the home environment. The home visitors (or early learning specialists) provide 48 visits to the child care provider while children are in care, offer 1:1 modeling of school readiness activities, and coach providers to implement best practices in a culturally competent and data-driven way. Early learning specialists leave behind 12 books/educational materials for the provider's learning environment, send additional books home with each child, and connect the child care providers and families to community resources.

Essential Lesson:

Rather than focusing exclusively on parents (which is the core model of ParentChild+) this initiative recognizes family child care providers as important developmental partners and equips them with the knowledge, materials, and coaching to strengthen children's learning experiences and extend that learning into the home.

Connecticut Early Years

Connecticut Early Years⁴ is an innovative, relationship-based model that brings together the strengths of child care and home visiting to support all families with infants and toddlers. Since launching in the fall of 2024, the pilot has served families in participating child care centers and family child care homes in New Haven and Hartford. Each participating program is paired with a Family Consultant -- hired, trained, and supervised by a local home visiting agency -- who is embedded in the child care setting and serves as a trusted resource for families, teachers, family child care providers, and directors. Family Consultants meet with families at least twice a month providing parenting guidance and support. They use the Family Map Inventory to help families identify needs and set goals; PICCOLO to highlight and reinforce rich parent-child engagement; and

³ <https://parentchildplus.org/our-work/home-based-child-care-model/>

⁴ <https://arclab.hdfs.uconn.edu/connecticut-early-years/>

the Ages and Stages Questionnaire/Sparkler to support child development. At its core, the model is driven by a commitment to advancing school readiness and long-term child outcomes, and holistic family well-being, including mental health and economic stability. Connecticut Early Years is funded as a pilot by the Office of Early Child Development with programmatic and research leadership from the University of Connecticut. Conversations are underway to explore how the model can expand statewide.

Essential Lesson:

Unlike a traditional referral partnership, Connecticut Early Years embeds a family-support professional within the child care setting, making home visiting-style support accessible to working families and adding critical support for teachers and the family-teacher relationship.

Collaboration Tips: Home Visiting and Child Care

Home visiting programs can partner with child care by:

- Referring families to child care resources in their community and other needed supports such as material needs, health care, mental health services, and more.
- Building relationships between home visitors and child care providers so they can share observations, identify strengths and concerns, and coordinate support for children and families.
- Delivering home visiting curricula and professional development to child care providers to bolster understanding of child development, early relationships, and parent-child connections.
- Embedding home visitors in child care programs to support working families who may not otherwise be connected to a home visiting effort.
- Recognizing and elevating both child care and home visiting as valuable professions that share a set of core competencies and are both helpful for families with home visiting's focus on parenting and child care's focus on quality early learning environments outside the home.
- Advocating for sustainable public investment in both fields by calling attention to the need for public financing to support the cost of quality programming, livable wages, and strategies to address burnout and staff turnover.

Helpful Resources

Connecting Home Visiting Families to Early Care and Education Services and Resources - <https://www.jbassoc.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Connecting-Home-Visiting-Families-Early-Care-Education-Services-Resources.pdf>

ParentChild+ Family Child Care Initiative - https://www.nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/HV_Models-to-Support-Home-based-child-care.pdf and <https://parentchildplus.org/our-work/home-based-child-care-model/>

Connecticut Early Years - <https://arclab.hdfs.uconn.edu/connecticut-early-years/>

Evaluation Report: Home Visiting for Home Child Care Providers - The Power of Early Childhood Partnerships - https://coloradolab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/PDG-Case-Study_Evaluation-Brief_FINAL_.pdf

National Institute for Early Education Research - State of Preschool 2025 Yearbook - <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2025>



Home Visiting and Elementary Education

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Helping children and parents be ready for school in the early years supports children's development, can ease the transition to formal education, builds parental confidence which may be vulnerable due to their own experience with school, and reinforces the importance of parents as their child's first teacher and essential partner in learning.

According to research analysis by the National Home Visiting Resource Center:

“Children whose families participate in home visiting receive more stimulation and support for learning, more reading time with their parents, compared to children of nonparticipants. Services can also improve the quality of the home environment. In the long run, children of home visiting participants demonstrate improved early language and cognitive development, greater math and reading achievement, reduced absenteeism rates, and decreased in-school and out-of-school suspensions compared to their peers.”¹

Yet significant challenges remain. The 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book indicates that 70% of fourth graders are not proficient in reading.² This underscores the importance of building strong developmental and learning foundations before children enter school – and maintaining strong connections between families, early childhood programs, and schools as children progress through the early grades.

When these two systems work together – home visiting and elementary education – children are more prepared for school, parents are more aware of their child's development and can be strong advocates for and partners in their children's learning, and schools have a greater understanding of each child's strengths, developmental needs, and family context and are therefore better able to receive and support each child so that they can reach their unique potential.

Promising Example

The National Home Visiting Network set out to uncover examples of collaboration between elementary education and home visiting. Fortunately, several home visiting models – most notably HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters), Parents as Teachers, and

¹ <https://nhvrc.org/yearbook/2025-yearbook/about-home-visiting/results/>

² <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2026-kids-count-data-book>

ParentChild+ – recognize the value of this partnership and are working closely with a few public school systems. Here is one promising example that illustrates what is possible when home visiting and elementary education work together.

Jefferson County Public Schools

In 1994, the Jefferson County Public School District implemented the HIPPY program to serve children ages 2 through 4. It is implemented as a bilingual program serving 98 families each year by 7 HIPPY home visitors who implement the 30-week model focusing on school readiness skills and social-emotional development. More recently, the District responded to community requests and added the Parents as Teachers (PAT) model so that they can now begin working with families prenatally with PAT and then continue to serve them with the HIPPY program to school age.

According to Kathy Harrison who oversees the home visiting programs, “This adds another layer of support for families – those early years are absolutely critical to brain development, so we want to make sure that families are reading books to their children, are practicing serve and return, and that they understand the importance of getting children ready for school.... making sure the whole family is ready for the school experience. Also, it’s great for early intervention too. We have a lot of resources we can access to address concerns that parents might have with their children’s development. And teachers now have a better understanding of the importance of the early years and want to make sure that all children have a strong home life to help ready them for school.”

The District uses an assortment of surveys and assessments to measure the growth in children and families – PICCOLO (Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes), Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and others. In 2024, they looked at data of 62 HIPPY graduates that completed 3rd grade and found:

- *Attendance.* HIPPY graduates had a 94% attendance rate, higher than the District.
- *Behavior.* Only one HIPPY graduate had a behavior challenge and it was not related to aggression.
- *READ Plan.* Thirteen HIPPY graduates had a READ plan (a Colorado specific targeted intervention plan tailored to the child’s specific reading skill gaps). A closer look at the data revealed that the children were all multilanguage learners or had an Individualized Education Plan in place as well. This suggests that there is an opportunity to offer more support to these children in Kindergarten to lower the READ Plan rate by 3rd grade.
- *Parent Confidence.* Before HIPPY, 26% of parents said they were confident with their parenting; after the program 93% expressed confidence.
- *Home Learning Environment.* Before HIPPY 24% of parents said they felt confident that they could create a learning environment in their home; after the program 87% expressed confidence.
- *Resources for the Family.* Before HIPPY 11% felt confident that they could find resources for their family; after the program 83% expressed confidence in knowing how to find resources.

Essential Lesson:

The data demonstrates that the program is not simply preparing children for school. It is building family capacity that leads to stronger partnerships between families, schools, and communities to better support children’s learning.

Collaboration Tips: Home Visiting and Elementary Education

Home visiting programs can collaborate with elementary education by:

- Creating opportunities for home visitors and teachers to learn from one another about child development, family engagement, and culturally responsive practices.
- Meeting with state and/or local Title 1 administrators to share information about the impacts of home visiting on school readiness and family engagement.
- Sharing information that Title 1, Part A funds can be used for home visiting to improve academic outcomes, reduce achievement gaps, and increase family engagement in high-poverty schools.
- Reviewing needs assessment and kindergarten readiness data to help determine where home visiting aligned with elementary education should be prioritized.
- Partnering to organize transition events that introduce the child and family to the new school environment and teachers.
- Engaging parents as partners in planning transition activities and identifying what information and support would help their families navigate the transition to school.
- Hosting group socialization opportunities for home visiting parents that take place in or near the schools.

Helpful Resources

Beyond the Early Years: The Long-Term Effects of Home Visiting on Mothers, Families, and Children - https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/MIHOPE_Home_Visits_Evaluation_Report.pdf

Children's Pre-Academic School Readiness and Home Learning Activities: A Moderated-Mediation Analysis of Home Visiting - <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1245893/full>

Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Intervention: A Path to Improved Academic Outcomes, School Behavior, and Parenting Skills - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740918303815?via%3Dihub>

Information on Selected Home Visiting Models that Work Closely with School Districts

HIPPY US - www.hippyus.org

Parents as Teachers - www.parentsasteachers.org

ParentChild+ - www.parentchildplus.org

Home Visiting and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

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Infants and toddlers develop a sense of self, connection to others, and safety through their early experiences. Nurturing relationships with consistent, caring adults are fundamental to promoting their emotional health and well-being. When this is missing, when young children grow up in more challenging environments, when their basic needs are not met, and their early emotional cues are misunderstood, they can be much more susceptible to long-term challenges including but not limited to poor health and difficulty with school.

Between 10% to 16% of young children experience social, emotional, or behavioral health challenges that negatively impact their development. The percentage is even higher (22%) for babies living in poverty.¹ Fortunately, the infant mental health field has a long history of building a continuum of evidence-based support from promotion, to prevention, assessment, and treatment. Infant and early childhood mental health professionals are skilled at offering therapeutic interventions and consultation to others working with young children – pediatricians, child care providers, home visitors, social workers, and more – as well as systems leaders.

Partnership between the sister fields of home visiting and infant and early childhood mental health can mean the world of difference for children and families. Infant and early childhood mental health providers are able to strengthen home visiting through consultation, reflective supervision, training, and direct support to families, and home visitors are able to more confidently identify concerns and connect families to a higher level of care when needed.

Promising Examples

The National Home Visiting Network set out to uncover examples of collaboration between the fields. The following examples illustrate what is possible when home visiting and infant and early childhood mental health work together.

¹ <https://www.zerotothree.org/issue-areas/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health/>

Southcentral Foundation

Several Tribal Home Visiting grant recipients – including but not limited to Southcentral Foundation – work hand-in-hand with mental health colleagues to meet the behavioral health needs of the families enrolled in the home visiting program. Southcentral Foundation has behavioral health consultants funded by primary care who work alongside the Nurse-Family Partnership home visitors to support families in need of services. Sometimes the consultants join the visit to build relationships with families and then will offer 1:1 support in the home or refer the family to the mental health department for an even higher level of care. In addition, the behavioral health consultants review family assessments and meet with the home visiting team for case consultations once a month.

Essential Lesson:

This is an example of mental health consultation integrated into home visiting.

Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health Home Visiting Program

The Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health Home Visiting (IMH-HV)^{2 3} is a preventive intervention and treatment program that has been implemented through the public mental health system in Michigan for more than 50 years. It is grounded in the principles of parent-child psychotherapy and designed to support the parent-child relationship. The intervention can begin during pregnancy and continues until a child turns three years of age. Families who are identified at risk for parent-child attachment challenges, child safety, and/or behavioral health concerns are welcomed into the program which delivers weekly visits (or more frequent as needed, each lasting 90 to 120 minutes) in a family's home. Home visitors have a Master's degree in social work, psychology or related fields, have taken classes in psychotherapy, trauma informed care, and culturally responsive practices. They use evidence-based assessments and videotaping to guide their practice, and are supported through regular reflective supervision. IMH-HV providers are expected to have or be in the process of obtaining an endorsement as an Infant Mental Health Specialist.

Essential Lesson:

This is an example of an integrated model where home visiting itself is the mental health intervention.

Hawaii Association of Infant Mental Health

The Hawaii Association of Infant Mental Health (HI-IMH) is the state office for Parents as Teachers (PAT).⁴ HI-IMH works to support PAT affiliates to implement the model with fidelity, provides infant and early childhood mental health consultation, strengthens state-level partnerships, and supports alignment across the early childhood system.

Essential Lesson:

This is an example of a state/system-level infrastructural alignment between home visiting and mental health.

² <https://www.cebc4cw.org/program/the-michigan-model-of-infant-mental-health-home-visiting>

³ <https://michiganimhhv.org/>

⁴ <https://aimhhi.org/parentsasteachershawaii>

Collaboration Tips: Home Visiting and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Home visiting programs can partner with infant and early childhood mental health by:

- Building relationships between home visiting and mental health professionals before a crisis occurs so that consultation and referral pathways are already in place when families need them.
- Embedding infant and early childhood mental health consultants in home visiting programs to provide reflective supervision, training, and support to home visitors, and 1:1 consultation with families as needed.
- Referring families to the mental health system who may need additional evaluations and interventions.
- Using data to identify and address the mental health needs of families and determine what level of support is appropriate.
- Strengthening promotion and prevention practices so that families receive support early.
- Connecting families to higher levels of support as needed.

Helpful Resources

Embedding Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Programs - <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/programs-impact/iecmhc-roadmap.pdf>

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Home Visiting - <https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/NHVRC-Brief-060823.pdf>

Maternal Mental Health in Home Visiting - Addressing Depression, Anxiety, and Stress - <https://nhvrc.org/brief/maternal-mental-health/>

Zero to Three - Advancing Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health - <https://www.zerotothree.org/issue-areas/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health/>

Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health in Home Visiting Programs Serving Diverse Families: Promising Strategies to Support Child and Family Well-Being - <https://www.nccp.org/publication/iecmh-hv-report/>

Zero to Three – Early Relational Health and IECMH: What do they mean? <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/early-relational-health-and-iecmh-what-do-they-mean/>

Home Visiting and Housing

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All families need access to safe and stable housing. Babies and young children need places to safely play and sleep, and parents need places where they can build the routines that are foundational for children's early development. But for many, there is a growing gap between income and housing costs which economists suggest should not exceed 30% of family income. While housing assistance programs exist, the demand far exceeds available resources, leaving many families without the support they need.

During the 2022-2023 program year, an estimated 446,996 infants and toddlers experienced homelessness across the United States. Housing instability in the earliest years is linked to development delays and future health challenges, such as asthma and more frequent visits to emergency rooms. Children experiencing homelessness score lower on language and communication skills. New mothers experiencing homelessness are less likely to receive appropriate health care.

Home visiting cannot solve the housing crisis, but it can help ensure that families experiencing housing instability are not navigating it alone – and that young children continue to receive the relationships, developmental support, and connections they need. When these two systems work together, home visiting can help families find housing, access resources, and nurture their child's development and housing can provide the stability families need as the foundation for well-being and a sense of security. Together, they create a more connected continuum of support for families.

Promising Examples

The National Home Visiting Network set out to uncover examples of collaboration between housing and home visiting. The following examples illustrate what is possible when the systems work together.

Massachusetts Follow-Up, Outreach, Referrals Families Program

In the home visiting capacity survey administered for the 2020 Massachusetts MIECHV Needs Assessment, 73% of respondents identified housing as the most pressing challenge facing home visiting participants. Housing instability became even more of a challenge in the spring of 2023 when the emergency assistance shelter system experienced an influx of people needing shelter.

The F.O.R. (Follow-up, Outreach, Referrals) Families Program, is a Massachusetts Department of Public Health program that provides home visiting services to families in Emergency Assistance (EA) shelters. In one Massachusetts community, EA shelter staff recognized that children were not having a typical childhood experience and they needed to do something to address the trauma being

experienced by the children and families. Staff reached out to the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program in their community for support. PAT provided parent groups three times a week with hands-on activities, books in multiple languages through Raising a Reader, developmental screenings, and referrals to Early Intervention when needed. The partnership created a safe, supportive space for families in the EA shelter and helped build connections they could continue to rely on as they prepared to transition to permanent housing.

Essential Lesson:

This partnership illustrates how home visiting can adapt its approach to meet families where they are—literally and figuratively—while providing children with opportunities for learning, connection, and normalcy during a period of profound instability.

Boulder Housing Partners

Boulder Housing Partners (BHP) recognizes the interconnections between housing, health, and early child development. Through a two-generation approach, BHP supports adults and young children together by building trust, connecting families to resources, and helping parents work toward economic stability while preparing their children for school success.

In 2016, BHP launched Bringing School Home at five project-based housing sites, creating a housing preference for families with children under age six and offering wraparound supports such as Parents as Teachers and Nurse Family Partnership. In 2025, with support from Parent Possible and funding from the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, BHP became a designated HIPPY site, expanding access to home-based school readiness activities and parent leadership opportunities. Together these efforts help families build connection, strengthen protective factors, and create community and hope.

Essential Lesson:

“What we are seeing at BHP with HIPPY is the beauty of possibility, families leaning in, children thriving, and a community growing stronger, one home visit at a time. These moments are the seeds of something greater, and I am confident that they will continue to grow, preparing children for school, for life, and for all that lies ahead,” Jackie Cordova, HIPPY State Program Director at Parent Possible.

Collaboration Tips: Home Visiting and Housing

Home visiting programs can collaborate with public housing by:

- Listening carefully to the needs of families to understand the magnitude of housing challenges in each community and state.
- Helping families find housing including completing housing applications and connecting with shelters, housing authorities, and other supports.
- Offering home visiting in non-traditional locations, including shelters, and maintaining connections as families transition into stable housing.
- Ensuring the home visitor is paired with other service providers (e.g., mental health specialists) to support families and help minimize the effect of trauma caused by housing instability.
- Partnering with housing authorities to coordinate resources and services and advocate for strong public investments in housing.

Helpful Resources

BUILD Initiative - Housing is Our Lane: The Role that Early Childhood Sector Should Play to Improve Access to Quality, Affordable Housing (January 2023) - <https://buildinitiative.org/resource-library/housing-is-our-lane-the-role-that-early-childhood-sector-should-play-to-improve-access-to-quality-affordable-housing/>

Campaign for Grade Level Reading – The Power of Place: Embedding Two-Generation Approaches in Housing Developments - <https://leo.gradelevelreading.net/event/the-power-of-place-embedding-two-generation-approaches-in-housing-developments/>

Head Start - Resources for Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness - <https://headstart.gov/family-support-well-being/article/children-families-experiencing-homelessness>

National Home Visiting Resource Center - Home visiting as part of a holistic approach to supporting unhoused families - <https://nhvrc.org/brief/home-visiting-unhoused-families> and accompanying video - Building on Strengths: Reaching Unhoused Families with Home Visiting Parent Support Programs - <https://nhvrc.org/building-on-strengths-reaching-unhoused-families-with-a-home-visiting-parent-support-program/>

Chapin Hall – Home Visiting for Homeless Families project: Final evaluation report. <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/HVHF-Evaluation-Final-Report.pdf>

School House Connection – Early Childhood <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/program/early-childhood>

Home Visiting and Child Welfare

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The earliest years of life are foundational for children's development. Secure, nurturing, and consistent relationships with caregivers help young children develop trust, safety, and a sense of self. When family stress is high – whether the result of economic insecurity or other challenges – young children experience the effects of that stress in profound ways.

Young children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system:

- Historically, over one quarter of all child maltreatment victims in the U.S. are younger than three years old, with children under one most affected.¹
- Young children (birth to age five) are the most likely to be involved in the child welfare system; the majority of cases involve neglect, often tied to poverty or parental stress.²

Countless studies find that early involvement with the child welfare system can have a long-term impact on children's emotional well-being.³ Because of this, efforts over the years have focused on providing earlier, family-strengthening support to families in the hope that fewer children will require placement in out-of-home care.

Signed into law in 2018, the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) gives states, territories, and tribes the option to use child welfare program funds for evidence-based preventive services like home visiting, mental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment that can help to support and stabilize families. This represents a notable change from child welfare agencies' focus on safety through placement, to a focus on prevention and early intervention.

Home visiting and child welfare have different purposes, responsibilities, and approaches—but when they understand and leverage each other's strengths, they can create a more connected continuum of support for young children and families. Voluntary home visiting programs can develop trusting relationships with families, offer early and consistent support to families, and provide deep expertise on infancy and early childhood development. When families are experiencing significant stress or facing concerns related to child safety, child welfare can play an important role in ensuring safety.

¹ <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs-impact/early-childhood-systems/infant-toddler-court#:~:text=Abuse%20and%20neglect%20during%20infancy,that%20children%20need%20to%20thrive>

² https://www.nccp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/text_968.pdf

³ <https://hvworkforce.org/resource/improving-partnerships-and-coordination-between-home-visiting-and-child-welfare/>

Together, they can foster healthy child-caregiver attachment, provide trauma-informed support, connect families to needed resources and services, and reduce placement in out-of-home care.

Promising Examples

The National Home Visiting Network set out to uncover examples of collaboration between child welfare and home visiting. Several evidenced based home visiting models, including Healthy Families America, SafeCare, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Child First among others, purposefully work at the intersection of these fields to reduce abuse and neglect. Among the many examples we discovered, the following two illustrate what can be possible when the two systems work together.

Healthy Families America

Healthy Families America (HFA) aligns with the FFPSA, offering preventative, evidence-based approaches to reduce the need for foster care. HFA provides flexible, tailored support to build protective factors and strengthen families. Its support is relationship-based, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive. HFA has developed specific protocols for sites that work with families referred from child welfare. The protocols allow programs to accept referrals and adjust standard programmatic frameworks to support families facing acute stress and/or child welfare system involvement. For example, adjustments include extending enrollment so that children up to 24 months can enroll; extending the service duration; considering caseload adjustments to reduce burnout of home visitors and spread out the highest need cases; and establishing memorandum of understanding between local HFA programs and child welfare agencies to streamline referral pathways and data-sharing agreements.

Essential Lesson:

Together, these adaptations demonstrate how a home visiting model can maintain its core approach while creating greater flexibility for families experiencing heightened stress or child welfare involvement.

Safe Babies / Infant-Toddler Court Teams

The Safe Babies Infant-Toddler Court Team approach was developed by ZERO TO THREE in 2005 as a pilot to reduce child maltreatment and speed up permanent placement by closing gaps at the systems level. Operating in more than 30 states, the model is designed to bring together judges, mental health providers, social workers, and community coordinators to consider the root issues that might be interfering with child safety. Home visitors partner with the community coordinators to build unified family support plans and they also provide hands-on parenting guidance, developmental screenings, and wrap-around services. This allows these teams to focus on what matters: understanding child development, the importance of early attachment, and creating safe, stable, and nurturing environments; integrating research-informed best practice into court proceedings and child welfare case planning; and aligning solutions across systems creating a continuum of services for families.

Essential Lesson:

This approach illustrates the unique contribution home visiting can make within a multidisciplinary child welfare team: bringing a developmental, relationship-based perspective into decisions about child safety, attachment, and permanency.

Collaboration Tips: Home Visiting and Child Welfare

Home visiting programs can support family strengthening and reunification by:

- Working in partnership with child welfare to establish pathways and remove barriers for child welfare to timely refer families to home visiting.
- Partnering with the judicial and child welfare systems to offer support to families at risk of child separation and to help increase the likelihood of family preservation and reunification.
- Developing consistency across the fields including shared language, collaborative protocols and service plans (e.g., establishing or supporting an Infant-Toddler Court Team), and cross-training of staff.
- Considering how each family's goals for home visiting may support the goals for their child welfare case plan.
- Sharing the home visitor perspective and experience working with families as decisions are made about services, programs, supports, and case plans.

Helpful Resources

National Home Visiting Resource Center - State Partnerships to Coordinate Home Visiting and Child Welfare - <https://nhvrc.org/wp-content/uploads/NHVRC-Brief-032923.pdf>

Jackie Walorksi Center for Evidence-Based Case Management
<https://hvworkforce.org/resource/improving-partnerships-and-coordination-between-home-visiting-and-child-welfare/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway -
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/find-resources/>

Annie E. Casey Foundation - 10 Key Resources for Child Welfare Professionals -
<https://www.aecf.org/blog/10-key-resources-for-child-welfare-professionals>

Chapin Hall & Start Early - Home Visiting in the Family First Context - <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/FFPSA-HV-Brief.pdf>

Casey Family Programs Issue Brief on Safe Children: Are home visiting programs effective in reducing child maltreatment? https://www.casey.org/media/22.07-QFF-SC-Home-visiting-programs_fnl.pdf

Prenatal to Three Policy Center - Home Visiting and Child Welfare Involvement
<https://pn3policy.org/home-visiting-and-child-welfare-involvement-a-matched-comparison-group-study/>

Zero to Three - Collaborating with Infant-Toddler Court Teams: A Tip Sheet for Home Visiting Professionals - https://www.zerotothree.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ZTT-Home-Visiting-Tips-Visitors-Final_508.pdf