

Partnering for Families: A Guide to Mental Health Support in Erie County, PA

Connecting Professionals to Resources Families Need

Every day, professionals across Erie County, PA support children and families facing emotional, behavioral, or developmental challenges. Even for experienced providers, understanding the full landscape of children's mental health services- and helping families access the right support- can be complex.

That's why we created this guide. **Think of it as your cheat sheet**- quick, clear, and built to help you understand key services, and connect the families you serve with the right resources at the right time.

You don't need to have all the answers. Whether you're responding to a concern, supporting a family in crisis, or simply want to deepen your understanding of what help is available- **this guide walks you through the options in clear, practical terms.**

We know that even seasoned professionals can run into roadblocks when navigating mental health systems. That's where **LAUNCH CTRL** comes in: when you're unsure what service best fits a family's needs, we're here to help you take the next step- quickly, clearly, and collaboratively.

LAUNCH CTRL, powered by the Achievement Center of LECOM Health, is a centralized triage and referral line for child and family services in Erie County. One phone number, email, and online tools connect you- and the families you support- to a coordinated network of local services.

Caring people. Clear Paths. Real help.

Trained coordinators will guide each inquiry-offering brief screenings to best identify the need, direct scheduling with trusted providers, and warm hand-offs to community-based supports.

Spend less time searching and more time getting support



What You'll Find in This Guide

Early support can be powerful and timely, and well-informed referrals can change a child's trajectory. This guide is here to make those connections easier.

You'll find information about:

**How Children's Services Are Structured
in Erie County, PA.**

**Types of mental health supports
available for children and families**

**What "levels of care" mean and how
they guide service access**

**Where to refer and how to help families
get connected**



Understanding Child Serving Systems

Here in Erie County, PA, there are many systems in place to support children and families. Understanding how these systems work, and who they're designed to serve, can help you navigate the different entry points and connect families to the right help at the right time.

1

Systems that are for everyone

Some systems like **education** and **physical health** are made to help all children. That means every child can go to school and see a doctor. Even though these systems are open to everyone, parents still need to take action like enrolling their child in school and making doctor's appointments for check-ups or shots.

2

Systems a person chooses to join

Some systems like **Early Intervention, mental health, autism and intellectual disability, and drug and alcohol**, are optional. This means that the person gets to decide if they want to use the system. A doctor, teacher, or someone else might suggest these services, but the person has to say yes and take steps to join these systems.

3

Systems that need a referral

Some systems like the **legal system/ juvenile probation and child welfare** are only used if something serious happens, like breaking the law. A judge or other official has to send or refer the person to these systems- they can't just sign up for them on their own.

Levels of Care (LOC)

In the mental health system, "**level of care**" refers to the intensity and setting of the support a person receives- whether that's at home, in school, in a community clinic, or in a more structured environment like a day program or hospital. Higher levels of care involve more frequent contact and more structured settings.

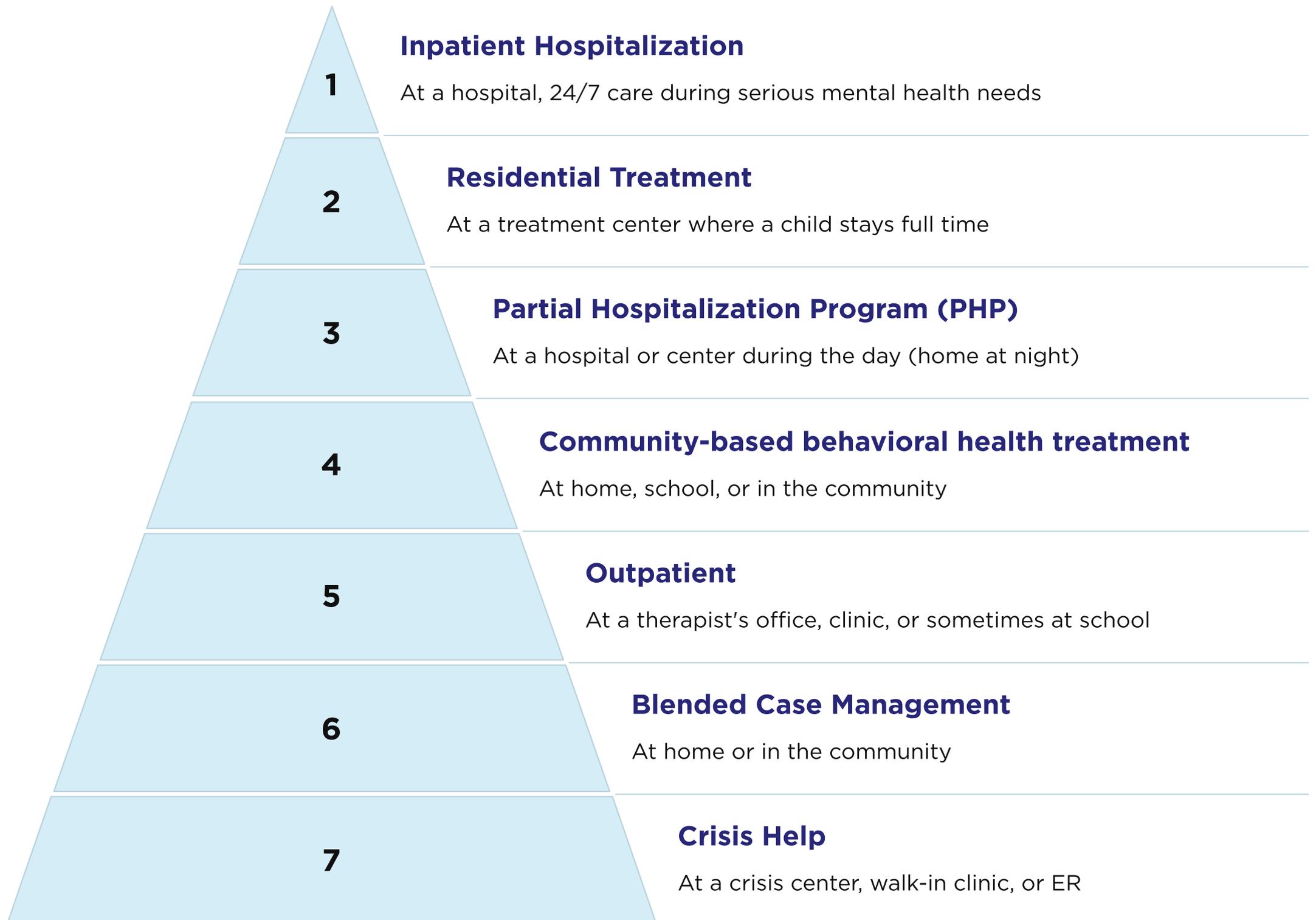
- ① Whenever possible, it's best to start with the **least intensive level of care** that still meets the person's needs. This helps preserve daily routines, maintain family connections, and supports success in natural settings like home, school, or work.

Finding the right level of care is essential- not just at the beginning of treatment, but throughout the entire process. As a person's needs evolve, the level of care may need to be adjusted. If progress stalls or more serious needs come up, it doesn't mean the child or family has failed, it may simply mean a different level of support is needed.

Keep in mind: levels of care for children, adolescents, and adults can all look a little different and this guide gives a general overview.



Levels of Care Available in Erie County, PA



Crisis Services

Crisis services are designed for people who need immediate support- such as when they're at risk of harming themselves or others, or their behavior puts them in immediate danger.

These services are short-term and focused on ensuring safety in the moment, while also helping to bridge the individual to ongoing care and support that may be needed.

 **How to get this help:** Anyone can receive this help by connecting with the resources below.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call **988** | Text **988**

[Click to connect with their online chat](#)

Crisis Services

Call **814-456-2014**

Call toll free at **1-800-300-9558**

Help is also available in person at these locations:

LECOM Medical Center and Behavioral Health Pavilion

5515 Peach Street
Erie, PA 16509

Crisis Center at UPMC Western Behavioral Health at Safe Harbor

2560 W 12th Street
Erie, PA 16505

AHN Saint Vincent Hospital

***ADULTS ONLY**

232 W. 25th Street
Erie, PA 16544



Blended Case Management

Blended Case Management (BCM) provides support for individuals with significant emotional or mental health challenges, particularly when those challenges affect daily life at home, in school, or in the community.

A case manager partners with the individual, and often parents and families, to set meaningful goals, identify strengths, and coordinate access to services, supports, and community resources.

BCM is **not a form of therapy**, but it can work alongside therapeutic services to ensure individuals and families receive both emotional support and practical help with day-to-day needs.

- ❏ **How to get this help:** Any person age 14 or older can refer themselves for BCM. Referrals can also be made by parent(s)/ guardian(s), member(s) of the family, community agencies or service providers, physicians, school staff, etc. by contacting the agency the person would like to work with. This level of care **also requires an evaluation** from a psychiatrist or psychologist that shows the person has a serious mental illness or emotional disorder, and there are also other rules about who can receive this service. We recommend contacting the agency the person would like to work with to learn more about the requirements.



Outpatient Therapy

Outpatient treatment is for individuals that are safe to live at home and continue their daily routines but could benefit from some extra support. It usually involves meeting with a therapist once a week for about an hour, though sessions can be shorter or happen less often depending on the person's needs.

Outpatient services include:



Psychiatric Evaluation



Medication Management



Individual Therapy



Family Therapy



Group Therapy



School-Based Services

- ❏ **How to get this help:** Any person age 14 or older can refer themselves for Outpatient. Referrals can also be made by parent(s)/ guardian(s), member(s) of the family, community agencies or service providers, physicians, school staff, etc. A referral is made by contacting the agency the person would like to work with.

Community-Based Behavioral Health Treatment

Community-based behavioral health treatment is for individuals who are safe to live at home but need more support than traditional outpatient services provide. Supports are provided in the home, school, or community, so the child can stay in their familiar environment while getting help but this is considered a **higher level of care than outpatient** because contact occurs more frequently and the support provided is more intensive.

Where Support Happens



In the home



At school



In the community

Services at This Level

- Intensive Behavioral Health Services (IBHS)
- Family Based Mental Health (FBMH)

Services happen more often- sometimes several times a week- and involve a team of professionals working together with the individual, and often their family.

 **How to get this help:** The services offered at this level of care each have their own requirements.

Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP)

Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP) are for individuals who need intensive mental health support provided routinely in a structured setting. In a PHP, individuals receive **6-8 hours of structured treatment several days a week**, but they still live at home and return there at the end of each day.

Some programs take place after school, while others operate during school hours. When a child attends during the day, it's often called a "school-based partial" program. In these settings, school districts work closely with the child's family so that the child can receive both mental health support and special education services in a structured setting. Services include:

Individual Therapy

One-on-one sessions with a therapist as part of the structured daily program.

Group Therapy

Therapeutic group sessions with peers in a structured setting.

Medication Support

Oversight and management from a psychiatrist as part of the program.

- 📄 **How to get this help:** This level of care requires an evaluation from a psychiatrist or psychologist that says a PHP is needed.



Residential Treatment

Residential treatment is for individuals who need to spend time away from home to stay safe and focus on their mental health in a more structured setting.

These programs take place in safe, community-like environments where individuals can receive care around the clock-but without constant one-on-one supervision. The goal is to provide the support needed to stabilize, build skills, and prepare for a successful return home.

While in residential treatment, children may participate in individual and group therapy and often meet with a psychiatrist for medication support. The focus is on helping them gain tools to manage emotions, strengthen relationships, and stay safe and healthy in daily life.

- ❏ **How to get this help:** To go to residential treatment, a person usually needs a psychiatric evaluation. There also needs to be a meeting with a team (called an Interagency Service Planning Team, or ISPT) to decide if this is the right level of care.



Inpatient Hospitalization

Inpatient hospitalization is for individuals who are experiencing a serious mental health crisis and may not be safe. This could include having thoughts of harming themselves or others, severe emotional distress, or difficulty thinking clearly—such as feeling extremely confused, overwhelmed, or experiencing hallucinations.

Inpatient care takes place in hospitals or treatment centers where trained staff are available **24 hours a day** to provide constant supervision, safety, and support. The goal is to help the individual stabilize and begin to feel better in a safe, structured environment.

Most inpatient stays are short-term, typically **3 to 7 days**, depending on the situation. Some individuals may need a longer stay to ensure they're safe and ready to transition into a lower level of care.

- ❏ **How to get this help:** Inpatient hospitalization requires a hospital evaluation (by a doctor or psychiatrist) that says this level of care is needed. Help is available and an evaluation can be completed anytime at any of these locations:

LECOM Medical Center and Behavioral Health Pavilion

5515 Peach Street
Erie, PA 16509

Crisis Center at UPMC Western Behavioral Health at Safe Harbor

2560 W 12th Street
Erie, PA 16505

AHN Saint Vincent Hospital

***ADULTS ONLY**

232 W. 25th Street
Erie, PA 16544



What Types of Services are Available?

In mental health care, a service is the type of support an individual receives. Different services are designed to meet different needs, so each one comes with its own guidelines about who is eligible and how to get started.

Getting familiar with the range of mental health services available in Erie County, PA can help you match children and families with the right support, at the right time.



Early Intervention (EI)

Children from birth to age 5 who have special needs due to developmental delays or disabilities are eligible to receive Early Intervention (EI) to support their cognitive, behavioral, and social development. These **free services** address mental health and behavioral needs, and can also include occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech-language services, and specialized instruction to support learning and behavior.

EI services take place during the child's regular daily routines and can happen in familiar places like the home, daycare, preschool, Head Start, or playgroup. This approach helps the child learn and practice new skills in real-life settings, with the people and environments they already know.



Eligibility

An evaluation is required to decide if this service is right for the child.

Referral Pathway:

Referrals should be initiated by contacting the Pennsylvania Early Intervention CONNECT line.

Once a referral is received by CONNECT, it is sent to the county level service coordination organization. For children 0-3 years old in Erie County, PA, this organization is Erie County Care Management (ECCM). ECCM provides a Service Coordinator that will schedule the required assessment to determine if the child is eligible for EI services. If the child is eligible for Early Intervention services, the ECCM Service Coordinator will create an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) with the family to review the services available and support the family in choosing a service provider. The ECCM Service Coordinator will notify the service provider that the family chooses, and services will begin within 14 days of being placed on the IFSP. For children 3-5 years old, eligibility determination and services are coordinated by Northwest Tri-County IU5.

Call

[1-800-692-7288](tel:1-800-692-7288)

Email

help@connectpa.net

Online Form

[this online form](#)



Blended Case Management

Blended Case Management (BCM) supports individuals with serious mental health challenges by helping meet both behavioral and basic everyday needs. Case managers work closely with the individual, and often their family, to build on strengths, enhance coping skills, and create more positive routines and relationships at home and in the community.

Case managers help navigate complex systems, like mental health, special education, and social services, and connect individuals with resources for things like housing, food, employment, recreation, and healthcare. Case managers also provide on-site support during a crisis and are available **24/7** when urgent needs come up.



Eligibility

To qualify for Blended Case Management the individual must:

- Be under the age of 18 (or up to age 22 if enrolled in school with an active Individualized Education Program) with a primary diagnosis of a serious mental illness or emotional disorder.
- Have six or more days of psychiatric hospitalization(s) within the last year

OR

- Be at risk of out-of-home placement

OR

- Be involved with, or have a need to become involved with other public services such as education, child welfare, juvenile justice, physical healthcare, etc.

Referral Pathway:

Any adolescent, 14 years of age or older, can refer themselves for BCM services. Referrals can also be made by parent(s)/ guardian(s), member(s) of the family, community agencies or service providers, physicians, school staff, etc. A referral is made by contacting the agency the person would like to work with.



Family-Based Mental Health

Family Based Mental Health (FBMH) offers a combination of therapy and practical support for families with an individual experiencing serious emotional or behavioral challenges. Services are delivered by a two-person mental health team, with a focus on building parents' confidence and skills to support their child, and the **goal of reducing the need for hospitalization or out-of-home care** whenever possible. FBMH includes 24/7 crisis support and a case management component to help families coordinate with schools, providers, and other systems they're involved with.

Duration

FBMH typically lasts **32 weeks**

Frequency

At least **2-3 sessions per week**

Crisis Support

24/7 crisis support available for emergencies between sessions



Eligibility

To qualify for FBMH the individual must:

- Be under 21 years old, with a diagnosed mental health condition that contributes to serious emotional and/or behavioral difficulties.
- Have a need that exceeds the services provided through other levels of care (Outpatient, School Based, Intensive Behavioral Health Services, etc.)
- Be recommended for FBMH by a psychiatrist, physician or licensed psychologist.
- Have at least one adult family member or caregiver willing to participate in the service.
- Be at risk of an inpatient hospitalization or another out of home placement OR require stepdown care to transition home from an inpatient hospitalization.

Referral Pathway:

Children, and adolescents can be referred to Family Based Mental Health by their parent(s)/ guardian(s), psychiatrist, mental health professional, and school staff.

Intensive Behavioral Health Support

Intensive Behavioral Health Services (IBHS) offer short-term, intensive mental health support for individuals who are struggling with behaviors or emotional challenges in daily life. These services are designed to meet the child's needs across all settings- including home, school, and the community so support is consistent wherever challenges show up.

IBHS has three (3) categories of service:

Individual Services

Provide services to one child to reduce and manage the child's needs. These services help increase coping strategies and support skill development to promote positive behaviors.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

A specific behavioral approach to services for a child. ABA services explore why a behavior occurs and then uses specific interventions to address behavior.

Group Services

Most often provided to multiple children at a specific place.



Eligibility

Requires a written order completed by an Ordering, Referring, and Prescribing (ORP) professional that says the person has a need for the service.

Referral Pathway:

Intensive Behavioral Health Support (IBHS) services in Erie County, PA are coordinated through [Erie County Care Management \(ECCM\)](#).



Parent Education and Early Childhood Prevention

Parent education and early childhood prevention services are available to help interested parents. These services might:

Support & Education

Offer support and education to address issues and make parenting easier and more enjoyable.

Child Development

Teach important things like how children grow, understand their emotions, and communicate well.

Positive Parenting

Promote positive parenting practices such as using positive language, planned discipline, and family routines.

Strengthen Families

Strengthen families by providing relevant, effective education and support.

Healthy Environment

Encourage an optimal environment for the healthy growth and development of children and parents.



Eligibility

Some programs are designed for specific situations- like families with a child under a certain age, parents managing a particular behavior, or caregivers who are also dealing with their own mental health or substance use challenges. Individual programs may also have their own admission criteria.

Referral Pathway:

Professionals can encourage parents/ caregivers to sign-up for online education, connect with a local agency like [Erie Family Center](#), or [check out the resources](#) available on the Project LAUNCH website.



Where to Find Resources in Erie County, PA

Erie County, PA is a resource-rich community when it comes to services for children and families but knowing how to find and connect families to these supports can still be a challenge.

Thankfully, there are already guides and services in place to help make navigating this process easier.



Erie County Care Management (ECCM)

Coordinated care management across five service areas



2-1-1

Free, 24/7 resource navigation for social services



Erie County Resource Guide

Comprehensive color-coded guide to local services and supports



Erie County Care Management (ECCM)

Expert Community Care Management (known as **Erie County Care Management or ECCM** in Erie County, PA) has a primary focus to promote the integration of community services into a seamless system of care for any child or adult in need of services.

Care management is the process of customizing services to fit an individual's specific needs.

ECCM has **five main care management services** in which they provide knowledgeable service and supports coordinators to help connect families to resources within the community.

Those five care management services address:

- **Intellectual Disabilities**
- **Behavioral Health**
- **Early Intervention**
- **Health Choices**
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder**



Call

814-528-0600



Visit Online

<https://www.eccm.org>

2-1-1

211 is funded and provided **free of charge** to users in Erie County, PA through the United Way of Erie County. Frequently referred to as the *"social service equivalent of 911,"* people in need of information can reach a trained, professional resource navigator **24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year**. Resource navigators listen to users' concerns and provide information on appropriate organizations that can assist with their needs.

Anyone can connect with a 211 resource navigator by:

Calling

Just dial [211](tel:211)

Texting

Send your zip code to [898-211](tel:898-211)

Online Chat

<https://northwest.pa211.org/>

The broad request categories for 211 include:

- Housing & Shelter
- Food
- Utilities
- Healthcare
- Mental Health & Addictions
- Employment & Income
- Clothing & Household
- Childcare & Parenting
- Government & Legal
- Transportation Assistance
- Education
- Disaster
- Wide-ranging "Other" category



The Erie County Resource Guide of Services & Supports

This guide comprehensively identifies services and supports for Erie County, PA residents enrolled in Medical Assistance (MA), although many of these programs may also serve residents without MA. If families are unsure if the services listed in the guide are available to them, there is contact information provided to call and ask a representative. There is also contact information provided if they are in need of behavioral health services but do not have Medical Assistance.

The guide is color coded by category:

Red	Drug and Alcohol
Orange	Early Intervention
Green	Housing
Purple	Intellectual and Developmental Differences
Blue/Grey	Mental Health
Teal	Other

In each category you'll find the types of services available, a brief description of the service, and providers in the county (with clickable links) that provide the service.

The guide also includes a list of agencies in alphabetical order, with the address, contact number, website, and list of services they each provide.

 **Click to Download the Erie County Resource Guide of Services & Supports**





Supporting a family or exploring next steps?

LAUNCH CTRL helps you connect them to the right support, right now.



[814-860-8765](tel:814-860-8765)



help@erielaunch.org



www.erielaunch.org