



Start Well – Supporting the Social and Emotional Development of Young Children

Start Well was implemented in 2018 to develop the social-emotional skills of young children, ages birth to eight, by building supportive, collaborative relationships with Early Care and Education (ECE) providers in family child care homes (FCCH) and center-based programs. Our program utilizes the Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Model designed by Georgetown University and the Pyramid Model, both evidence-based practices in the field of early childhood mental health.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health is the Driver for All Future Development

The quality of a child's early relationships sets the stage for healthy attachments and positive mental health in the future. Infant and early childhood mental health is dependent upon developing secure relationships with the adults closest to them, including family members and other caregivers such as ECE providers. One way Orange County, California measures a child's social and emotional development is through the Early Development Index (Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University, 2000) which provides valid and reliable population-level data to inform systems change.

The Early Development Index is a Tool Used to Measure Early Child Development

The Early Development Index (EDI) is a population-based measure of early childhood development and school readiness in five key domains: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge. The information collected through the EDI helps us understand how children are developing by connecting early childhood experiences to learning outcomes and future successes. Using a composite score of two domains of the EDI, social competence and emotional maturity, Start Well identifies the most vulnerable neighborhoods in the county with a goal of targeting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation services in those regions.

Funded by First 5 Orange County and in partnership with the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, in 2008 Orange County became the vanguard site for implementing the EDI in the United States. First 5 OC has continued its commitment to the EDI, funding EDI implementation every three years at 100% of the schools and districts in the county with a kindergarten population. Overall, 12.8% of children in Orange County are vulnerable on the EDI's social-emotional composite. This includes a range of scores from a low of 1.4% vulnerable in a neighborhood in Irvine to a high of 25% in a Tustin neighborhood. In 2022, the average vulnerability on the social-emotional composite was 9.6%.



