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A Gamechanger for Families in Crisis

With state funding and community partnership, The Florida Center for Early Childhood introduces Sarasota County's first in-home Family Support Team for young children and their caregivers.

(June 25, 2026) A Sarasota mother once watched her 9-year-old son cycle through repeated hospitalizations after mental health crises. Each time he came home, the family felt more overwhelmed and at risk of falling apart. Stories like hers are all too common—and they highlight the urgent need for more intensive, family-centered support.

Now, thanks to a \$500,000 partnership between The Florida Center for Early Childhood, the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), and the Central Florida Behavioral Health Network (CFBHN), families like hers can access the **Family Support Team** (FST) designed to prevent repeated crises, keep children safe, and the risk of foster care or other out-of-home placements.

The Family Support Team is made up of specialists hired and trained by The Florida Center to work intensively with families to bring services to them in their homes, in the community, or wherever is most convenient. Their role is to bring everyone connected to the child—parents, schools, doctors, counselors, and community

supports—into one coordinated plan. By reducing stress and building stability, the team helps families stay together.

“This program is a breakthrough for families in crisis,” says Dr. Kristie Skoglund, CEO of The Florida Center. “Once the funding came through, we moved quickly to hire staff, complete training, and begin accepting referrals. Acting swiftly meant families could start receiving the support they urgently needed without delay.”

Skoglund explains that the Family Support Team uses **High Fidelity Wraparound**, an evidence-based approach that brings all parts of a child’s life together—home, school, healthcare, and community—into one comprehensive plan.

“Unlike traditional services that focus only on the child, this model supports the entire family to reduce crises, strengthen relationships, and build lasting stability,” she says, adding that families typically take part for three to 12 months, depending on their needs and progress.

Referrals come from partner agencies including the crisis stabilization unit at Cornell Behavioral Health Pavillion, Sarasota County Schools, Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams, NAMI, and other behavioral health settings in the community. The program serves children birth through fifth grade who are returning from or experiencing a mental health crisis, are at risk of foster care or other out-of-home placement, or have been diagnosed with a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder. Many of these children also struggle with behaviors that disrupt home, school, or community life, or are involved with multiple systems such as child welfare, juvenile justice, or school interventions that require intensive, coordinated support.

Family Support Teams are part of a broader Florida DCF initiative, but The Florida Center is the only agency in Sarasota County offering this level of intensive, in-home support exclusively for young children and their families.

“What makes this program a gamechanger is that our team goes directly into the home and surrounds the entire family with support,” says Skoglund. “Families no longer have to navigate a maze of disconnected services—we bring everyone together around one plan. That approach is new for Sarasota County, and it has the power to keep children safe, strengthen families, and change lives.”

Photo caption

- *Through Sarasota County's new Family Support Team program, specialists from The Florida Center for Early Childhood work closely with children and caregivers to coordinate services, reduce crises and strengthen family relationships.*

About The Florida Center for Early Childhood

For more than 45 years, The Florida Center for Early Childhood has been the leading provider of therapeutic services, early education, and healthy development for young children in southwest Florida, offering a seamless delivery of services for the whole child and their family. Today, the agency is nationally recognized for its early childhood expertise in various specialties. The Florida Center provides developmental therapies, mental health counseling, Starfish Academy preschool, the Healthy Families home-visiting program, and the state's only Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Clinic, with locations in Sarasota, Orlando and Pensacola. **For more information, visit TheFloridaCenter.org.**