



Children ages 0-3 are the largest age group of children being removed from their homes due to child abuse or neglect. Research proves that the first 1,000 days of life is the most critical time for rapid brain development, i.e. the most important period for a child's healthy mental development and, conversely, the most vulnerable time for maltreatment.

Early Childhood Court ("ECC") – is a problem-solving court docket designed to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children ages 0-3 through an integrated treatment of intensive child/parent therapy, frequent visitation, developmental supports, utilization of trauma-informed judges, and monthly parent/team meetings and judicial hearings.

Integrated Support – ECCs are led by a judge or magistrate and include a multidisciplinary team made up of court staff, community-based care case managers, attorneys (agency attorneys, parent attorneys, guardian ad litem ("GAL") attorneys, and children's attorneys), GAL child advocacy managers, GAL volunteers, and infant mental health clinicians. The team fast tracks services for the parents to promote timely permanency for the child.

As of December 2017, 12,109 children with active cases in Florida's dependency courts were under the age of three when they were removed from their homes. Florida's ECC is serving 334 children across the 19 ECC sites throughout the state.

Florida's ECCs can better serve families engaged in opioid use who are in the child welfare system. More than 4,000 babies were born experiencing neonatal abstinence syndrome in Florida in 2016.

Positive Outcomes – ECCs have begun implementation across Florida and have shown remarkable results:

Data from the Florida Dependency Court Information System - Calendar Year 2016:

- ECC children were placed in permanent homes more quickly than non-ECC children of the same age group (examples: 112 days (almost 4 months) quicker to reunification, placement with relatives, or placement with non-relatives; 167 days (more than 5 months) quicker to adoption.
- Only 3.39% of Florida's ECC children (two children) re-entered the dependency court system compared to a 3.86% re-abuse rate for non-ECC children.
- In summary, children in ECC get to a permanent home quicker and have less re-abuse than non ECC children.

ECC Team success has been achieved by:

- Monthly hearings in front of a trauma-informed judge or magistrate to ensure timeliness and accountability.
- Monthly family meetings with a multidisciplinary team facilitated by a community coordinator to prioritize family needs and fast track integrated services.
- Meetings with a clinical specialist who provides intense child parent therapy to heal trauma by building parenting capacity and optimizing child well-being – findings are reported to the court/team to inform decisions toward a timely, permanent, and stable family for the child.

Long-Term Benefits – ECCs can break the multigenerational cycle of maltreatment and abuse resulting in fewer families needing state services and more families contributing to Florida's economy. ECCs generate a positive return on investment for the Florida legislature and taxpayers.

Supporters – ECC funding is supported by Florida's Children & Youth Cabinet, the Statewide Guardian ad Litem Office, the Department of Children and Families, community-based care agencies, foster parents, judges, parent attorneys, state attorneys, sheriff's offices, Florida State University, the Office of the State Courts Administrator, and Florida's Infant Mental Health Association.