

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Parents/Caregivers: Attachment

Here is what we know about attachment:

- Infants and children need to develop strong attachments to the people that care for them.
- Your baby needs to feel safe, loved and protected, especially when they are feeling sick, upset, hurt or scared.
- Children with secure attachments feel that they can trust their caregivers. This will help them explore and learn about the world around them.
- Some stress is a part of everyday life. Too much stress can affect a child's health and development. You can help protect your child by responding in a caring and supportive way.
- A secure attachment with you can help your child build healthy relationships in the future. It also means your child will be more likely to grow and develop in a positive way.

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

- Respond to your child's feelings and needs?
It is normal for children to express a wide range of emotions. You can label feelings and respond with understanding. For example, "I know it is hard to leave the park when you are having so much fun. Let's hold hands while we walk home and you can tell me what you would like to do at the park tomorrow."
- Plan daily routines to meet your child's basic needs?
Knowing what will happen next can help children feel safe and secure. For example, set regular times for eating, sleeping, playing, and outdoor time.
- Increase your connection to your child?
Children learn best through real life moments. It is important to [keep screen time to a minimum for you and your child](#). For example, the [Canadian Pediatric Society](#) recommends that children:
 - Under 2 years old do not have any screen time.
 - 2-5 year olds have limited screen time that is less than 1 hour a day.
 - Studies show that less is always better. There is no evidence showing that screen time improves a child's development.
- Provide ways for your child to play and explore their world?
It is important to pay attention and comment on their play. This will reassure your child that you are interested and available if they need you. For example, while your baby is exploring on the floor, talk to them about what they are doing or seeing.
- 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?

- [Caring for Kids: Screen Time and Young Children](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Attachment](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Key Concepts, Brain Architecture, Serve and Return, Toxic Stress](#)
- [Zero to three: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health](#)
- [Best Start, Healthy Baby Healthy Brain](#)
- [Best Start, Healthy Baby Healthy Brain \(attachment video\)](#)
- [Infant Mental Health Promotion, Comfort Play and Teach](#)
- [Psychology Foundation of Canada, Make the Connection](#)
- [Best Start, Life with a New Baby](#)
- [National Collaborating Center for Aboriginal Health](#)
- [24-Hour Movement and Activity Guidelines](#)

Where can you find support?

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