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ZERO TO THREE

Early connections last a lifetime

April 26, 2023

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

(https://www.zerotothree.org/issue_area/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health/?post-type=resource)

Yes, Mental Health Includes Babies



Quinn K. donated \$250 🧑🏻‍🦧

to Where needed most

🇺🇸 Minneapolis, United States

Join them!

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details and any questions.

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Understanding the Impact

The perinatal period and a baby's first few years of life are critical for lifelong mental health.

A warm smile. A familiar song. A gentle touch. With each positive interaction, babies develop important neural pathways that shape their future social-emotional and cognitive functioning.

Did You Know...

Between 10-15% of young children experience mental health conditions including PTSD and anxiety.



Brain development in the prenatal and first three years of life advances at rates that exceed any other time period. This window of infancy and early childhood provides optimal opportunities to build healthy brain development, support the earliest relationships, and promote infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH).

Research has consistently found that securely attached children experience better relationships with their parents and peers, heightened optimism, stronger self-esteem and enhanced problem-solving abilities. Conversely, adverse experiences such as neglect, abuse, or trauma can have negative effects on a baby's mental health, potentially leading to issues like anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems throughout childhood, adolescence and even adulthood.

Even in a nurturing environment, mental health problems can still manifest. Regulatory problems in infancy are associated with later motor, language and cognitive delays, behavioral problems and ongoing parent-child relationship difficulties.

This is why early identification and intervention is key when it comes to infant and early childhood mental health (<https://www.zerotothree.org/issue-areas/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health/>) (IECMH) and includes understanding and identifying both protective and risk factors in pregnancy and the early postnatal period.

IECMH is the developing capacity of the infant/young child to form close and secure relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture.

Everyone Has a Role to Play

For early childhood professionals, using a diversity-informed approach for each family is key.

IECMH is a multidisciplinary field, inclusive of persons from many professional and community backgrounds and systems, focusing on enhancing the emotional and social competence of infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children through healthy relationships. Anyone who touches the lives of babies, young children and their families can contribute to promoting infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH).

Cultural connection not only determines how “healthy social-emotional development” is understood by parents and caregivers, but also defines the coping mechanisms, child-rearing beliefs, and expressions of love and nurturing they may use to promote a child’s mental health.

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Diversity-informed practice helps us approach the work through a lens of curiosity and recognize that we cannot filter the experience of children and families through just our own singular lens.

KATRINA MASACAET, PD MANAGER, PROFESSIONAL INNOVATIONS DIVISION (PID)

10 Tips for Promoting Diversity-Informed Practice Among Staff



What IECMH P

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Babies remember. They just remember it differently. We remember in our brains, and they remember in their bodies

— MEGHAN SCHMELZER
*Senior Manager, Infant and Early Childho
Mental Health, ZERO TO THREE*