

LEADERS' *Cagniappe*



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Dr. Allison Boothe Trigg (Director) and Dr. Angela Keyes (Assistant Director) lead [Tulane's TIKES program for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Support](#). Together with their team of consultants, they have supported the mental health of young children and their providers since 2007. That work has expanded in light of COVID-19 and is needed more than ever for Louisiana's children to have a Strong Start.

Why is infant mental health important? Sometimes it takes people by surprise that this kind of development is important. It can be easy to dismiss how traumatic events impact young children, and sometimes adults have not been exposed to information about how trauma presents itself. Young children's brain development and relationship building is impacted by positive experiences, such as quality childcare and supportive caregiving. Likewise, it can be shaped by negative experiences such as exposure to community or family violence or other adverse childhood experiences.

Dr. Trigg shares, "Children are small human beings with their own emotions and feelings who can be traumatized and supported just like we are when hard things happen. They might not be able to articulate it in the same way, but small children can be mentally healthy or not." TIKES can help.

TIKES offers *free* infant mental health consultation to centers and family child care pilot participants. Drs. Trigg and Keyes have [a team of dedicated, thoughtful professionals](#), trained in infant mental health and infant and early childhood mental health consultation, who work closely with providers to meet their goals for children's health. First, a director or family child care provider requests support through a simple referral process. A mental health consultant is assigned to the center for a 6-month period, and works with the center weekly or every other week, depending on the size of the center. Visits are in-person, remote, or some combination. The consultant, teacher, and director work together to set goals that improve children's mental health.

During these visits, the consultants observe in classroom or play yard and meet with teachers over nap time to identify challenges and goals. The consultants provide trainings on relationships, supportive environments, social emotional learning and teaching strategies, and more, all for Pathways credits. TIKES consultants can conduct screening measures and provide community referrals for more in-depth services. "Our goal is that when we leave, the whole center has reached those goals and can operate without us," shared Dr. Trigg.

Special Response to Trauma Issue



Dr. Allison Boothe Trigg
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TULANE'S TIKES PROGRAM



Dr. Angela Keyes
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But as importantly, adults are also targeted for supports from TIKES. Directors, teachers, and families are all managing a great amount of stress right now. Without careful attention, this can bubble up in ways that are harmful to those nearby. Other supports that TIKES can provide include:

- **Family engagement:** TIKES can host parent meetings to discuss supporting children's mental health and will work with providers if they would like to improve their own family engagement.
- **Universal social emotional screening for children:** Children can demonstrate concerns in ways that aren't always obvious to adults. Conducting a universal screener for all the children in your center can help identify possible challenges. TIKES can help you with implementation of such a program.
- **Direct social skills support:** Consultants can work with one or two children at a time and target building new skills that build socialization over 6-7 sessions. With the pandemic resulting in an extended period at home, children may need these types of supports to be ready for kindergarten.

The needs of directors and teachers themselves are also important. Dr. Keyes shared a favorite quote from Jeree Pawl, "How you are is as important as what you do." Now, more than ever, those working with young children need self-awareness, and to monitor their own mental health. It is important to ask oneself, "How am I doing? What do I need?" Early learning center directors and family child care providers need to identify supports for their teachers, as well as support themselves for their own self-care. TIKES consultation can help. "We want teachers to know that there is always someone that they can turn to. Ask your director to step into the classroom so you can take a deep breath or just go to the bathroom. Make sure that parents are also finding supports when they have social emotional needs that aren't getting met," shared Dr. Trigg.

TIKES offers training and groups to discuss self-care, burnout, etc. This is a great way to discuss how to do self-care, something we all need a little help with these days. "If we aren't taking care of ourselves, we cannot care for young children," shared Dr. Keyes.

Tulane Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Remote TeleMHC is available to support individuals in Louisiana that are caring for young children, aged 0-6 years, during this COVID-19 pandemic. This includes families, teachers, and early learning leaders. We can provide supportive services from early childhood mental health experts in areas such as:

- Child behavior & social emotional issues
- Supporting children during the COVID-19 crisis
- Teacher, director & parent support
- Classroom issues
- General stress and coping
- And other concerns related to caring for young children

Schedule a free [TELEHEALTH MHC appointment](#).



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