

## Definition:

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Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health refers to the quality of a child's first and early relationships and the child's social and emotional development. This includes a child's ability to:

- \* Experience warm and responsive relationships with caregivers.
- \* Form relationships with others.
- \* Explore and learn.
- \* Communicate in play.
- \* Experience, express and regulate emotions.



Don't give up.  
I believe in you all.  
A person is a person  
No matter how small.

-Dr. Seuss

## Brain Development

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A child's early experiences, whether positive or negative, affect the development of his/her brain. The first three years of life is a time of rapid growth and development of the brain. A newborn's brain is about 25 percent of its adult weight. By age one the brain has doubled in volume. By age 3, your child's brain is mostly grown, is making connections and learning about the world. It is easier and less costly to form strong brain circuits during these early years than to "fix" them later.

Early Childhood Mental Health

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Services for Children Ages 0-5

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## Attachment and Early Relationships

The first three years of life set the stage for social-emotional functioning throughout the life span. Attachment refers to the ongoing nurturing relationship that a child builds with familiar adults. This relationship is fundamental to shaping brain development, specifically through the interactions that occur between the caregiver and the child. When infants and toddlers have healthy attachment relationships, they learn to trust that the world is safe and they have confidence to explore and learn. Healthy attachments help children get ready to learn, influence the child's self image and give the child skills needed to face new challenges.

## Early Childhood Mental Health Services May Include

Play based interventions

Focus on developing secure parent-child relationships

Parent education and support

Observation of child with parent, peers, or other family members

Trauma based interventions

Consultation with child care providers and/or preschool teachers

Referrals as needed

\* A diagnostic assessment for a child ages 0-5 involves three sessions in order to consider all aspects of the child's development, relationships, and environment.



## How do I know if my child needs mental health services?

Displays little or no emotions.

Shows extreme emotion (unusually aggressive, fearful, shy sad).

Unusually difficult to soothe or console.

Consistently rejects being touched or held.

Shows little interest in playing with other children.

Does not turn to familiar adults for comfort or help.

Does not engage in social communication (does not look when you point, doesn't respond to name).

Lacks language or communication, doesn't make eye contact.

Overly familiar with strangers.

Shows extreme difficulty separating from caregivers.

Exhibits sudden behavior changes.

Feeding problems, sleeping problems.

Consistent strong reactions to touch, sound, or movement, or shows no response to stimuli.

Shows no interest in toys, interactive games, or pretend play.

Loses skills he/she once had.

Is unusually destructive to self, others, or environment.

Is unusually active, impulsive, distractible, or withdrawn.