



# Children's Mental Health: Increasing Awareness and Advocacy

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## Introduction

Mental health is an essential component of a child's overall health, and plays a significant role in the child's emotional, social, and intellectual well being. Mental health is directly related to physical health, and is impacted by the child's home, school, and social environment. It is estimated that 15 million youth are living with diagnosable mental illnesses, yet only 7% are receiving the care that they need. There is a strong need for health care professionals to assess the risk, and protective factors for mental health of youth and offer the appropriate treatment.

There are also many organizations whose aim is to support children struggling with mental illness. It is important that health care providers are aware of these organizations, and are able to direct families to these resources in order to gain both emotional support and assistance navigating the system.

## Population of Focus

Population:

- American children with mental health disorders are in need of better access to treatment.
- Treatment systems are available to children with mental health disorders, but often families are unaware of these services.

Statistics:

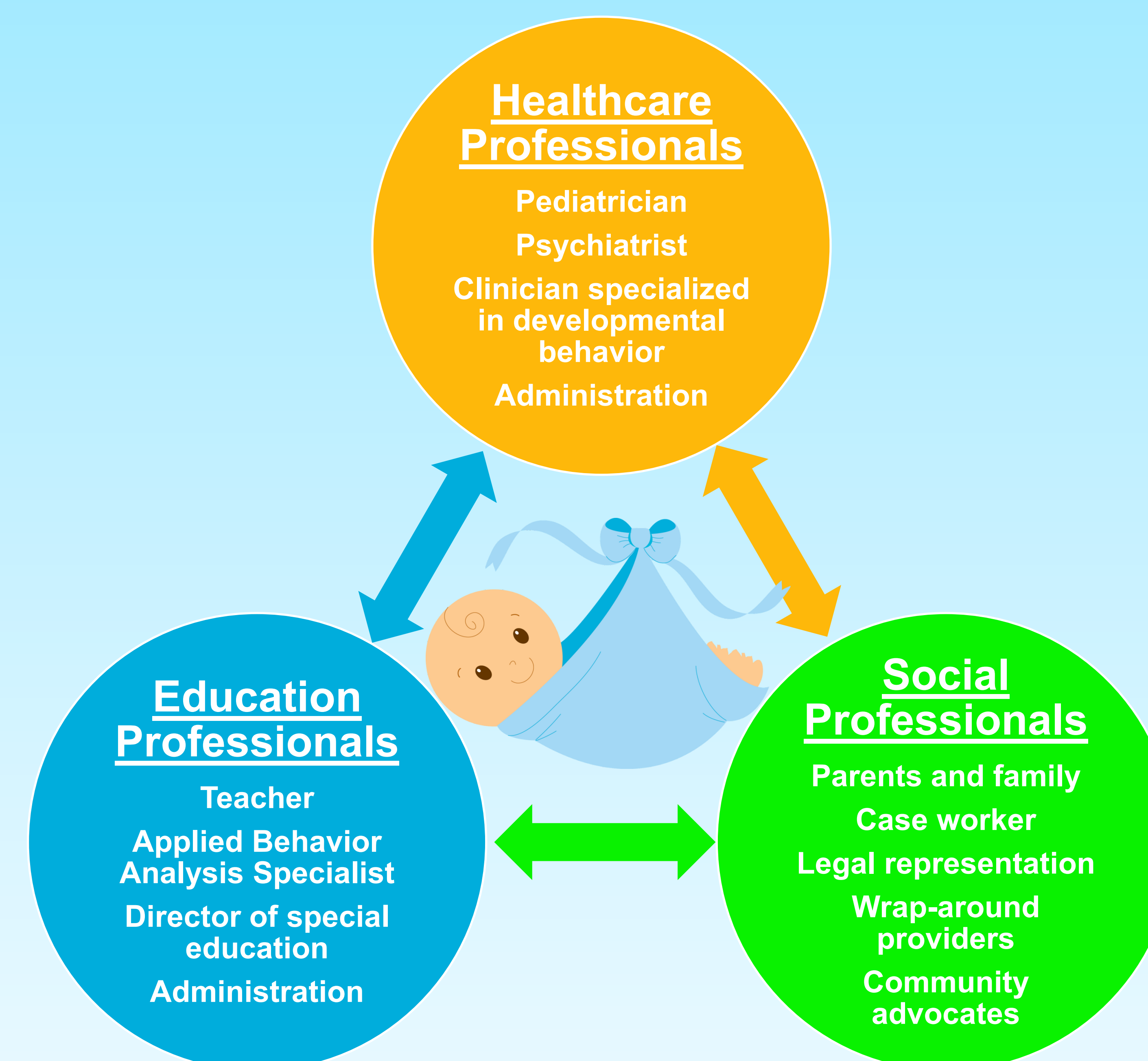
- 46.3% of children age 13-18 suffer from a mental disorder in there lifetime.
- 1 in 5 children will have a severe debilitating mental disorder.
- Half of all mental disorders begin by age 14.
- Suicide has become the second leading cause of death in children, overtaking cancer.
- Only 50.6% of children with a mental disorder received treatment within the past year.
- Annual direct and indirect cost for serious mental illness amounted to 317.6 billion dollars in 2002 and continues to rise.

## Service Project

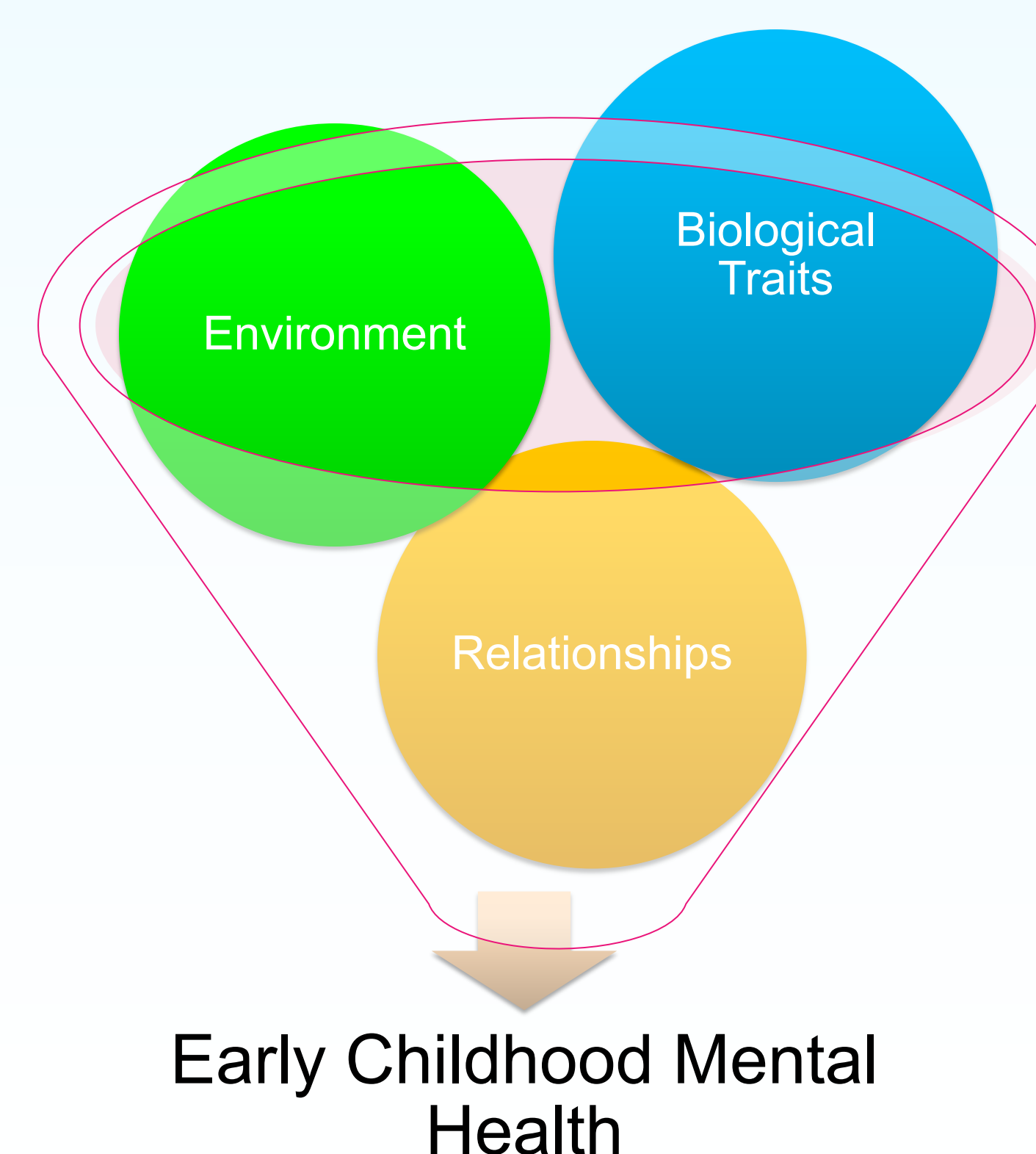
Our goal was to identify a family in need and help them gain access to resources for their child:

- The family identified has a child with severe emotional and mental struggles who is diagnosed with ADHD and a mood disorder.
- The child experiences behavioral and communication difficulties in the classroom that are interfering with his educational progress.
- An individual education plan (IEP) at school is recommended for the child.
- Students met with the mother in a clinic visit at The Center for Well Being.
- A follow-up visit was made to the family's home to help identify the barriers to an IEP.
- Three students accompanied the mother to the IEP hearing at the school.
- An IEP was granted to the child and follow-up meetings between teachers, administrators and family were scheduled.

## Inter-Professional Relationships



## Social and Emotional Development



## Key Points and Lessons

- The overwhelming majority of children with mental disorders fail to be identified, lack access to treatment or support, and, in turn, have a lower quality of life.
- Research shows that the early years of life set the stage for all future development, and therefore early intervention is crucial.
- Although a multitude of mental health services are available, navigation through the system can be dizzying and frustrating.
- A practitioner must understand and acknowledge social determinants of health and an individual's own personal circumstance.

## Next Steps

- Educate parents, healthcare providers and schools about children's mental health
- Create sustainable programs modeled after MYCHILD and Project LAUNCH
- Increase access to the healthcare and education system for parents of children with mental disorders

## Acknowledgements

Organizations:

- Ben Speaks: Medway, MA
- Boston Public Health Commission: Boston, MA
- Bureau of Child, Adolescent, and Family Health: Boston, MA
- Center for Well Being, Dr. Mathieu Bermingham: Millis, MA
- Children Services of Roxbury: Roxbury, MA
- Department of Mental Health: Boston, MA
- Department of Public Health: Boston, MA
- Family Health Delivery Systems: Millis, MA
- The Valley View School: North Brookfield, MA
- PPAL (Parent Professional Advocacy League): Boston, MA

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