

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Professionals: Attachment

Here is what we know about attachment:

- Infants are hardwired to develop strong emotional connections, known as attachments, to primary caregivers through [serve and return](#) interactions.
- Babies need to feel safe, cared for, and protected. A secure attachment develops when a caregiver responds consistently in a warm and sensitive manner.
- Caregivers are the anchors from which young children explore their surroundings. This supports optimal development and learning.
- Children develop trust when secure attachment needs are met; they gain the knowledge that they are important and loveable.
- Children require a nurturing caregiver to protect them from harm and the effects of toxic stress.
- Secure attachment is foundational to positive developmental outcomes and future relationships (e.g., peers, partners).

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

- Support caregivers responding to their child's needs and feelings in a prompt and sensitive manner?
- Explore the importance of healthy predictable routines with a caregiver (e.g., feeding, sleeping, connecting time, play time, outdoor time)?
- Share screen time guidelines and the impact screen time may have on brain development and the formation of secure attachments with caregivers? The [Canadian Pediatric Society's](#) screen time guidelines are:
 - Children under 2 years old: screen time is not recommended.
 - Children 2 to 5 years old: firmly limit screen time to less than 1 hour per day. There is no evidence demonstrating recreational screen time benefiting early childhood development; less is best.
- Investigate opportunities with the caregivers for safe and supervised indoor and outdoor exploration?
- Explore attachment based workshops or services that promote healthy caregiver-child relationships?
- 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?
- Screen and refer caregivers for risk factors that may impact attachment (e.g., substance-induced mood disorders, postpartum mood disorders)?

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 \(attachment video\)](#)
- [Comfort Play and Teach](#)
- [Psychology Canada, Make the Connection](#)
- [Best Start, Life with a New Baby](#)
- [National Collaborating Center for Aboriginal Health](#)
- [24-Hour Movement and Activity Guidelines](#)
- [Kid Care Canada Videos](#)
- [Connect Play & Learn Every Day!](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)

Where can you find services that support families?

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

References:

- [Best Start, Healthy Brains Video: Love Builds Brains](#)
- [National Scientific Council on the Developing Child \(2004\). Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Attachment](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Key Concepts, Brain Architecture](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Serve and Return](#)
- [Caring for Kids: Screen Time and Young Children](#)