

## A CLOSER LOOK AT

# Emotional Health for Babies and Toddlers

### WHAT IS EMOTIONAL HEALTH?

Emotional health is learning how to express and manage feelings, learning about other people and yourself, and developing a sense of belonging within community and culture. It is the key to future development for children at every age.

By protecting early emotional health, children become more resilient to stress and are less likely to develop mental health problems down the road.

### INVESTING IN EMOTIONAL HEALTH

As our healthcare systems increase focus on disease prevention, we can benefit from a similar approach for the emotional health of babies and toddlers.

Investment in emotional health has proven returns for all stages of development. ★ **Prioritizing it means funding the needs of caregivers, so they can be responsive, nurturing, stable and safe for those they care for. These relationships are the most effective intervention to help children thrive.** ★

### POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE FOUNDATION FOR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Of all the factors that are important to the health and well-being of infants and young children, including nutrition, sleep, learning, etc., relationships are the most important. Early relationship experiences shape brain development and influence all future relationships.

Promoting adult wellbeing and reducing family stressors is essential to ensuring caregivers can provide responsive, nurturing, stable and safe relationships for children to develop.

These supports benefit children's health and success as they grow. They also benefit caregivers, by alleviating distress and fostering healing.

### EVERYDAY ACTIONS MATTER

Think about everyday actions you can take to support caregivers and their children at work and at home. What can you do to support families in your community?

From volunteer service to individual acts of kindness, every day actions can improve your own and others' emotional health.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO IN CHILD WELFARE AND THE COURTS?

Emotional health and child safety grow in the context of a child's relationship with their parents. Science backs approaches that support parents so they can provide responsive care to their children.

- Caregivers need you to advocate for them in a system that is often challenging
- Support strong relationships by referring families to free parenting services
- Help families access critical resources to address their concrete needs
- Center and seek to understand parents' experiences and needs
- Shared planning and decision making
- Listen to parents as experts on their children and include family and community supports
- Apply a racial equity lens to all decision-making, recognizing that child welfare disproportionately impacts families of color



## CONTRIBUTORS

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[barnardcenter.nursing.uw.edu](http://barnardcenter.nursing.uw.edu)



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

[dcyf.wa.gov](http://dcyf.wa.gov)



[hca.wa.gov](http://hca.wa.gov)



[thepracticenw.com](http://thepracticenw.com)



WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION FOR  
Infant Mental Health

[wa-aimh.org](http://wa-aimh.org)

## WANT TO LEARN MORE (RESOURCES)

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Center on the Developing Child Harvard University [developingchild.harvard.edu](http://developingchild.harvard.edu)

Zero to Three | Think Babies [zerotothree.org](http://zerotothree.org)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)

Washington State IECMH Network [facebook.com/groups/waiecmhnetwork](https://facebook.com/groups/waiecmhnetwork)

## ACCESS SERVICES IN WASHINGTON STATE

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Washington 211 [wa211.org](http://wa211.org)

Help Me Grow Washington [helpmegrowwa.org](http://helpmegrowwa.org)

Mental Health Referral Services for Children and Teens [seattlechildrens.org/clinics/washington-mental-health-referral-service](http://seattlechildrens.org/clinics/washington-mental-health-referral-service)

