MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND'S
HEALTHY NEW MOMS PROGRAM

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Resource

Presenter: Rony Ngamliya-Ndam, Child and Family Program Manager



Voices From The Community: Postpartum Mental Health Experience

“I had postpartum psychosis at 3 weeks postpartum. I was misdiagnosed with PPD and anxiety. I went to my OB to get medication and was told that if my symptoms got worse to go to the ER. They did and I went to the ER that night. My husband had to drive me with our newborn son to the ER. I spent the night at the ER and was given medication for panic attacks and not given the opportunity to stay with my newborn son or pump for breast milk. The doctors refused to talk to my husband before I was discharged and I had a referral to a psychiatric provider with a 2 month wait list. I was back in the ER the next morning. There was no follow-up, no support and no resources until my 6 week check-up.”



Voices From The Community: Postpartum Mental Health Experience

“Mental health can change, even up to 1 year postpartum. Earlier postpartum was manageable for me, it was about 10 months in when my menstrual cycle returned and I started weaning did I have unmanageable symptoms.”

“Sleep is so important to mental health, lactation, or care advice should be given with a focus on TAKING CARE of BOTH MOTHER and BABY not just lactation.”

“Sometimes we are not honest about it [mental health challenges]. We think you may take our child. We need reassurance!”



Early Childhood Mental Health Matters!

- Mental health during early childhood lays the foundation for the lifespan.
- Growing research on epigenetics and the intergenerational transmission of trauma.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Parental depression is linked to:
  - Higher risk of behavioral and emotional difficulties in children.
  - Weaker parent–child bonding.

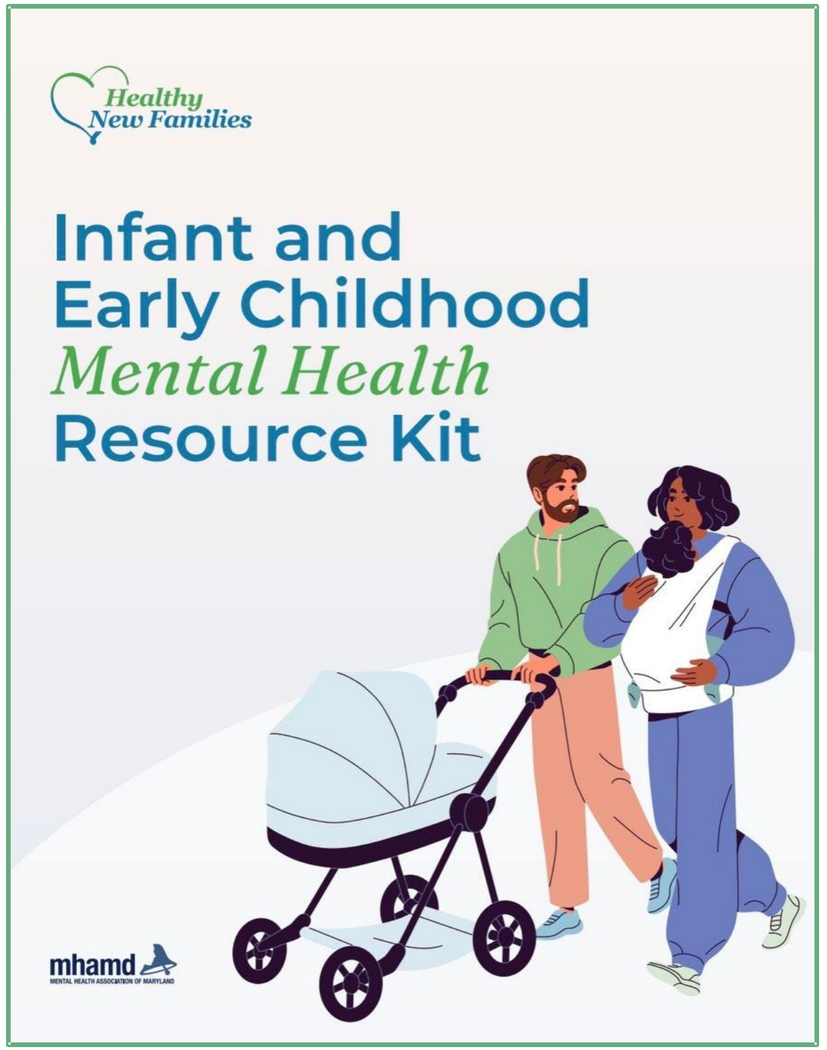
Early involvement and support can improve long-term outcomes.



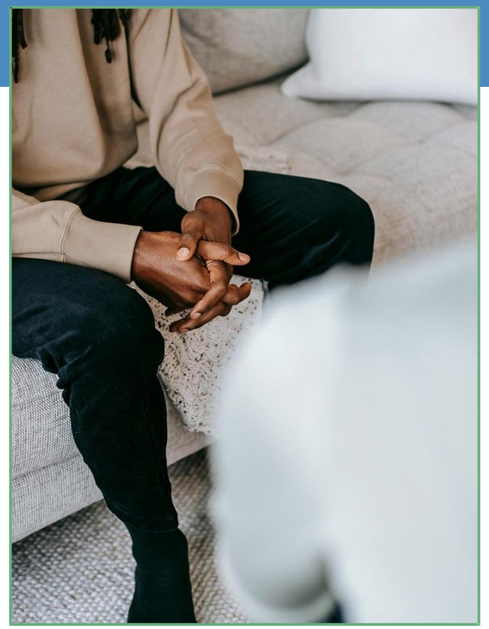
Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Resource Kit

Developed through a collaboration between **Healthy New Moms** and the **University of Maryland's Center for Infant Study**, this resource equips families, providers, and communities with practical tools and information to support the mental health and well-being of infants, young children, and their caregivers. The kit brings together resources designed to promote healthy development, strengthen families, and build a strong foundation for lifelong mental health.

The resource kit is intentionally designed to make information accessible and interactive for all.



Who Is the **Resource Kit** For?



Hospitals, Professionals, and Providers



Early Childhood Educators and Daycare Workers



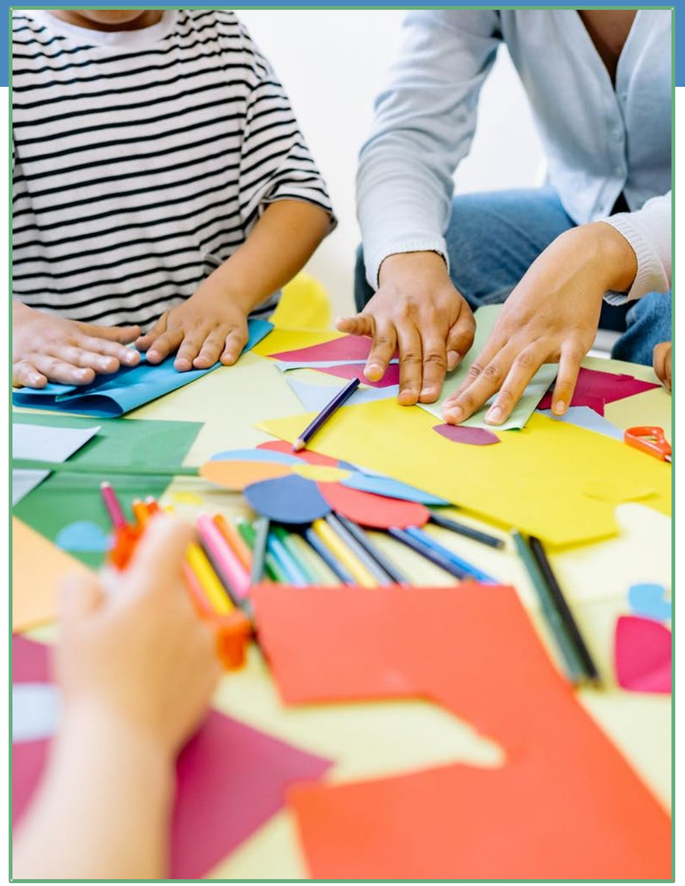
Organizations Serving Young Families



Parents, Caregivers, and Advocates

IECMH Resource Kit Objectives: Supporting **All Communities**

- **Provide practical tools and resources.**
- **Support conversations with families.**
- **Strengthen understanding of early childhood and whole family mental health.**
- **Connect families to relevant support.**
- **Promote healthy child development.**
- **Inform programs and community outreach.**



IECMH Resource Kit **Factsheets Topics**

Foundations of Early Childhood Mental Health

Recognizing Developmental Delays and Behavioral Concerns

Recognizing Signs of Abuse and Neglect in Early Childhood

Screening Tools and Evaluation in Child Development

Supporting Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood

Understanding Trauma and Stress in Early Childhood

Understanding Trauma and Stress in Families

Building Strong Parent–Provider Partnerships

Child Development Stages and Milestones

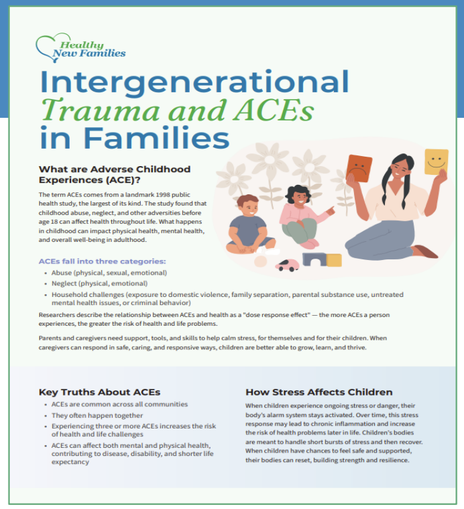
Educator Essentials for Early Childhood Mental Health

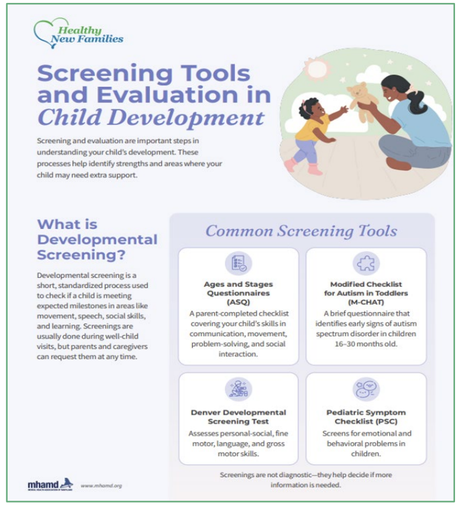
Parental Mental Health in the Perinatal Period

Healthy Attachment in Early Childhood

Intergenerational Trauma and ACEs in Families









How can you support infant and early childhood mental health?

Kay Connors, LCSW-C

10/20/26

IECMH_FoundationsofEarlyChildhoodMentalHealth_FactSheet_2026_09.pdf

Definition of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

The Brain is Connected to the Rest of the Body

BRAIN & AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

Depression

Anxiety Disorders

HEART & CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM

Cardiovascular Disease

Asthma

GUT & METABOLIC SYSTEM

Metabolic Syndrome

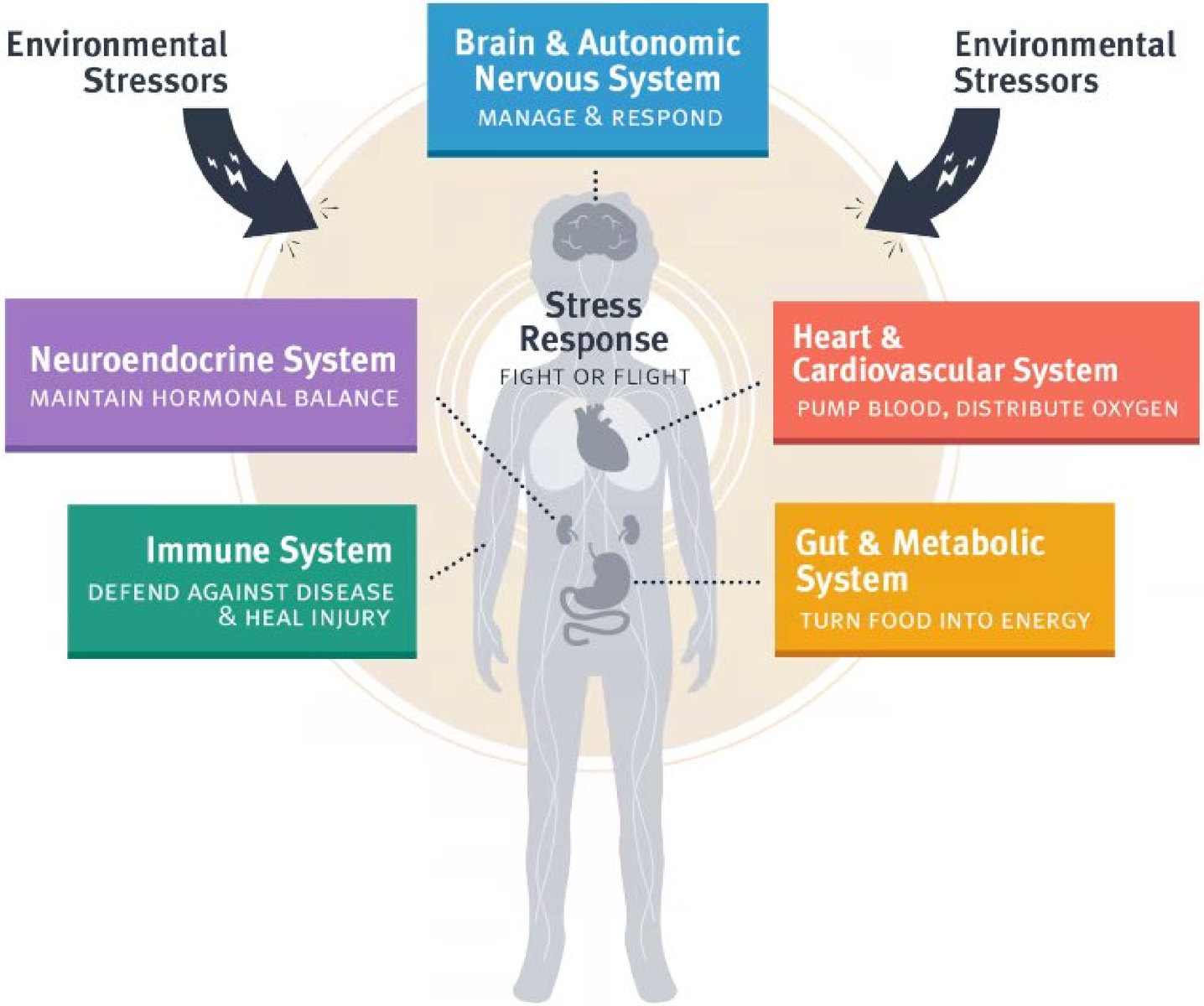
Diabetes

Obesity

IMMUNE SYSTEM & NEUROENDOCRINE SYSTEM

Immunodeficiency

Inflammation



What we are learning...
Advances in Biology are Deepening Our Understanding of Development and Lifelong Health



Interactive development of multiple systems



Developmental Environments



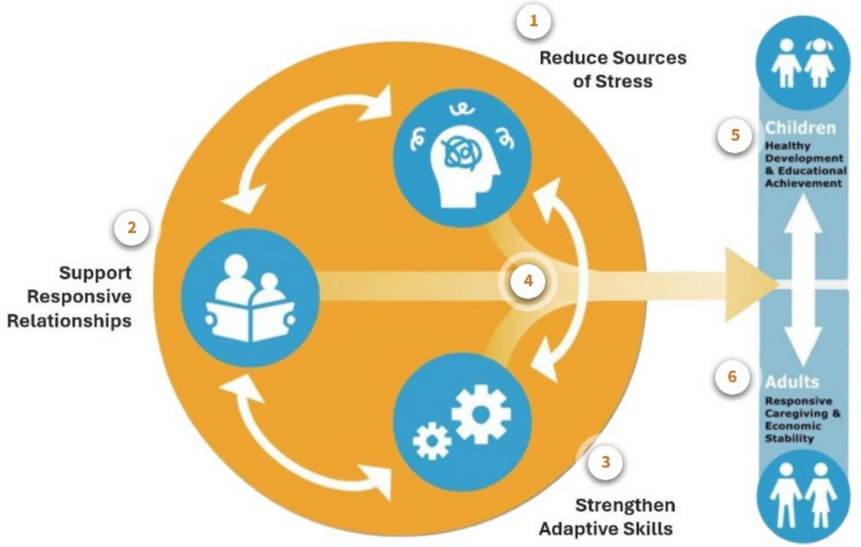
Variation in sensitivity to the environment



Timing and critical periods

Science X Design

- Empower each of us to improve the health of young children.
- Use these these three science informed principles :
  - Reduce Sources of Significant Stress in Children and Caregivers
  - Supportive Responsive Relationships
  - Strengthening Adaptive Skills in Context



Click to learn more

IECMH_HealthyAttachmentinEarlyChildhood_FactSheet_2026_09.pdf

Defining Early Childhood Mental Health Concerns

- Child abuse and neglect
- Divorce
- Domestic Violence
- Family mental health issues
- Natural disasters
- School crises
- Military deployment
- Grief and loss

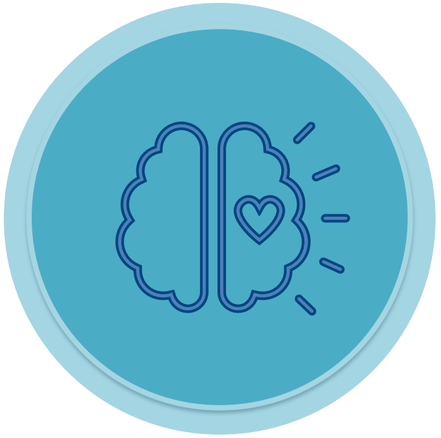


- Behavioral
- Neurodevelopmental
- Psychiatric
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Social
- Impact of fetal substance exposure

American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health and Task Force on Mental Health. 2009

Grow Well & Love Well

Early childhood mental health is defined as the capacity to *"grow well and love well."*



Emotions



Relationships



Culturally expected development

-Alicia Lieberman and Patricia Van Horn, 2008.

Click to learn more

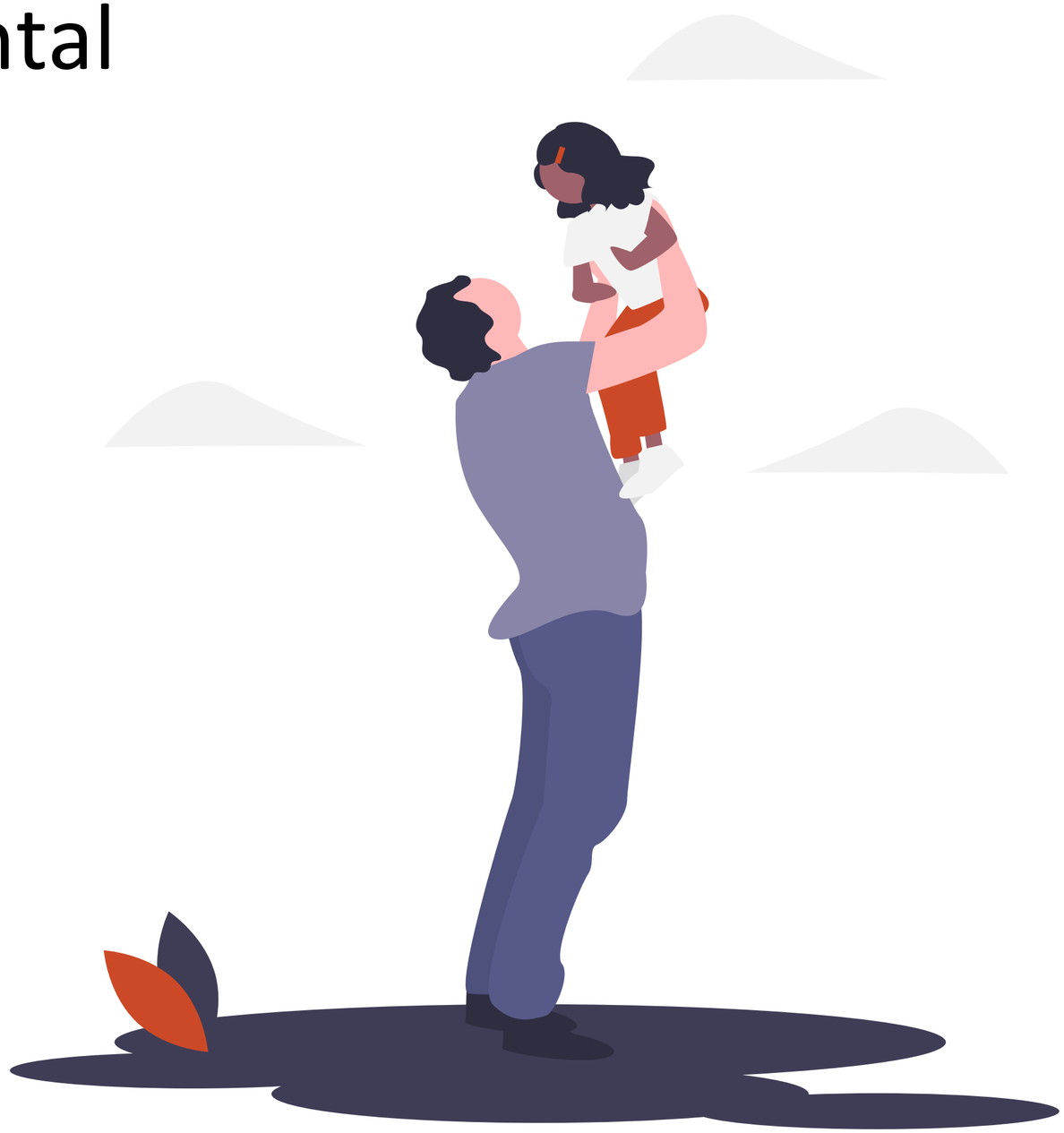
IECMH_SupportingSocialEmotionalDevelopmentinEarlyChildhood_FactSheet_2026_09.pdf

Prevalence of Early Childhood Mental Health Concerns

Early Childhood Mental Health Concerns

17%

of all children experience a mental health disorder in early childhood.



7%
Emotional and motor regulation difficulties

25%
Feeding problems

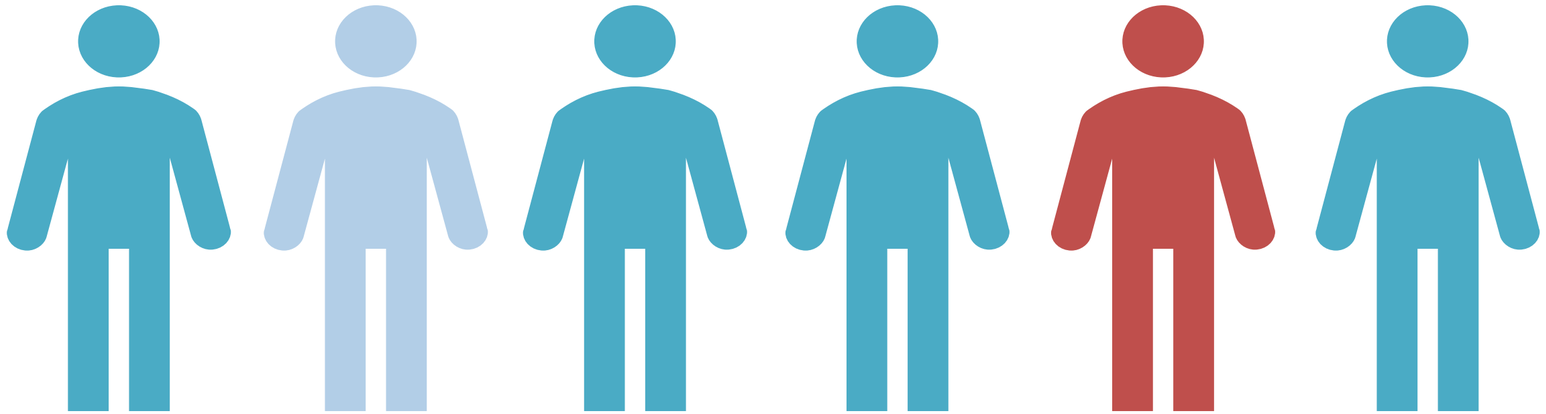
1%
Reactive attachment disorder

10-20%
Anxiety disorder

2%
Depression

1 in 6 children

have a developmental delay or disability



Click to learn more

IECMH_RecognizingDevelopmentalDelaysandBehavioralConcerns_FactSheet_2026_09.pdf

Course of Mental Illness

- **Disruptive behavior disorders** (including ADHD and ODD), are among **the most diagnosed** and stable disorders in children.
- **Symptoms evident as early as 1 to 3 years** of age. Often continue into later childhood and adolescence
- Symptoms were related to:
  - Disruptions to family life/activities
  - Parent-reported worry about behaviors
- **Higher risk** for children with **family history of psychopathology, exposure to childhood adversity,** and **low SES**



<25%

of young children identified with behavioral problems receive treatment





Changes in Children's Health in USA

- Reduction of serious infections and disease
- Increases in treatment and recovery rates for acute illnesses
- Increases in metabolic and mental health conditions

Defining EPSDT Best Practices

Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT)

EPSDT guarantees children (0 to 21) who are enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP access to **medically necessary services** to prevent, diagnose, and treat health issues.

Focus is prevention for dental, **mental health**, and **specialty services**.

Early: Assessing and identifying problems early

Periodic: Checking children's health at periodic, age-appropriate intervals

Screening: Providing physical, **mental, developmental**, dental, hearing, vision, and other screening tests to detect potential problems

Diagnostic: Performing diagnostic tests to follow up when a risk is identified, and

Treatment: Control, correct, or reduce health problems found.

sho24005_1.pdf

Learn the Signs. Act Early. Campaign

- The goals of the Taskforce was to:
  - Identify evidence-informed milestones to update and include in CDC checklists
  - Clarify when most children can be expected to reach a milestone (to discourage a wait-and-see approach)
  - Support clinical judgment regarding screening between recommended ages.

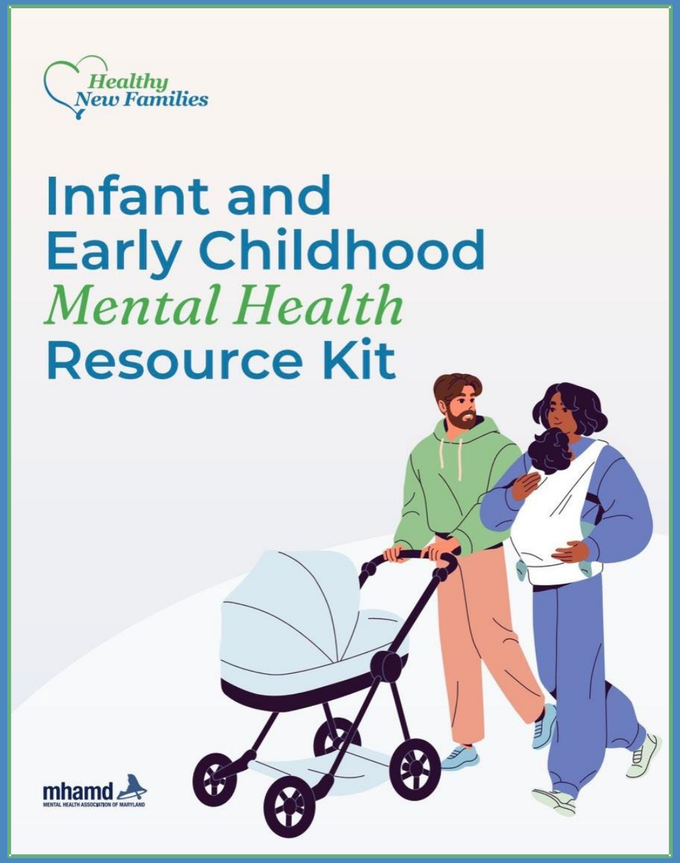
Click to learn more

IECMH_ScreeningToolsandEvaluationinChildDevelopment_FactSheet_2026_09.pdf

Click to learn more

IECMH_RecognizingSignsofAbuseandNeglectinEarlyChildhood_FactSheet_2026_09.pdf

IECMH Resource Kit Walk-through!





Complementing Your Work

Increase whole-family mental health awareness.

Facilitate difficult mental health conversations.

Promote early identification of mental health concerns.

Provide accessible, evidence-informed resources.

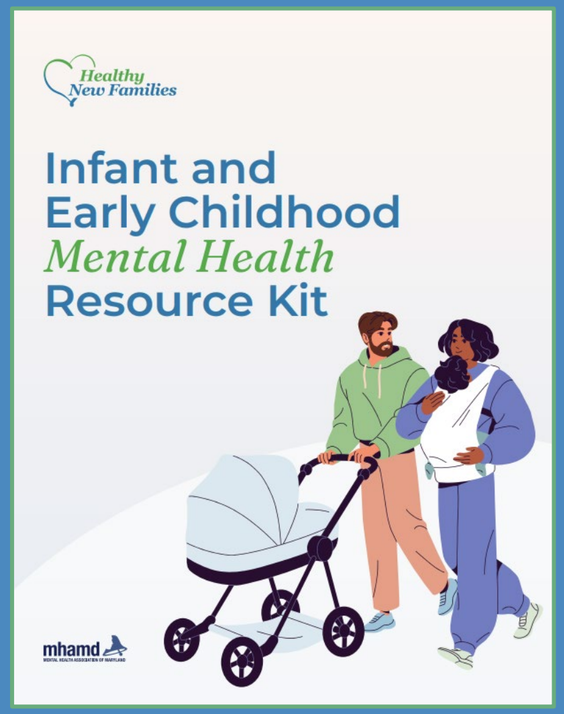
Connect families to additional mental health resources and support.

Encourage healthy parent-child relationships and attachment.

Strengthen parent and caregiver engagement.

Equip families, professionals, and organizations. Facilitate increased whole-family mental health awareness.

Access the Resource Kit!



Virtual Download

Physical Copies

Kit Webpage

You can freely access the kit at mhamd.org.

Early Childhood Resources

“Learn the Signs. Act Early” www.cdc.gov/actearly

- This website provides information and free resources on developmental milestones, developmental monitoring, and acting early on concerns
- Provides information on when infant and toddler behaviors are developmentally appropriate and when they are not

Center for the Developing Child-Harvard University

- Science tells us that the foundations of sound mental health are built early in life. Early experiences—including children’s relationships with parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, and peers—interact with genes to shape the architecture of the developing brain. Disruptions in this developmental process can impair a child’s capacities for learning and relating to others, with lifelong implications.
- This edition of the InBrief series explains how improving children’s environments of relationships and experiences early in life can prevent initial difficulties from destabilizing later development and mental health. The 5-minute video provides an overview of Establishing a Level Foundation for Life: Mental Health Begins in Early Childhood, a working paper by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child.

- PLAY VIDEO: 5 minutes

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-early-childhood-mental-health-video/

Resources

- Bright Futures (aap.org)
- Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! | The Administration for Children and Families (hhs.gov)
- Developmental Surveillance Resources for Healthcare Providers | CDC
- CDC's Developmental Milestones | CDC
- Watch Me! Celebrating Milestones and Sharing Concerns | CDC

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