



GOOD Mental Health.
It starts with a conversation.

The Children's Behavioral Health Knowledge Center: Helping Families Talk about a Parent's Mental Illness

This is the first article in a series about the Children's Behavioral Health (CBH) Knowledge Center and the issues addressed through its work.



Helping families identify the effects of a parents' mental illness and develop strategies to promote resilience in parents and children is critical work for both Department of Mental Health adult services and child & adolescent services. The CBH Knowledge Center is supporting a partnership between Dr. William Beardslee, *pictured left*, and his team at Children's Hospital and South Shore Mental Health to do this by integrating Family Talk with an In-Home Therapy (IHT) Program. This partnership will produce new Family Talk training materials tailored for use in IHT programs statewide.

In-Home Therapy is a MassHealth Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) service that provides a family therapy team in the home. In 2013, more than 17,000 children received IHT services statewide. The experience of IHT clinicians is consistent with research data: children with serious emotional disturbance receiving mental health services are likely to have parents with mental health and substance abuse issues. Yet, it can be challenging to engage a parent in their child's care and to help them understand how their own behavior might be affecting their child's behavior and well being.

The Family Talk Preventive Intervention, known as Family Talk, is a strength-based, psycho-educational program with a strong evidence base. A summary of the relevant studies can be found at www.FAMpod.org. Unlike many intervention strategies that focus only on alleviating individual symptoms, Family Talk focuses on the effects of parental mental illness on all family members. Intervention sessions involve meetings with parents and children separately and culminate with a family meeting facilitated by a clinician in which parents talk about the effects of their mental illness. Integrating family members into the intervention helps all family members build coping skills and promotes mental health in children and families.

Dr. Beardslee discussed the development and evolution of Family Talk as well as the importance of evidence based programs and practices in general at the CBH Knowledge Center's Symposium this past spring. A video of his talk is available on DMH's YouTube channel www.youtube.com/dmhconnections. Also available are DMH Child and Adolescent Services Deputy Commissioner Joan Mikula's welcoming remarks and vision for the Knowledge Center. These links and more are listed here:

- [The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry's Facts for Families provides some helpful guidance](#)
- DMH's Center of Excellence at UMass: Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC):
[Families Living with Mental Illness Motherhood, Mental Illness, and Recovery](#)
- [Family Talk training materials and related information](#)
- Dr. Beardslee's Lecture at the May 7, 2014 Symposium
[Part 1 of 3](#)
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- [Joan Mikula's Welcome Remarks at the May 7, 2014 Symposium](#)