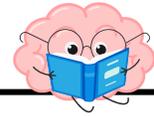


INFANT & EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW



WHAT IS INFANT & EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH?

Infant and early childhood mental health is about how young children (birth to age 5) feel, act, and think. It's the way they handle emotions, form relationships, and learn about the world around them (Zeanah, 2018). Early experiences, especially with caregivers, can help shape a child's mental health for the rest of their life.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The first few years of life are the most important for brain development (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.). Positive experiences help children learn how to manage their feelings and build strong relationships. When children get the support they need early on, they are more likely to do well in school and in life (Center on the Developing Child, 2010). But without that support, they may struggle with emotions, behavior, or learning later on.

SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Young children may not always show their feelings the way older kids do, but there are signs to watch for, such as:

- Sudden changes in behavior
- Loss of developmental skills
- Crying a lot, acting very withdrawn, or being upset often
- Having frequent tantrums or mood changes
- Delayed speech or trouble with learning new skills
- Problems with sleeping or eating

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH?

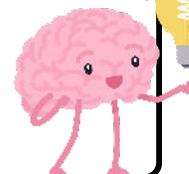
1. **Build Strong Relationships:** Be there for your child with love, care, and consistency.
2. **Create a Safe and Predictable Environment:** Make sure your child feels safe and knows what to expect each day.
3. **Help Them Express Feelings:** Teach your child to understand and talk about their emotions in healthy ways.
4. **Take Care of Yourself:** Parents who take care of their own mental health are better able to support their children.
5. **Get Help Early:** If you notice signs of trouble, talk to your child's doctor or a mental health professional.

Scan the QR code for more information on how to support your child's mental health!



WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If your child's behavior is concerning or if you notice signs of emotional struggles that last a long time, it's a good idea to get help. Talking to your child's doctor or a mental health expert early can make a big difference in how they feel and develop.



REMEMBER: Your child's mental health is just as important as their physical health. By supporting their emotional well-being from the beginning, you are helping them grow into happy, healthy adults.

Sources:

- Zeanah, C. H. (Ed.). (2018). Handbook of infant mental health. Guilford Publications.
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/key-concept/brain-architecture/>
- Center on the Developing Child (2010). The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Childhood. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.