

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Professionals: Sense of Agency

Here is what we know about sense of agency (“I can do it!”):

- It is the child’s ability to make choices and decisions that will influence and have an impact on their life.
- Children need to develop a strong sense of belonging and self-identity. These foundational conditions encourage children to see themselves as capable, competent and valued contributors.

Within your professional role and considering the [social determinants of health](#), how do you:

- Explore opportunities with caregivers that support children in:
 - Making daily age-appropriate choices and decisions?
 - Having opportunities to develop autonomy in safe and nurturing environments (e.g., taking graduated risks according to readiness, ability and interest)?
 - Engaging in meaningful interactions, tasks, problem solving, play and exploration?
- Discuss coping and support mechanisms with caregivers?
- Explore connection opportunities to informal and formal supports (e.g., professional and peer community-based supports and services)?
- Support caregivers in having developmentally appropriate expectations for their child?
- Administer appropriate screening tools that advise on if a child is within the typical developmental milestone range? How do you manage referrals?

Where can you find more information?

- [Early Childhood Australia, Promoting Independence and Agency](#)
- [Talking about Practice Series Video: 'I can do it!' Supporting Babies' Sense of Agency](#)
- [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)
- [Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT: Road to Resiliency Factsheet and Video](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)

Where can you find services that support families?

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

References:

- [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)