



Pediatric Mental Health Newsletter

June 2026

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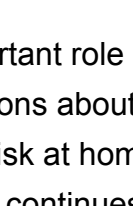
2026 Pediatric Mental Health Conference

Thanks to all those who joined us for our second Pediatric Mental Health Conference in Peoria on May 7! We were thrilled to have over 100 health care clinicians, including Pediatricians, Family Physicians, Psychiatrists, Physician Assistants, Nurse Practitioners, Nurses, Social Workers, Clinical Mental Health Counselors, and nursing students from across the state join us for this event.

Sessions included:

- **A Generation at Risk: Trauma-Informed Care for Every Child**
Presented by: Kristen Kenan, MD, MPH, FAAP
- **Discomfort with Mental Health Issues in Younger Children (<11 yrs)**
Presented by: Courtney Romba, MD
- **Working with Schools**
Presented by: Ashley Fischer, MD, FAAP, WPATH and Gloria E. Barrera, MSN, RN, PEL-CSN, PLNC
- **ADHD Management - Part 1**
Presented by: Janet Patterson, MD, FAAP
- **Building Trust Before Treatment: Addressing Barriers to Pediatric Mental Health Care**
Presented by: Shweta Chawla, MD, FAAP, MBA in HCA
- **ADHD Management - Part 2: Beyond the Diagnosis - Advocacy and Interventions**
Presented by: Shawn Amador, LCSW, PEL and Amanda Myers, LCSW
- **Adolescent Substance Use in 2026: Trends, Risks, and Responses**
Presented by: Molly Perri, MD
- **Legal Issues in Pediatric Mental Health**
Presented by: Amanda Klemas, JD

[View Conference Presentations](#)



June is National Gun Violence Awareness Month!

Pediatricians can play an important role in preventing firearm injuries by engaging families in conversations about firearm access, promoting safe storage practices, and reducing risk at home and places where children visit. As the youth mental health crisis continues to grow, these conversations are more important than ever. Firearms are the most lethal means of suicide, and their presence in the home significantly elevates the risk for adolescents. Families should be aware of the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#), which provides free and confidential 24/7 support for anyone experiencing mental health distress, suicidal thoughts, or concern for a loved one.

Visit ICAAP's [Firearms Violence Prevention Webpage](#) for resources including:

- [Clinician Guidance for Playdates & Gun Safety](#) (talking points)
- [Patient Resource on How to Talk About Firearm Safety with Other Parents](#)
- [Where to Find Free Gun Locks in Illinois](#)
- [Secure Firearm Storage Tips for Families](#)



A Stepped Approach for Addressing Mental, Emotional Health Concerns

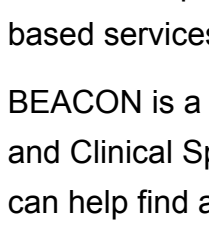
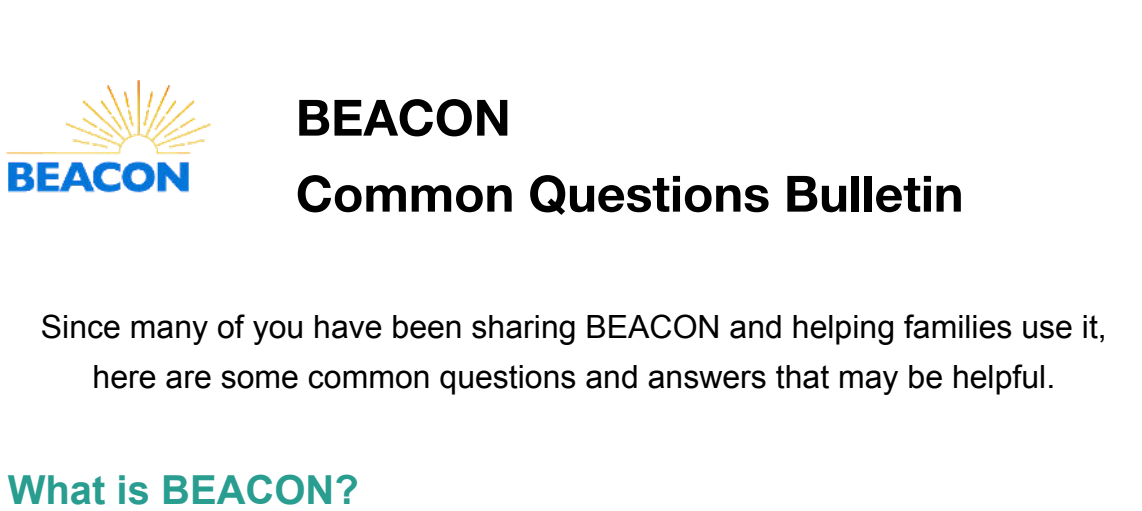
The AAP encourages pediatricians to integrate mental, emotional and relational health into their approach with patients beginning in infancy and continuing throughout adolescence as part of a whole health approach. A new clinical report observes that more children are experiencing mental and emotional health concerns and specialized resources are often difficult to access.

- [Clinical Report](#): "Framework for Approaching Healthy Mental and Emotional Development in Pediatrics"
- [AAP News](#): Report offers ways to integrate mental health as part of overall care
- [Healthy Children](#): Children's Mental Health: Shifting Focus From What's Wrong to What's Strong
- [News Release](#): AAP Offers Framework on Integrating Mental, Emotional, and Relational Health into Every Visit

Children's Mental Health is a Growing Source of Parental Stress, Survey Finds

[HealthDay](#) (5/1) reports a [survey](#) by The Kids Mental Health Foundation found that "children's mental health is an increasing source of stress for parents."

According to the online survey involving 1,081 parents of children younger than 18, "nearly all parents (97%) reported that they felt stress related to parenting in the past month, the survey showed. Nearly 1 in 3 (30%) said they experienced stress 'often.' And two of the top sources of stress are children's behavioral issues (35%) or children's emotional and mental health (26%), the survey found. Unfortunately, nearly half of parents (46%) said their stress makes their children more anxious or worried."



BEACON Common Questions Bulletin

Since many of you have been sharing BEACON and helping families use it, here are some common questions and answers that may be helpful.

What is BEACON?

BEACON serves as a centralized access point, enabling parents, caregivers, and service providers to identify and connect with state-funded and community-based services for which youth may be eligible.

BEACON is a secure platform that can link families with Resource Coordinators and Clinical Specialists in the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery who can help find appropriate resources. Anyone can request assistance from this team on behalf of a family seeking services. The tool also offers parents the option to create an account where they can upload documents related to their child's care and choose to work with a navigator who can provide support for navigating the process of obtaining school-based services. Enabling state agency partners to work together in one platform, BEACON also speeds up the process of obtaining residential treatment and in-home support for youth with complex needs.

How does BEACON connect families to services?

BEACON generates a tailored list of community-based services and state-funded programs based on the responses to intake questions. If the family would like additional assistance, a Resource Coordinator will connect them to the BEACON team for personalized help. BEACON does not replace human interaction with an AI-generated response; rather, by speeding service matching it frees up staff to provide timely responses to families who need them.

How do I refer a family to BEACON?

Anyone can enter a case into BEACON by selecting "Get Started" here: <https://beacon.illinois.gov/>

The family can enter their own information, or you can enter it on their behalf. First, it will ask some intake questions that will provide a tailored list of state-funded and community-based services. And after that, you can request that the family be connected to the BEACON team who can assist them directly.

What are the next steps after entering a case into BEACON?

We always encourage anyone helping a family to let them know that once their information is entered (to request assistance), they will receive a call from a Resource Coordinator within 24 hours. The next step will be for the Resource Coordinator to walk the family through the consent forms and sign them. As soon as consent is obtained, the BEACON team will start working on their case.

How is BEACON different from other resource tools in the state?

BEACON puts all of the information about state-funded and community-based services in one place to help you determine what mental and behavioral health services youth are eligible for. You can continue to use the resource tool you have been using to find community-based services in your area, but if you need access to residential treatment or need help from Illinois state agencies, BEACON can help.

How are new providers added to BEACON?

SPIDER is the current catalogue of community-based services for Illinois. To ensure that a provider is included in the list of community-based resources produced by BEACON, please make sure they are included in the [SPIDER resource database](#). BEACON links to SPIDER, so if the provider is included in their list, they will be included in BEACON.

To check that a provider is in SPIDER, please visit <https://spider.dcf.illinois.gov/> and search for the provider agency. If the provider is not listed or the information is out of date, please reach out to DCF.SPIDER@illinois.gov.



For more information and BEACON resources, please visit the [Illinois Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative](#) website.



Get Connected!

