

August 20, 2019

Concurrent Sessions

Updating the Evidence - Presentations and Conversation

Five concurrent sessions will be offered in thematic areas. Each session will feature three presenters who will have 15 minutes to share evidence that complements and adds to our understanding of supportive environments for child and youth mental health. Presentations will be followed by general discussion on the following questions:

- *How does this work fit into and advance the ASI Call to Action?*
- *What are the implications for upstream investment and a whole society approach to mental health promotion?*

Results of these discussions will be included in the final plenary session on August 21st.

Session 4: Nurture and Nature

a) In these woods – wonder, discovery, adventure

Presenter: Alex Smith, PlayGroundology

Increasingly, studies are documenting that children experience a broad range of benefits from spending time outdoors in independent play. Recent research also indicates that time immersed in natural environments can have a positive impact on mental health regardless of age. Kids engaged in unstructured play in a natural setting are in a win – win zone. In these woods – wonder, discovery, adventure will explore some of the assets we have in Atlantic Canada that support independent play in natural environments. It will also speak to how kids benefit from this play. We will also look at some of the obstacles that prevent more children from experiencing the natural environment in meaningful ways and what might be considered to increase access. References will be drawn from contemporary studies, publications and documentaries. The presenter will also draw on his experience as a Scout leader of a Cub pack, as a family camper with three young children and as an independent writer and researcher advocating for a wider variety of play opportunities for kids in public spaces.

How does your presentation make a connection with the theme Supportive Environments for Child and Youth Mental Health – Our Shared Responsibility!?

In the first instance, the presentation will identify supportive spaces, groups, institutions and activities that are recognized as making positive contributions to child and youth mental health within the context of play in natural environments. In addition, the presentation will also provide resources to help facilitate play in natural environments as well as raise questions about mobility and access and about roles for local governments and the education and voluntary sectors to support and facilitate increased engagement of play in natural environments.

What will others learn from your presentation?

Participants will learn about some of the great natural play landscapes in Atlantic Canada and some of the urban nature spaces available to be explored. Participants will also learn how outdoor play in natural environments can help to support the development of resilience and other positive mental health outcomes. Participants will

consider what kind of coalition of care and action is necessary to ensure an increased number of children are able to benefit from play in natural environments. Beyond educators, health care professionals and naturalists who else can be added to the mix?

How does your presentation demonstrate implications for policy and practice in fostering supportive environments?

A collaborative approach from all three orders of government will be required to improve and promote access to play for kids in natural environments. The natural environment assets, as well as some established networks are available in both urban and non-urban contexts but there is a need to work on awareness and access barriers.

Presenter

Alex Smith
Founder/Editor, PlayGroundology
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Alex Smith is an independent writer/researcher and founder/editor of the award-winning blog, PlayGroundology. Over the past 10 years he has become an ardent play advocate producing original content and curating material for international audiences in over 100 countries on a variety of social media platforms. His volunteerism also includes programming public play events, participating in presentations and panel discussions and being a grass-roots source for media reporting on play.

Alex was a late convert to the camping life. Along with his wife – the experienced outdoorsperson - and their three children he's been camping at various of National Parks in Atlantic Canada for nearly 15 years. He is very happy that his children are growing up experiencing some of nature's wild places and that he has the good fortune to join them on the journey and share in their wonder.

b) Infant and Early Mental Health – the influence on later health outcomes

Presenter: Chaya Kulkarni, Hospital for Sick Children

Infant Mental Health Promotion (IMHP) will provide insight into the science of infant and early mental health and how it influences later physical and mental health outcomes. The science and implications for policy and practice will be shared through findings from a number of research led by Infant Mental Health Promotion. IMHP will highlight findings from:

- An RCT at Children's Aid Society of Toronto highlighting the need for a differential response for children under five involved with child protection.
- A qualitative study in Calgary region that looked at impact on developmental trajectory of children birth to five with child welfare involvement using a differential approach to support early mental health
- A summary of 20 community mapping tables on infant and early mental health, of which 5 are Indigenous communities, that document the state of infant and early mental health and the opportunities to begin building a system at a community level

The overall goal is to provide insight into how and why early mental health needs to be recognized as a key factor in later physical and mental health outcomes. Implications for practice and policy will be explored.

How does your presentation make a connection with the theme Supportive Environments for Child and Youth Mental Health – Our Shared Responsibility!?

Research is showing us just how critical development and experiences are to long term outcomes of every child. We also know this to be the most profound period of brain and behaviour development. Given this science, ensuring that our young children have the optimal support for their development will lead to healthier youth and adults. This presentation will connect what happens in the first three years to what happens later in life.

What will others learn from your presentation?

One of the most important outcomes of this talk will be the recognition of mental health as something that begins to develop prenatally and throughout infancy. The second will be the understanding that the most profound influence on early mental health is the quality of relationships a child experiences. These relationships will influence brain architecture, attachment, and overall development not just in the early years but throughout a person's life.

How does your presentation demonstrate implications for policy and practice in fostering supportive environments?

Currently, infant and early mental health is left out of the conversation on mental health and therefore left out of policy initiatives. This presentation will offer examples of how some communities in Canada are taking the science of infant and early mental health and changing both policy and practice. In Alberta, early developmental screening for children under five involved with child protection is becoming standard practice. It is supported with policy and with training. This presentation will highlight some easy ways communities can engage with this knowledge and change policy and practice.

Presenter

Chaya Kulkarni, Ed. D
Director, Infant Mental Health Promotion, The Hospital for Sick Children
www.imhpromotion.ca

Dr. Chaya Kulkarni is currently the Director of Infant Mental Health Promotion (IMHP) at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. Infant Mental Health Promotion is a national organization guided by individuals from a wide range of services/agencies that focus on promoting optimal outcomes for infants in the first three years of life. Dr. Kulkarni provides leadership to research, professional education and public awareness activities at IMHP. In her role with IMHP, Chaya is currently leading advocacy and training initiatives in areas such as child welfare including family courts, and community based programs supporting families in their neighborhoods. She leads IMHP in the development and implementation of curricula and materials to support professionals working with families of young children.

c) A Foodie's Perspective: SEL is a 4 Course Meal!

Presenter: Anna-Lisa Mackey, PATHS Program

First Nations Education Initiative has been working with 3 First Nations communities in New Brunswick to support implementation of the PATHS® program in their band operated schools. This fall will mark our fourth year of implementation. There have been many teachings along the way. So far, here are the 4 big take-aways:

1. Amuse-bouche: Comprehensive programing – what is SEL and what should a comprehensive program look like?

2. Appetizer: Evidence-based research – not all evidence is created equal: how to be discerning?
3. Main Course: Training – why it's important and what should it entail?
4. Desert: External Support- Necessary to ensure lasting implementation.

The SEL implementation in the province of New Brunswick has found success, in part, because of these 4 key elements. By sharing our experience, we hope to provide a well-balanced dining experience that others can replicate in their own communities.

How does your presentation make a connection with the theme Supportive Environments for Child and Youth Mental Health – Our Shared Responsibility!?

This presentation is all about what is needed to provide effective SEL implementation in schools. SEL is foundational in the effort to provide preventative programming in schools for children and youth mental health. We highlight the importance of external supports in the effectiveness of SEL implementation.

What will others learn from your presentation?

Participants will learn:

1. What is SEL and how to determine effective programs?
2. How to determine if a program is "evidence" based?
3. What should training include?
4. Why external support is so important!

How does your presentation demonstrate implications for policy and practice in fostering supportive environments?

Many sites are looking to implement SEL in their schools. However, there is a plethora of available programs on the market today, making selection confusing. With 20 years of experience in the field of SEL implementation, and using the New Brunswick example of what works, this presentation will provide solid guidelines from basic understanding of SEL, evidence-based program selection, training and support to ensure success.

Presenter

Anna-Lisa Mackey
CEO, PATHS Program, LLC
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Anna-Lisa Mackey holds bachelor's degrees in both English and Education (with a focus on First Nations Education) and a Master's in Education. For close to 20 years, Anna-Lisa has worked specifically with children at risk of developing serious behavior problems and training/implementing the PATHS® and Preschool pro-grams. She has trained and presented to school staff and mental health professionals across Canada, United States and several countries worldwide. Most recently, Anna-Lisa's company, LearningSEL, LLC became the proud owner of the publishing and distribution of the PATHS® Program, LLC.