



POLICY FORUM

Addressing 'Adverse Community Experiences' with a Collaborative Approach to Child Well-being

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic era uncovered not only what we already knew about the prevalence of childhood anxiety and depression but revealed too a mental health system that is ill equipped to handle the distress or the concerns of children and families. It's a crisis that must be met not only by qualified professionals but by equipping parents, schools, and communities with the skills and resources they need to support and care for all our children.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has shared interest, concern, training, and treatment of children's mental health for more than two decades, but it took a pandemic to reveal that our systems of care have failed to grow and evolve to better meet a crisis looming in the background. This issue's authors do more than just describe the challenge. They offer insight, describe evidence-based approaches to addressing our concerns, and shine lights on successful programmatic and community efforts to support our infants and toddlers, children, and teens.

There is more to this solution landscape than screening, referral, and treatment. Affordable child care and whole-child health care that include affordable food and improved nutrition are critical. The science of social drivers of health suggests that trauma-informed care can help with the unaffordable costs of housing and child care, and that pre-K and schools need well-paid teachers and aides to buffer stresses and uncover resilience in families and children alike.

In time, we can steadily raise up additional mental health and behavioral health professionals and programming. We can more rapidly alleviate distress and provide redress for parents, children, and families. We need a both/and, not an either/or, solution. NCMJ

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