

Developing an Early Childhood Mental Health
System of Care in Maryland

Voices of Families I

Focus Groups with Families Caring for Young Children with Mental Health Needs



1. **"I didn't know..."**

- there was anything wrong!
- what to do!
- where to go for help!

"What do you do when you don't know what to do?"

2. When did you first have concerns?

- Often only when the child was a few months old
- Sometimes did know until the child entered a program or another sibling was born

"I just thought he was being a child."

3. What path did you take?

- Families looked for and found help in many places
- Head Start, Family Support Centers, Infants and Toddlers, Child Find, Judy Centers, Home visiting, Healthy Start, churches, daycare and more
- Bus signs, Valu Pak mailers, websites, chat rooms and books
- Pediatricians often the first point of contact - often not helpful.
- An individual who took an interest in them - a teacher, a counselor, a speech therapist

"He always said, 'She'll out grow it, but she wasn't.' "

"Ask anybody: friends, family, son's school."

4. What role have you played?

- Mother and father, advocate, nurse, mentor, teacher and student
- Get papers together, get to appointments
- Set up meetings with all involved so that everyone is on the same page and they know what's going on at home

"Explain to others how to work the Rubik's Cube."

"How can someone who sees my child only a few minutes and just reads his chart know more than I?"

5. What role do you see for families in the system?

- Often only viewed their role in the context of their own child yet voiced concerns and a willingness to get involved.

"Don't want others to go through what I went through."

"Ask the people you're helping."

6. Themes:

- Concern about confidentiality
- Attitudes of providers - intimidating and judgmental - don't want to be "trained"
- Concern about medication effects with young children
- Assistance for grandparents caring for young children - financial and peer support

"Help me, don't judge me."

7. Needs:

- Affordable daycare
- Education, GED
- A good job
- Cheaper rent
- "Mothers my age to talk hang out and talk"
- Support groups, parent to parent support, sharing word of mouth

"It's overwhelming"

"So tired and exhausted."

**"A high school diploma... I feel so bad when some one asks if I have a diploma.
It's like someone crumbled me up like a piece of paper."**

Support so I know I'm not alone and have somebody to talk to."



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