

# NC Early Care & Education Study: Mental Health Findings



**As an early childhood educator, you play an essential role in nurturing and engaging our youngest children.** However, the challenges you face—like high levels of burnout and lack of mental health support—can make this work even more difficult. While training often focuses on recognizing and responding to young children's mental health and challenging behaviors, there's an urgent need to prioritize your mental health too. You deserve the tools and support to thrive in your role, so you can continue making a meaningful impact on the development and well-being of young children in your care.

Based on the 2022/2023 NC early care and education workforce study<sup>2</sup>, over 200 early childhood professionals shared their experiences through interviews and focus groups. Mental health emerged as a key concern, with many expressing the need for systemic change. Here's what some of your peers had to say:

**“Of course, [mental health] is something serious. That’s something we don’t take lightly at all because if we’re not on our game, teachers are not on 100%, how can they help someone else when they’ve fallen apart inside?”**

-Administrator, Suburban, 3-star

**“There’s a lot more attention now to staff’s physical and mental health because a lot of us saw a lot [of] hard times just dealing with our own sort of source of trauma from the pandemic.”**

-Mixed Administrator, FCC Provider and Teaching Staff Focus Group, across the state

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**As ways to support better mental health, participants suggested implementing strategies to foster nurturing workplace cultures, including peer support programs and mentorship opportunities.** Additional recommendations can be found in the resources cited below, such as developing specialized training programs for early childhood educators to equip them with skills to address children's mental health and challenging behaviors and provide access to mental health resources and support services for early childhood educators experiencing stress or burnout<sup>1</sup>.

**When early childhood educators are well-supported, everyone benefits.** You are better equipped to meet the needs of children, leading to improved developmental outcomes and enhanced learning experiences. Supporting your well-being also reduces turnover rates, ensuring continuity and stability for children and families.

**What have you noticed in your own community regarding mental health in our field of early care and education? What support do early childhood professionals receive regarding mental health?**

Please share with us any practices you think should be elevated and implemented. Below are resources available to support your mental health. All together, we are stronger to better support the well-being of early childhood educators, young children and their families.

**NAMI NC Helpline**

By phone: 800-451-9682  
By text: 919-999-6527  
By email: [helpline@naminc.org](mailto:helpline@naminc.org)

 **NAMI** North Carolina  
National Alliance on Mental Illness

**Hope4 NC Helpline**

The North Carolina Department  
of Health and Human Services'  
Hope4NC Crisis Counseling  
Program

**HOPE 4 NC HELPLINE**  
**1-855-587-3463**

(1) Stein R, Garay M, Nguyen A. It Matters: Early Childhood Mental Health, Educator Stress, and Burnout. *Early Child Educ J.* 2022 Dec 30;1-12. doi: 10.1007/s10643-022-01438-8

(2) 2023 North Carolina Early Care and Education Workforce Study. [EarlyYearsNC.org/research/2023-north-carolina-child-care-workforce-study](https://EarlyYearsNC.org/research/2023-north-carolina-child-care-workforce-study)