# Preschool Mental Health

# Parent Academy

**Daniella Jernick, LCSW**
**Preschool Social Worker**
**Community & Parent Involvement Specialist**

Nutley Public Schools
Early Childhood Education

# AGENDA

1. Define mental health
2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs & Genetics
3. Importance of Attachment
4. Video→ Building Connections and Strengthening Attachment
5. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
6. Childhood diagnosis and treatment approaches available
7. Home to school connection
8. Pyramid Model
9. Healthy Habits

# What is mental health?

**The CDC states that**

"Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood."
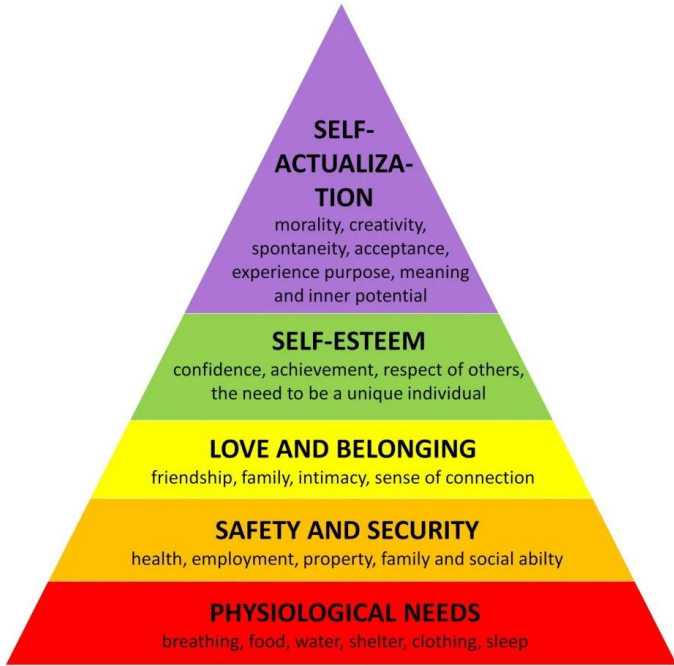
# Mental health in preschoolers

❖ **self-regulation**→ the ability to understand and manage your behavior and your reactions to feelings and things happening around you

❖ **emotional adaptability**→ having the flexibility to handle change and adapt to new situations. Being open for change

❖ **relating to others**→ interacting with others, listening, showing interest, and being accepting or including

❖ **behavior**→ the way in which a person acts in response to a particular situation or stimulus**

❖ **coping**→strategies we use to handle and  reduce unpleasant emotions

❖ **social/ emotional well being**→ the ability to identify what you are feeling, how to manage that emotion, and how to navigate those emotions in a way that leads to stable and supportive relationships with others.

❖ **attention**→ the ability to focus and remain on task

# Impacts of early childhood mental health



## SELF-ACTUALIZA-TION
morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, experience purpose, meaning and inner potential

## SELF-ESTEEM
confidence, achievement, respect of others, the need to be a unique individual

## LOVE AND BELONGING
friendship, family, intimacy, sense of connection

## SAFETY AND SECURITY
health, employment, property, family and social abilty

## PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS
breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep

# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

## Environment
Family/ caregivers
Relationships**
School
Physical Factors
Getting needs met



## Genetics

Human needs starting at the base which are survival needs.
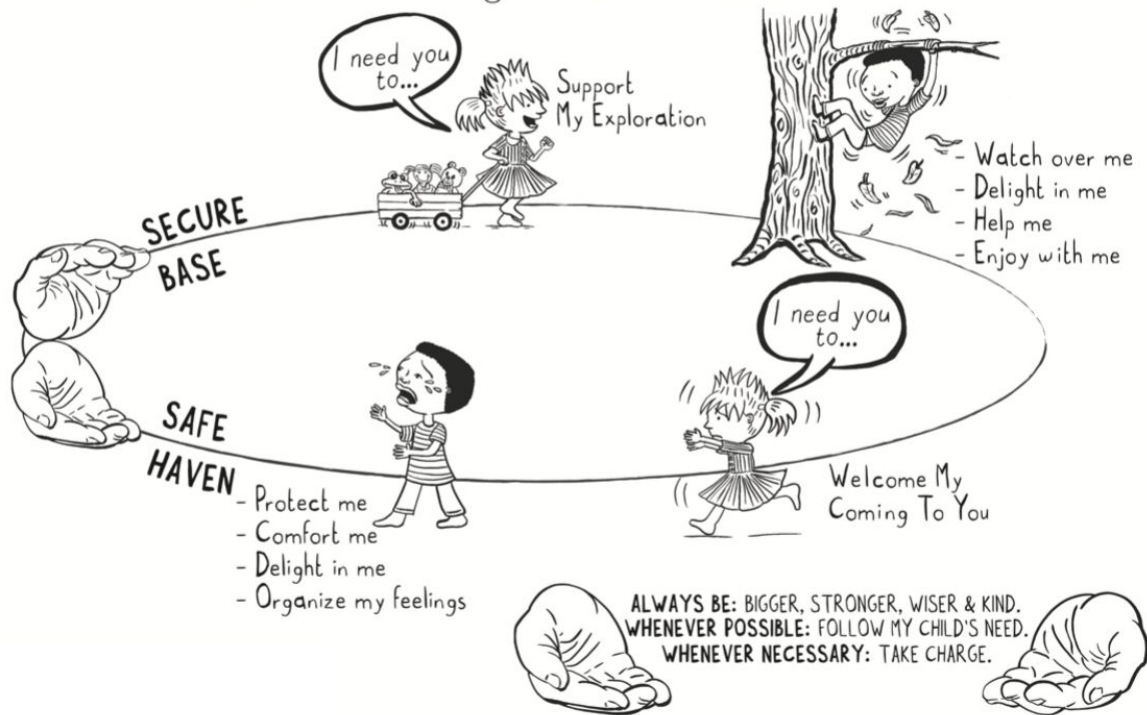
# The importance of attachment early on in life

❖ Attachment → enduring emotional closeness which binds families in order to prepare children for independence and parenthood.

❖ Attachment allows children the 'secure base' necessary to explore, learn and relate, and the wellbeing, motivation, and opportunity to do so. It is important for safety, stress regulation, adaptability, and resilience.
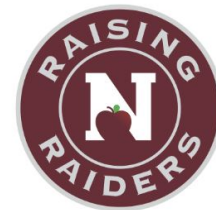
*The Circle of Security: A Visual "Map" of Caregiver-Child Attachment*

# Building Connections and strengthening attachment

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aISXCw0Pi94

# Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health.

Research tells us that chronic stress a can lead to medical conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke later on in life.

## Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years)

Examples:

- witnessing violence in the home or community
- having a family member attempt or die by suicide

environmental impacts affecting sense of safety, stability, and bonding, such as growing up in a household with:

- substance use problems
- mental health problems
- instability due or abandonment from parental separation or household members being in jail or prison

# Mental health diagnosis in childhood

- Anxiety (separation anxiety)
  a. Selective Mutism
- Depression
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)
- Conduct Disorder (CD)

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Tourette Syndrome
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Attachment Disorders

PANDAS Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections.

The symptoms are usually dramatic, happen "overnight and out of the blue," and can include motor or vocal tics or both and obsessions, compulsions, or both. In addition to these symptoms, children may become moody or irritable, experience anxiety attacks, or show concerns about separating from parents or loved ones.

# Mental health treatment in children

#1: The first step to treatment is to talk with a healthcare provider such as your child's primary care provider, or a mental health specialist

Behavior therapy includes child therapy, family therapy, or a combination of both.

Types of therapy that can be utilized in treating a child:

**Play therapy**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or

Trauma Focused (TF CBT)

Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)

Psychotropic medication
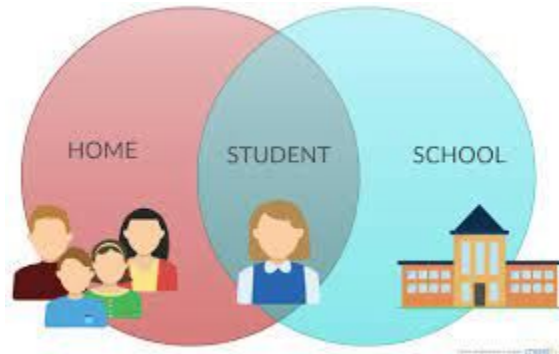
**Family therapy**

Therapy for parents

# Home to School Connection

Early childhood programs that actively involve families, serve children in natural contexts where possible, incorporate evidence-based interventions, and take a comprehensive approach to treatment are associated with greater improvements in mental health outcomes.

# PYRAMID MODEL

The Pyramid Model is a positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) framework that uses evidence-based practices.

***Supports Social Emotional Competence in Early Childhood.***

Helps build skills for supporting nurturing and responsive caregiving, create learning environments, provide targeted social-emotional skills, and support children with challenging behavior.

Has many resources available for schools and families, including **Backpack series, schedules, visuals, etc.**

We also use things like family pictures, transition items, cozy corner, and manipulatives to teach coping mechanisms (like deep breathing)

***CHALLENGINGBEHAVIORS.ORG***

Safety

Consistency

Nurturing relationships

Community: Sense of Belonging

Basic Needs: Food & Shelter

# Summing it up...

- ❖ The emotional well-being of young children is directly tied to the functioning of their caregivers and the families in which they live.

- ❖ Mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions which causes distress and problems getting through the day.

- ❖ Mental and physical health are interconnected and contribute to overall health

- ❖ Many children occasionally experience fears and worries or display disruptive behaviors. If symptoms are serious and persistent and interfere with school, home, or play activities, this could be an indicator to seek professional help and treatment with a mental health clinician.

# STAYING HEALTHY

- **Healthy eating:** including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes (for example, beans, peas, and lentils), lean protein sources, and nuts and seeds

- **Physical activity** and movement for at least 60 minutes each day

- Getting the **recommended amount of sleep** each night based on age→ **Prek is 10–13 hours per day (including naps)**

- Practicing **mindfulness or relaxation techniques**

belly breathing

# Resources

- ❖ Center for Disease Control
  - ➢ https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/parent-behavior-therapy.html
  - ➢ https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html
- ❖ Circle of Security
- ❖ Department of Education
  - ➢ Supporting Child and student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health needs
- ❖ National Library of Medicine
- ❖ National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI)
- ❖ National Institute for Mental Health
- ❖ PyramidModel.org
- ❖ Simply Psychology (https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html)
- ❖ https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/deep-dives/mental-health/