



## BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS: Supporting Infant Mental Health

Caring for your young child's mental health or "brain health" is just as important as caring for their physical health. Prenatal through age 5 is a critical window for brain development and your child's brain is growing the fastest during this time.

### Brains can be changed for the better!

Ways to support growing brains and build secure relationships include:

1. Hold and touch your child gently
2. Talk, sing, and read books or play pat-a-cake
3. Follow a child's lead and respond to their sounds
4. Use routines such as diapering and feeding as one-on-one time to interact with your child
5. Acknowledge and mirror your child's emotions and help them learn words to describe their feelings

### Infant mental health (or brain health) is a young child's ability to:

- Experience, control and express their emotions
- Form close and secure adult and peer relationships
- Explore their environment and learn

### Your child's developing brain needs:

- **Healthy relationships:** early relationships help wire the brain to form trusting relationships, to experience love, and to feel safe and secure
- **Positive experiences:** verbal and physical experiences help the brain grow new connections
- **Consistent and secure care:** the brain grows gradually in response to experiences and the environment

### Did you know?

- Evidence of infants experiencing symptoms of depression has been found in children as young as 4 months old
- Chronic stress can actually **slow brain growth**, especially the part of the brain responsible for **judgement, impulse control**, and **reading social cues** from others

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**Parenting Can Be Tough**  
*Asking for help doesn't have to be!*

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