

### **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Parents/Caregivers: Sense of Agency**

#### **Here is what we know about sense of agency:**

- It is your child's growing ability to make choices and decisions.
- These are the types of choices that say, "my opinion matters."
- Having a sense of agency helps develop their sense of identity ("who am I?").
- Learning who they are, helps them discover their role in relationships, the community, and the world.

#### **As a parent or caregiver, think about a child's age and developmental abilities, how can you:**

- Celebrate your child's unique personality?  
Children express who they are in many different ways. For example, some children prefer music or dance instead of sports.
- Provide opportunities for your child to make decisions?  
Each day, there are many moments for your child to make choices, ask questions, think, and problem solve. For example, choosing to wear a red shirt or blue shirt.
- Help your child learn to become independent in a safe way?  
Allow your child to do things for themselves. For example, practice getting dressed and feeding themselves.
- Create environments and opportunities for your child to take risks in a way that builds on their readiness, abilities, and interests?  
Children develop confidence and learn skills through play and trying things for themselves. For example, a baby pulling themselves up from the floor is building the skills needed to walk.
- Build a support system around you?  
Parenting is not always easy. Having support can help you get through challenging moments. For example, reach out to supportive family, friends, community programs and resources.
- Know if your child's development is on track for their age?  
It is important to have developmentally appropriate expectations of your child's ability and behaviour. For example, the [Looksee Checklist®](#) (formerly Nipissing District Developmental Screen®-NDDS) and the [Early Years Check-In](#) give activities and examples for each age and stage of development.

#### **Where can you find more information?**

- [Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT: Keep Trying](#)
- [Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT: Encouragement Poster](#)
- [Today's Parent: Help Yourself! 8 Tips for Teaching Kids to be More Independent](#)
- [The Conversation: How do Children Develop a Sense of Self?](#)
- [Self Efficacy in Kids](#)

#### **Where can you find support?**

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)
- [Mental Health and Substance Use Services and Resources](#)