

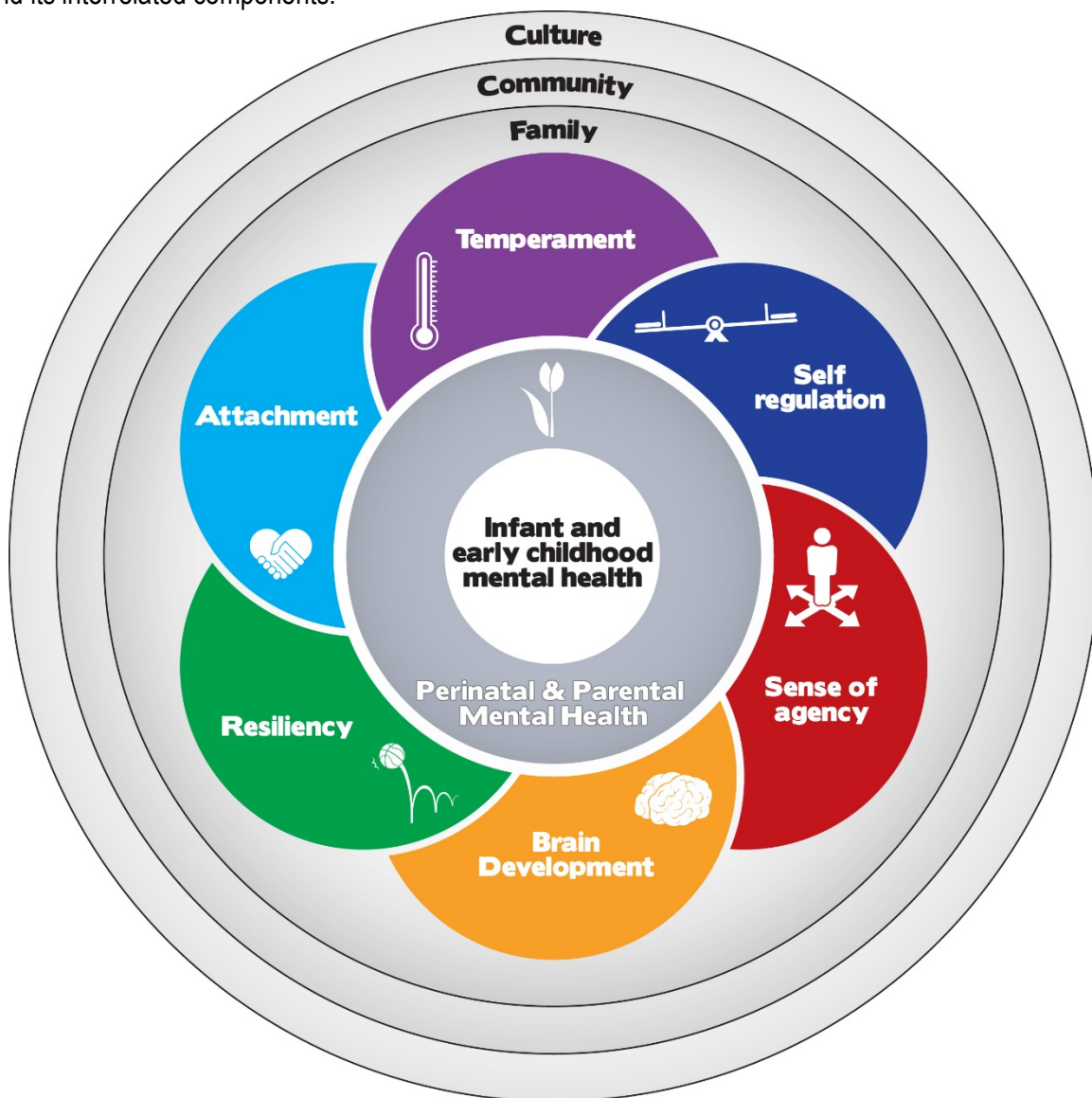
## Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Professionals

Mental health refers to striking a balance in all aspects of one's life: socially, physically, spiritually, economically and mentally.<sup>1</sup> It is more than the absence of a mental health condition or illness.

Infants and young children have mental health. It is the “developing capacity of the child, from birth to six years of age, to form close and secure adult and peer relationships to experience, manage and express a full range of emotions, and to explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and culture.”<sup>2</sup>

It is also important to recognize that brain development begins in pregnancy. Therefore, the prenatal period must also be considered in relation to IECMH.

The purpose of this guide is to provide support and information to professionals when they have the conversation about IECMH and its interrelated components:



1. Canadian Mental Health Association: Mental Health for all [Internet]. Ottawa, ON: 2005-2016 [cited 2016 Nov 2016]. Available from <https://cmha.ca/resources/>
2. Clinton J, Kays-Burden A, Carter C, Bhasin K, Cairney J, Carrey N, Janus M, Kulkarni C, Williams R. (November 2014). Supporting Ontario's youngest minds: Investing in the mental health of children under 6. [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health: [cited 2016 Nov 16]. Available from [http://www.excellenceforchildandyouth.ca/sites/default/files/policy\\_early\\_years.pdf](http://www.excellenceforchildandyouth.ca/sites/default/files/policy_early_years.pdf)

## Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Professionals: Perinatal and Parental Mental Health

### Here's what we know about perinatal and parental mental health:

- “It takes a village to raise a child...”
- We all share a responsibility in supporting parenting practices.
- Family, friends, culture and community influence an adult’s ability to interact positively with children.
  - This circle of support is foundational for a child’s optimal growth and development, and their ability to build healthy relationships for life.
- Parents or caregivers can have a range of emotions and experiences during pregnancy and after the baby arrives.
- Parent’s or caregiver’s overall health and wellbeing may have an impact on the developing child.

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

- Discuss how the parent or caregiver is coping and their support system.
- Discuss if the expectant parent or caregiver is accessing primary health care supports.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to informal and formal supports (community, neighbourhood, resources, groups).
- Screen and refer for postpartum mood disorders and other risk factors that may impact perinatal and parental mental health.

### Where can you find more information:

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development](#)
- [Caring for Kids: Pregnancy and Babies](#)
- Best Start
  - [Mental Health Resources](#)
  - [Life with a New Baby](#)
  - [Prenatal and Postpartum Health Resources](#)
  - [Prenatal Education Program](#)
- [Infant Mental Health Promotion: Parenting Moments](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)

## **References**

- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: The Foundations of Lifelong Health are Built in Early Childhood](#)
- [Infant Mental Health Promotion: Mental Health and Brain Development](#)

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

#### Here's what we know about attachment:

- Infants are hardwired to develop strong emotional connections or attachments to primary caregivers through face-to-face interactions and eye contact.
- Babies need to feel safe, cared for, and protected. When a parent or caregiver responds consistently in a manner that is warm and sensitive, a secure attachment develops.
- The parent or caregiver are the anchor from which young children can safely explore their world and develop to their full potential.
- When secure attachment needs are met, children develop trust and gain the knowledge that they are loveable and important.
- Children require a nurturing parent or caregiver to protect them from harm and the effects of toxic stress.
- A secure attachment is foundational to positive developmental outcomes and future relationships with peers and partners.

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

- Support the parent or caregiver to respond promptly and sensitively to their child's feelings and needs.
- Explore the importance of healthy predictable routines for feeding, sleeping, connecting time, play time and outdoor time with a caring parent or caregiver.
- Share with the parent or caregiver, screen time guidelines and the impact screen time may have on brain development and the formation of secure attachments. The Canadian Pediatric Society's Screen time and young children guidelines (June 2017) are:
  - For children under 2 years old, screen time is not recommended.
  - For children 2 to 5 years old, limit routine or regular screen time to less than 1 hour per day. It is important to note that studies show that the less time is better. There is no evidence that shows recreational screen time improves early child development.
- Explore with the parent or caregiver opportunities for the child to safely experience and explore their world (including the outdoor world) with attentive supervision.
- Explore attachment based workshops or services that promote healthy parent child relationships.
- Discuss how the parent or caregiver is coping and their support system.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to informal and formal supports (community, neighbourhood, resources, groups).
- Support the parent or caregiver to have realistic, age appropriate expectations for their child.
- Screen and refer for postpartum mood disorders and other risk factors that may impact attachment.

### **Where can you find more information:**

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Caring for Kids: Screen Time and Young Children](#)
- [Caring for Kids: Tips for Limiting Screen Time at Home](#)
- [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](#)
- [Infant Mental Health Promotion, Comfort Play and Teach](#)
- [Psychology Foundation of Canada, Make the Connection](#)
- [Best Start, Life with a New Baby](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)

### **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: Working Paper No. 1.](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Attachment](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Key Concepts, Brain Architecture](#)
- [Caring for Kids: Screen Time and Young Children](#)
- [Caring for Kids: Tips for Limiting Screen Time at Home](#)

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

### Here's what we know about temperament:

- It is an individual's innate way of approaching and responding to the world.
- Some children approach situations with ease while others may experience more challenges.
- Temperament describes a range of character traits which include: activity level, adaptability, approach and withdrawal, distractibility, intensity, persistence, positivity/mood, regularity and sensitivity.
  - A child's temperament can shape their outcomes and influence how others respond to them.
  - Each parent or caregiver has their own unique temperament; how these temperaments interact can impact the quality of the relationship. This is known as the "goodness of fit," which is the ability of the parent or caregiver to adapt their expectations and responses to the child's personal style and abilities.

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

- Provide opportunities for a parent or caregiver to learn more about temperament.
- Explore individualized strategies to support the parent or caregiver and the child.
- Discuss how the parent or caregiver is coping and their support system.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to informal and formal supports (community, neighbourhood, resources, groups).
- Support the parent or caregiver to have realistic, age appropriate expectations for their child.
- Administer an appropriate screening tool to ensure that the child is meeting their expected developmental milestones and refer if applicable.

### Where can you find more information:

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Temperament](#)
- [Parents 2 Parents: Temperament](#)
- Raising Your Spirited Child. Book by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka
- City of Hamilton: [Parenting with LOVE Video - Temperament](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)

### References

- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Temperament](#)
- [Parents 2 Parents: The Temperament Corner](#)
- [Georgetown University, Centre for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#)

## Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Professionals: Self-regulation

### Here's what we know about self-regulation:

- It is the ability to deal with stressors and recover from them.
  - Challenging behavior can be reframed as: The child is not coping due to stressors, skill deficits or unmet needs.
- It is closely linked to brain maturation and develops over time with support from nurturing and responsive parents and caregivers.
- Is the ability to adjust our bodies, emotions, thinking, attention and behaviour so we can be in a calm, focused, alert state for learning and responding to our environment.

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

- Explore with the parent or caregiver how to:
  - provide environments that reduce stressors while supporting the child's effort to learn how to self-regulate.
  - Help children understand, identify and label their feelings and responses to stressors. Support them while they release emotions using "[time ins](#)".
  - Model and practice learning social skills and problem solving abilities through the use of songs, stories and unstructured play.
- Discuss how the parent or caregiver is coping and their support system.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to informal and formal supports (community, neighbourhood, resources, groups).
- Support the parent or caregiver to have realistic, age appropriate expectations for their child.
- Administer an appropriate screening tool to ensure that the child is meeting their expected developmental milestones and refer if applicable.

### Where can you find more information:

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Executive Function](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Executive Function & Self-Regulation](#)
- [Canadian Self-Regulation Initiative](#)
- [The Mehrit Centre](#)
- [KidsMatter, Explaining Self-Regulation](#)
- [Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)

## **References**

- [Ontario Ministry of Education: Childcare, Calm, Alert and Happy by Dr. Stuart Shanker](#)
- [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)
- [Best Start, Frequently Asked Questions about Time-outs](#)



## Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Professionals: Sense of Agency

### Here's what we know about Sense of Agency ("I can do it!"):

- It is the child's ability to make choices and decisions that will influence and have an impact on their life.
- Children need to develop a strong sense of belonging and self-identity. As they do, they begin to see themselves as capable, competent and valued contributors.

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

- Explore with the parent or caregiver opportunities to support a child to:
  - Make age appropriate choices and decisions in their everyday life.
  - Have opportunities to develop autonomy in safe, nurturing environments and take graduated risks according to their own readiness, abilities and interests.
  - Engage in meaningful interactions, tasks, solving problems, play and exploration.
- Discuss how the parent or caregiver is coping and their support system.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to informal and formal supports (community, neighbourhood, resources, groups).
- Support the parent or caregiver to have realistic age appropriate expectations for their child.
- Administer an appropriate screening tool to ensure that the child is meeting their expected developmental milestones and refer if applicable.

### **Where can you find more information?**

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Early Childhood Australia, Promoting Independence and Agency](#)
- [Talking about Practice Series Video: 'I can do it!' Supporting Babies' Sense of Agency](#)
- [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)
- [Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT: Road to Resiliency Factsheet and Video](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)

### **References**

- [Gowrie SA Research Summary - Sense of Agency](#)
- [How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)

### Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Guide for Professionals: Brain development

#### Here's what we know about brain development:

- “Early experiences matter...” A child's genes, environment, experiences and relationships all work together to shape the architecture of the brain.
- Brain development begins in pregnancy and undergoes its most rapid and critical period of growth during the first 2000 days.
  - Latest research shows that more than 1 million new neural connections are made each second.
  - Brain development in the first 2000 days is highly vulnerable to the effects of toxic stress. Toxic stress is defined as ongoing stress that occurs in the absence of a responsive caring adult. It can have an impact on learning, behavior and both physical and mental health.
  - Social, emotional, physical and cognitive capacities including executive functioning continues to develop throughout childhood and into early adulthood.

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

- Explore if the parent or caregiver is sensitive and responsive to the child's cues, feelings and needs.
- Explore opportunities for the child, parent and caregiver to connect through positive interactions such as playing, talking and singing.
- Share with the parent or caregiver screen time guidelines and the impact screen time may have on brain development and the formation of secure attachments. The Canadian Pediatric Society's Screen time and young children guidelines (June 2017) are:
  - For children under 2 years old, screen time is not recommended.
  - For children 2 to 5 years old, limit routine or regular screen time to less than 1 hour per day. Important to note that studies show that the less time is better. There is no evidence that shows recreational screen time improves early child development.
- Discuss how the parent or caregiver is coping and their support system.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to informal and formal supports (community, neighbourhood, resources, groups).
- Support the parent or caregiver to have realistic, age appropriate expectations for their child.
- Administer an appropriate screening tool to ensure that the child is meeting their expected developmental milestones and refer if applicable.

## **Where can you find more information?**

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Brain](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Key Concepts; Brain Architecture; Serve and Return; Toxic Stress; Executive Function and Self Regulation.](#)
- [Best Start: Healthy Baby, Healthy Brain](#)
- [Infant Mental Health Promotion: Comfort, Play and Teach](#)
- [City of Hamilton: Parenting with LOVE - Brain Development](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)

## **References**

- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Key Concepts, Brain Architecture](#)
- [Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Five Numbers to Remember about Early Childhood Development](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development](#)
- [Make No Little Plans: Ontario's Public Health Sector Strategic Plan](#)

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

### Here's what we know about resiliency:

- It is the ability to steer through life's challenges and bounce back from adversity in a positive way.
- Helps people deal with stress, overcome childhood disadvantages and reach out to new opportunities.
- It is not a personality trait and develops throughout your life.
  - Develops through the interaction of supportive relationships, biological systems and gene expression.
- Research demonstrates that it can be linked to higher levels of happiness, positive relationships and greater success in school, work and life.

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

- Share strategies with parents? Examples:
  - Calming strategies such as deep breathing, hugs, movement, a drink of water, music, art, taking a break, sensory play, etc.
  - Modeling and nurturing the development of positive thinking habits and reaching out for support as needed.
  - Encouraging children to keep trying even when it is hard. Helping them learn that mistakes are okay.
  - Giving children opportunities to help out and contribute to the needs of others through meaningful tasks such as: getting a band aide for a friend, help cleaning up, help with mealtime preparation.
- Discuss how the parent or caregiver is coping and their support system.
- Explore opportunities for connecting to informal and formal supports (community, neighbourhood, resources, groups).
- Support the parent or caregiver to have realistic, age appropriate expectations for their child.
- Administer an appropriate screening tool to ensure that the child is meeting their expected developmental milestones and refer if applicable.

### **Where can you find more information:**

- [Parenting in Ottawa](#)
- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Resilience](#)
- [Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT: Road to Resiliency Factsheet and Video](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard: 8 Things to Remember about Child Development](#)
- [Best Start: Building Resilience in Young Children](#)
- [CHEO: MindMasters 2](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada: Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [211 Ontario](#)

### **References**

- [Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development: Resiliency](#)
- [Reaching IN ... Reaching OUT Resiliency Guidebook](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: Key Concepts, Brain Architecture](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child: The Science of Resilience](#)
- [Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard: 8 Things to Remember about Child Development](#)
- [Best Start, Building Resilience in Young Children](#)