

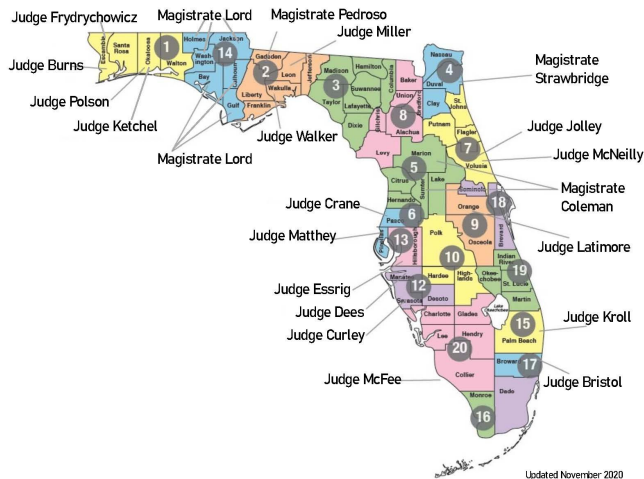


Florida's Early Childhood Courts

Florida's Early Childhood Court, also referred to as "Baby Court," serves children under the age of three in the child welfare court process. Using the science of attachment and a trauma-informed team, outcomes are improved for safety, permanency, and well-being for abused and neglected young children during the most pivotal time for brain development. Early Childhood Courts are one type of Florida's many successful problem-solving courts designed to address both the legal and underlying nonlegal issues to break the cycle of multigenerational trauma and court involvement.

Florida's court teams are supported by: Office of the State Courts Administrator, Florida State University's Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, Zero to Three National Center, and a wide array of community partners.

27 Court Teams



Outcomes At-A-Glance

40%
safer

children in Early Childhood Court are safer with less re-abuse than children in traditional dependency court

8.5
months faster

children in Early Childhood Court reunify with their parents faster than children in traditional court

7.5
months faster

children in Early Childhood Court are permanently placed with relatives/nonrelatives faster

Children in Early Childhood Court are safer and placed in a forever home faster according to an analysis by the Florida Office of the State Courts Administrator comparing children in Early Childhood Court with children in traditional dependency court during 2014 - 2018.

Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, taxpayer research institute determined in 2020 that "the ECC approach yields significant benefits to taxpayers and society." Because of these benefits, TaxWatch recommended expansion with a permanent dedicated funding source.

\$113.6
million dollars

savings to the state if Early Childhood Court was implemented statewide



Florida State University, Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy
For more information call 850-922-1300 or email at ECC-CPEIP@CPEIP.fsu.edu



Early Childhood Courts: Grounded in Science



Early Child Development. Early Childhood Court judges and teams understand that the most rapid development occurs in the first five years of a child's life. They promote quality parenting and high quality early learning environments. They monitor children's development and fast track early intervention services needed during this pivotal time of growth and development.



Neuroscience. The first 1,000 days of life is the most critical time for brain development. By age three, the brain is at 80% of adult development and 90% by age five. Early Childhood Court judges and teams understand that child maltreatment and toxic relationships disrupt healthy brain development during this crucial time. The team uses the science to inform decisions to minimize stress and maximize stability and nurturing relationships which offer the greatest potential for shaping brain development, the foundation for lifelong mental health and well-being as adults.



Attachment. Early Childhood Court teams recognize the value of stable healthy attachment relationships and ensure that placement decisions focus on promoting security and continuity, striving for the first placement to be the best placement. The team understands the high emotional costs of attachment disruptions especially for young children and works to prevent/minimize multiple placements. Any changes are carefully contemplated and planfully transitioned to be emotionally protective and to help transfer attachment to create a sense of safety and reduce trauma. This ensures the child's mental health and continuing capacity to trust, attach to others, and build relationships in the future.



Trauma and Resilience. Early Childhood Courts supports parents in addressing their own childhood trauma histories, strengthening healthy relationships with their child and building resilience for coping with future challenges. Child parent therapy helps heal two generations and helps break the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment.

With science as the foundation, young children have:

- safe, stable, nurturing out-of-home placements, with few, if any, placement disruptions
- well-planned transitions if the child returns home or must change placements
- attachment relationships which buffers stress, helping children thrive in trusting relationships
- frequent family time visitation with parents
- timely developmental screenings and services

With science as the foundation, parents receive:

- trauma-informed services, including evidence-based Child-Parent Psychotherapy
- parenting education that includes child development
- social connections
- concrete supports



Early Childhood Courts: Grounded in Best Practices

In November 2019, the Florida Supreme Court approved nine research-based best practice standards for Early Childhood Courts:

1. **Target Population** (eligibility and exclusion criteria)
2. **Disadvantaged Groups** (equivalent access and treatment)
3. **Responsibilities of Judge/Magistrate** (training, status hearings, demeanor, decision-making, permanency planning)
4. **Child-Parent Therapy** (assessment, evidence-based treatment, provider credentials, treatment duration)
5. **Additional Treatment/Social Services** (substance use/mental health treatment, post reunification supports)
6. **Family Time** (adherence to visitation protocols)
7. **Multidisciplinary Team** (community coordinator, family team meetings, communication, decision-making)
8. **Caseloads** (caseload caps)
9. **Monitoring and Evaluation** (adherence to best practices, independent evaluation)



Additional information regarding Early Childhood Courts and these standards is found at the state courts system website: www.flcourts.org.

	Traditional Dependency	Early Childhood Court
recommendations to judge	adversarial recommendations from attorneys, case managers, and service providers	consensus from a nonadversarial court team working together with the parents, and meeting monthly
court appearances	judicial reviews at six month intervals	monthly judicial status hearings plus reviews at six month intervals
therapeutic intervention	services that may or may not be trauma-informed, evidence-based, suitable for young children	evidence-based, trauma-informed services engaging parent and child together
family time visitation schedules	in accordance with the law; at least monthly	based on national protocols for young children; multiple times per week
training and technical assistance	traditional training, as available, for judges, attorneys, case managers	specialized training and technical assistance at state and national levels



Florida State University, Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy
For more information call 850-922-1300 or email at ECC-CPEIP@CPEIP.fsu.edu



"We know that if we can address these problems early in the first 1000 day of life, the chances of having a healthy well-adjusted child later on is enhanced." – Senior Judge Lee Haworth, 12th Judicial Circuit



"After working in dependency for over 25 years, I now preside over baby court. The three things that are exceptional about baby court is that we provide Child-Parent Psychotherapy which heals the family like no services we've offered before. Also, I've found that the team approach is the best approach in order to provide the necessary services that the family and the children may need. And, we have lowered the rate of recidivism because we've offered the services they need to make them whole." – Judge Alicia Latimore, 9th Judicial Circuit



"I think that the frequent visits have made a huge difference with these families. By having the more frequent visits in Early Childhood Court there's a bonding that's going on. I have families that come in and they show me pictures of how their child has changed from hearing to hearing. They're babbling more, they're looking me in the eye, they're following along when I read them books. One of the best parts of Early Childhood Courts is actually seeing the parents get invested in their kids." – Judge Hope Bristol, 17th Judicial Circuit



"I come from a very conservative part of the state of Florida – in northwest Florida – and one of the things that I think has allowed Early Childhood Court to be well received in the area is because it does lead to a more efficient use of our resources and it provides better outcomes because every time we can actually solve a problem within a family it keeps kids out of the juvenile justice system it –keeps kids ultimately out of the adult prison system." – Judge Terrance Ketchel, 1st Judicial Circuit



"We now have our son home permanently and even when he wakes up at 6am because he's ready for breakfast I can't wait to walk over to the crib and as soon as he sees mommy and daddy that cute face of his lights up!!! This program does need to keep going...each and every person that is involved is necessary because they all had a role in helping us to complete our tasks."

Early Childhood Court Participant



Florida's
Early Childhood
Courts

Florida State University, Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy
For more information call 850-922-1300 or email at ECC-CPEIP@CPEIP.fsu.edu

