

## 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](#)

### Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Parents/Caregivers: Brain Development

#### Here is what we know about brain development:

- The brain starts developing during pregnancy and grows the most during the first 2000 days (5 to 6 years) of your child's life.
- More than 1 million new brain connections are made each second. The brain continues to develop throughout childhood and into early adulthood.
- A child's genes, their environment, early experiences, and relationships all work together to make these connections and build healthy brains.
- Some stress is a part of everyday life. Too much stress can affect a child's brain development. You can help protect them by responding in a caring and supportive way.
- Healthy nutrition, sleep and exercise are very important for good brain development, health and wellness.

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

- Building a [secure and trusting relationship](#)?  
It's like playing a "[serve and return](#)" game like tennis. For example, if your baby babbles or is upset, respond in a positive comforting way by holding them and giving them a hug or kiss.
- Respond to your child's feelings and needs?  
It is normal for children to express a wide range of emotions. It is important to comfort your child when they are hurt, sick or upset. For example, soothing your child when they fall down.
- 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.
- 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 - Your baby's brain: How parents can support healthy development](#)
- [Healthy Baby, Healthy Brain](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Key Concepts, Brain Architecture, Serve and Return, Toxic Stress](#)
- [Infant Mental Health Promotion, Comfort Play and Teach](#)
- [City of Hamilton: Parenting with LOVE - Brain Development](#)
- [Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development – Brain](#)
- [Zero to three: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health](#)
- [24-Hour Movement and Activity Guidelines](#)

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

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

### Here is what we know about resiliency:

- It is the ability to steer through life's challenges and bounce back from hard times in a positive way.
- Resilience is developed throughout your life.
- Everyday interactions that are caring and positive build resilience skills.
- You play the biggest role in helping children develop strengths that support resilience.
- Research shows that resilience can be linked to higher levels of happiness, positive relationships & greater success in school, work, and life.

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

- Take care of yourself to stay healthy during hard times?  
Children watch and learn positive self-care strategies from you. For example, getting enough sleep, going for a walk, asking for help, etc.
- Practice staying calm when dealing with challenging behaviour or situations?  
It is important to lead by example for children of any age. For example, count to 10, take a deep breath, reach out for support, etc.
- Comfort children when they are upset?  
Support them to talk about their feelings and teach them calming strategies. For example, comfort with a hug, teach deep breathing, help them name their feelings "You seem to be frustrated".
- Encourage children to keep trying even when it is hard?  
Help them learn that mistakes are ok. For example, break big tasks into smaller steps, celebrate their strengths and praise their efforts, "You worked hard to get your shoes on all by yourself".
- Create opportunities to share the positive moments in your day?  
Having a positive outlook and being thankful helps to build resilience. For example, choose a time of day to name something positive from your day (mealtime, bedtime, etc.).
- 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?

- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Resilience](#)
- [Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT: Road to Resiliency Factsheet and Video](#)
- [Center of the Developing Child, Harvard University: Resilience](#)
- [Psychology Foundation of Canada: Parenting Information](#)
- [Parenting with LOVE: Role Modeling](#)
- [Best Start Resource. Building Resilience in Young Children](#)
- [Ottawa Public Health: MindMasters2](#)
- [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](#)

## Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Parents/Caregivers: Self-Regulation

### Here is what we know about self-regulation:

- It is how we deal with stressors and recover from them.
- It is how we manage our feelings, thoughts, and actions so we can be in a calm, focused, alert state. This helps us to cope with everyday life so we are ready to learn.
- Some examples of stressors children can experience are:
  - Lack of sleep
  - Being hungry or not eating enough healthy foods
  - Feeling overwhelmed (e.g., adjusting to a new baby, transitions, family changes)
  - Feeling unwell or being sick
  - Restlessness or needing to move (e.g., not enough physical activity)
  - Using screens more than recommended ([Canadian Pediatric Society](#))
  - Being exposed to an environment that is not a good fit for them (e.g., noise, lighting, overstimulating or understimulating, crowded, no opportunities for movement)

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

- Support your child's ability to cope in different environments?  
For example, in a grocery store, at a party, and at a playground.
- Help children understand, identify and label their feelings and responses?  
For example, "You must have felt frustrated when Omar took your toy. Let's go talk to Omar together."
- Support them while they release emotions using "[time ins](#)"?  
For example, "I see that you are angry right now. It's okay to feel angry. I am going to stay with you until you feel calm."
- Model and practice social skills and problem solving abilities through the use of songs, stories and unstructured play?  
Use songs and resources to teach you and your child new techniques such as deep breathing to help calm down. For example, a [Sesame Street video](#).
- 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?

- [Self-Reg with Stuart Shanker](#)
- [Stuart Shanker, Self-Regulation: The Early Years What You Need To Know](#)
- [City of Hamilton – Parenting with LOVE](#)
- [Why Do We Lose Control of Our Emotions?](#)
- [Ottawa Public Health: MindMasters2](#)
- [24-Hour Movement and Activity Guidelines](#)
- [Positive Discipline for Young Children \(Time-Ins\)](#)

### Where can you find support?

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

### **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](#)

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

#### Here is what we know about temperament:

- Every child is born with a unique personality and temperament.
- Temperament develops early in life and is influenced by both biology (genetics and epigenetics), experiences and relationships. Temperament affects how a child behaves, reacts to situations and gets along with others.
- Some common features of temperament are activity level, emotional intensity, may have a hard time dealing with change or new situations or people, may be easily distracted or frustrated, etc.
- While children are born with certain temperament traits, they can learn to overcome the aspects that are challenging (e.g., fearful, impulsive).

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

- Learn about and understand your child's unique temperament?  
A child's temperament will affect how they experience the world. For example, recognizing patterns in behaviour will help you anticipate how they will react to certain situations (change in schedule, meeting a new person, etc.).
- Explore different ways to support your child's temperament?  
Some children are more sensitive and have intense feelings. For example, try to stay calm and comfort your child when they are upset.
- Accept your child for who they are?  
Instead of focusing on changing your child's temperament, focus on how you can help your child celebrate their unique traits. For example, sensitive or shy children will need extra time and support to adapt to new situations.
- Support and comfort children if they are showing signs of stress or frustration?  
By building a trusting relationship with your infant and child, they will learn they can rely on you to help them through difficult times. For example, follow their lead with new experiences, be their advocate with other adults, "It takes time for her/him/them to get comfortable with new people".
- Model ways to manage emotions and reactions to situations?  
As a parent, you are the most influential person in your child's life, and they will learn by watching you. For example, share your own stories of trying something new even though it was scary at first.
- How can you match your positive discipline style to your child's temperament?  
Discipline your child with respect and try to have consistent routines and limits. For example: give an age appropriate choice, redirect your child's attention and help them learn how to problem-solve.
- 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?

- [Zero to three: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health](#)
- [Parents 2 Parents: Temperament](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Temperament](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [Raising Your Spirited Child. Book by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka](#)
- [City of Hamilton: Parenting with LOVE Video - Temperament](#)
- [24-Hour Movement and Activity Guidelines](#)
- [Children See Children Learn](#)
- [Best Start: Frequently Asked Questions about Time-outs](#)

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