

# Healthy Minds Begin at Home: *from Infant to Individual*



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# Healthy Minds Begin at Home: from Infant to Individual

*production of the*

**CAPC Mental Health Toolkit**

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# Introduction

## *Healthy Minds Begin at Home: from Infant to Individual*

This is your guide to the “*Healthy Minds Begin at Home: from Infant to Individual*” toolkit. The toolkit was designed to educate, promote, and provide awareness about early childhood mental health. It has been developed and organized so that you can find and pull out information to use as needed.

The goal of the toolkit is to create a foundation for CAPC and CPNP projects to begin or continue to work in the area of early childhood mental health promotion. The toolkit will be relevant to a variety of families and project settings.

During the early years, the foundation for secure beginnings for children to have positive relationships, self-confidence, and the ability to meet change and challenges successfully is built. Healthy social and emotional development is necessary for success as children grow and develop.

For healthy development, children need good mental health as much as they need good physical health. Physical and mental health affect how children think, feel and act. Mental health is also tied closely to relationships that children have with significant caregivers. Loving, nurturing relationships enhance emotional development and mental health. The toolkit provides caregivers with methods to help their children learn how to effectively express emotions, make friends, and explore the world around them through these relationships.

Included with the toolkit are a guide book, handouts that can be photocopied for parents, suggestions of activities, CDs, DVDs, puppets, fact sheets, information cards, books for professional development, and storybooks.

Resources included within the toolkit are meant to educate and assist both the staff members who work with CAPC projects and the families and children they support.

The guidebook covers the following topics that relate to early childhood mental health:

1. Early childhood mental health
2. Attachment
3. Brain development
4. Self-esteem and self-efficacy
5. Play
6. Empathy
7. Stress and anxiety
8. Resiliency

Each section contains information about the topic as well as samples of activities that professionals or caregivers can do with children to help them develop or cope. There is also a list of web resources at the end of each section that staff can refer to for more information and a glossary of terms.

Please note that any information or tools contained within this toolkit are not meant to be used to diagnose children or in clinical intervention. If staff believe that a family needs assistance beyond the scope of their project and training, a referral to your local health care provider is recommended.

This toolkit was designed so that projects can continue to make use of it over a number of years. As such, the guidebook will be made available online at [www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca) and updated as needed.

Throughout this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.



# Section 1: Early Childhood Mental Health

## What is Early Childhood Mental Health?

Early childhood mental health refers to the developing ability of young children (*birth to age 6*) to:

- experience, regulate (control), and express emotion
- form close, secure relationships
- explore their environment and learn (adapted from Zero To Three)

Young children need a solid foundation of mental health to develop, learn and grow.

When a child is born, his brain is approximately 90% of the size that it will be when he grows up. However, it will not function in the same way as an adult brain. During a child's first six years of life, the brain is further developed and refined.

It is during this time that neural networks are formed in the brain. These impact the way that children view, interpret, and interact with their environment throughout their lifetime. Neural networks are formed as a result of repeated experiences in early childhood and are a basis of mental health. This will be discussed further in Section 2 of the toolkit.

The early years are called critical years of both brain development and the development of mental health. The first six years present an opportunity to actively promote development that leads to long-term well-being.

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**Mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness.**

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**Mental health in infancy and early childhood affects every aspect of an individual's life throughout his or her lifetime.**

## Why is Early Childhood Mental Health Important?

Children's mental health affects how they socialize, learn, and meet their potential. The mental health of a child is what enables him to function in the world.

Young children are completely dependent upon their caregivers for their survival. Therefore, young children's mental health development takes place within the context of the caregiver-child relationship. Some young children develop in healthy environments with supportive caregivers, community relationships, and other advantages, such as good nutrition. For others, the environment to which they are exposed in early childhood may be unreliable, unhealthy, or unstable. They may not have access to resources or consistent supportive relationships.

Nurturing environments during the first 6 years of life are essential for healthy brain development and the development of mental health.

## Why is Early Childhood Mental Health Promotion Important?

As early childhood is a critical time for the development of mental health, this is also an excellent time to engage caregivers. By introducing the concept of early childhood mental health and practical ways that caregivers can, and already do, help their children to develop, professionals can engage caregivers as equals ... as partners in development. Most

caregivers are already parenting in ways that promote early childhood mental health and reinforcing this can increase feelings of confidence and motivation for the parent. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with caregivers in a way that is truly focused on prevention.

## Why are Relationships Important in the Development of Mental Health?

For young children, supportive relationships – especially those with their primary caregivers – are crucial for both physical survival and for the development of mental health. These nurturing connections provide the loving, consistent context necessary to comfort, protect, and encourage children.

Through relationships, young children develop mental health and become familiar with the world that they live in. One of the key messages caregivers can receive is that by helping their baby feel loved, cared for, and protected, they are nurturing their baby's mental health.





**Mental health is tied closely to relationships the child has with his parents and significant caregivers.**

**Children learn how to effectively express emotions, develop relationships with peers and adults, and explore the world around them through these relationships.**

## **Promoting Early Childhood Mental Health**

All people involved in young children's lives, whether they are transportation providers, recreation leaders, receptionists, cafeteria workers, or direct service staff, can use their daily interactions with children and families to promote early childhood mental health.

Young children learn through modeling. One of the best ways that community members and caregivers can help children develop mental health is through developing their own healthy skills related to mental health.

It is important that environments are created to support and promote mental health development. Leaders make an especially important contribution, as they can have an impact on staff, caregivers, and children through both supervisory practices and organizational decisions.

The following are key:

- surround children and families with positive, nurturing relationships
- create a trusting, secure environment through stable, predictable routines
- provide stable caregivers at home, in childcare, and in programming
- learn about child development as a way to have realistic expectations

When developing environments that promote early childhood mental health, the following should be taken into consideration.

### **a) Physical Development:**

It is important to provide opportunities for physical development and exploration. Physical health is strongly connected to mental health.

### **b) Temperament:**

Temperament is the natural way that an individual reacts to his environment. Temperament is something that all individuals are born with; it is not developed over time. For example, some babies are easy-going, they can calm easily and do not react much to change. Others are not; they react strongly to change, sounds, and other stimuli, and may be harder to soothe. Helping staff to understand the temperament of the children they work with and providing an environment that allows for adaptation and flexibility will make it easier for all children, regardless of temperament, to succeed.

### **c) External Factors:**

It is important to understand that there are many factors outside of a family's control that can affect a child's mental health. For example, poverty, inadequate housing, a lack of accessible and affordable food, and a lack of accessible health care.

#### d) Children with Additional

##### **Medical/Behavioural Needs:**

A child's overall mental health can be influenced by special care needs, such as, medical or behavioural interventions, support, or care. As these may be time consuming, emotionally draining, and critical, interactions that promote mental health may be limited. It is important to create an environment that provides support for young children and their families, while modeling skills that are important for the development of mental health.

#### e) External Support Systems and Community Connections:

Families exist in the context of communities. Communities can be physical in nature, e.g., a city neighbourhood, or based on some other type of grouping, e.g., cultural. It is important that children and caregivers feel that they belong to a community. Developing a sense of oneself as a capable and valued individual within a community is an important part of early childhood mental health. This is crucial to the development of self-esteem, can strengthen support systems, and can have a positive effect on the caregiver-child relationship.



Community support is also essential to the development and strengthening of individual and family resiliency. While caregivers are the primary supports for their children, it is important that they also have trusted and safe adults or organizations outside of the family that can provide support. For families in crisis, this is especially critical as the caregivers may not be able to provide support to their young children in a timely, sensitive manner.

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**When young children are treated with kindness, consistency, and encouragement, they develop a sense of safety and emotional security.**

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#### f) Emotional Regulation:

In the first few years of life, babies grow and change very quickly. At first, babies do not have the ability to soothe themselves or even to recognize their own emotions. Babies need caregivers and other important people in their lives to help them regulate their emotions by holding them, speaking softly to them, reassuring them, and gently rocking them. It is important that staff reinforce these behaviours and help caregivers understand the important role that their caring plays in their child's development.



**Mental health, like physical health, is an essential part of a person's identity.**

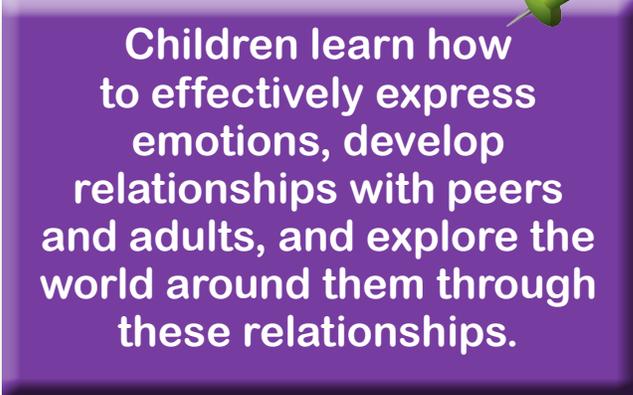
**g) Routine:**

Routines refer to actions that are performed on a regular basis, for example, bathing a child everyday before he goes to bed or reading a book before you turn out the lights. For grownups, some routines are not necessarily our idea of fun, for example, mowing the lawn, taking the garbage out, or going grocery shopping. However, routines can be comforting, like sipping a coffee each morning or reading a book before bed. For young children, routines are an extremely important part of brain development and the development of mental health.

Routines help young children understand that the world is a predictable, consistent, and organized place. They help children learn what will happen next. This helps them feel safe and secure. Routines can also help young children cope during difficult times by providing predictability. This can create a sense of “sameness” when there has been a recent change, such as a new babysitter, a new bed, a new sibling, or a new house.

**Routines can be used to ...**

- **Support brain growth and connectivity.** Routines provide the consistent and predictable stimulation that is needed for the creation of neural-networks.
- **Support growing social skills.** As young children grow, they come into contact with more people and begin to learn the role that routines play in building relationships with others. Hellos and good-byes, playtime, and mealtime are three routines that teach important social skills such as communication, taking turns, sharing, learning to wait, and helping others.



**Children learn how to effectively express emotions, develop relationships with peers and adults, and explore the world around them through these relationships.**

- **Soothe.** Routines can offer children a buffer during stress. Stress occurs when a person experiences anything that is new, unexpected, or a perceived threat to themselves or someone they love. In young children, stress occurs frequently as they are experiencing many situations for the first time.

There are a number of routines that can help soothe children who are experiencing stress. For example, having a relaxing naptime routine can help babies calm down after a stressful event, making it easier for them to fall asleep. Other examples include brief massages with lotion, reading a book together, singing a lullaby, dancing, going for a walk, drumming on pots and pans, and rhythmic bouncing and rocking. These create specific routines that can help soothe and increase feelings of safety, not just in the present, but during future stressful events.

- **Support the development of impulse control.** Routines can be helpful for teaching children to wait. For example, if every time babies are hungry and their parent/caregiver meets their needs with breastfeeding or a snack, they learn that when they voice their needs, they will be

consistently met. This is the very beginning of learning self-control, a process that will take the next few years to fully develop. As a toddler, caregivers can begin to delay meeting this need for small periods of time to teach further impulse control. For example, a caregiver may say “I know you are hungry. First put away the blocks then we will have a snack.”

- **Self nurture.** Becoming a caregiver has its stressful moments and dramatically changes caregivers’ lives. Helping caregivers to find ways to continue some routines they engaged in before their child was born is important (like an evening out or an activity). Caregivers should also be encouraged to spend time with each other and support each other. In addition, beginning a special routine with a child (such as preparing a special breakfast on Saturdays) can bridge the transition to being a family.

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**Young children depend heavily on adults to help them experience, regulate, and express emotions.**

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- **Create familiarity.** Within programming, provide predictability and structure. This will comfort children and help to engage them. For example, during storytime, always sit in the same area, begin the same way each time, and consistently engage young children in the same manner.
- **Cope with change.** There will be times when routines will be “off”, for example, during trips to

a grandparent’s house or during a planned preschool excursion. To help children cope with these changes it is important to plan ahead to help create feelings of “sameness”, for example, keep routines around mealtime or bedtime; bring a familiar bib, spoon, and bowl for eating; pair children with familiar adults during outings; and go through the same welcome and goodbye routines during the day.

Even though routines are important, it is important to recognize the need for flexibility. Remember that routines do not have to be on a strict timetable. If a child in daycare takes 20 minutes instead of 10 to put on her coat and mittens, try to figure out a way to give her this time.

#### **h) Holistic, Strength-Based Practices:**

Caregivers and professionals need to think about and define their roles and relationships with young children. Each individual will have multiple roles, e.g., caregiver, role model, play partner, and teacher.

In order to model mental health, caregivers need to be healthy and feel like competent, positive role models. Professionals can help caregivers develop this by pointing out the abilities they see in caregivers and providing opportunities for success. This will help families celebrate the small steps toward positive outcomes.

Allow caregivers and children to make choices and feel a sense of power, even in the small things. Help caregivers find aspects of their environment that they can control, for example, bedtimes, and aspects that their children can control,



e.g., choosing which shirt they would like to wear. This can be done even when in crisis.

Even very young children need to feel control and mastery in their environment. This will help them to develop skills in the area of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Allow them to make decisions, for example, choosing which sippy cup they want to use at lunch. Even with very young children, help them to independently complete age and developmentally appropriate tasks so that they feel a sense of accomplishment. For example, allow a three year old to dish up his own lunch.

Whenever possible, include caregivers in programming, both in program planning and delivery. This can help strengthen caregivers' feelings of control as well as recognize their expertise in raising their children. When caregivers have safe places to interact with their children in positive ways, it will strengthen the relationship and build connections.

Provide descriptive praise to children. Try not to provide praise unless there is something the child has done that you can specifically praise. For example, instead of saying "good boy", say "thank you for helping me dry the dishes. You did a really good job stacking them."





## Early Childhood Mental Health Tips for Caregivers Handout

- **Help your child to feel loved, cared for, and protected.**
- **Model healthy relationships with friends, partners, and community members.**
- **Provide opportunities for your child to safely engage in physical activity while exploring his environment.**
- **Develop consistent routines for your child and family.**
- **Create community connections to help strengthen your circle of support.**
- **Help your child to regulate his emotions by holding him, speaking softly to him, and reassuring him.**
- **Encourage your child to complete age-appropriate tasks so that he can feel a sense of accomplishment and build self-esteem.**
- **Praise your child, being specific about what you are praising him for and why.**
- **Remember to take time to nurture yourself outside of your caregiving duties.**

## Web Resources

BestStart: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Center

[www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)

CASA: Mental Health Services for Infants, Children, Adolescents and Their Families

<http://www.casaservices.org/>

CEECD: Centre of Excellence for Early Child Development

<http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca>

Children's Mental Health Ontario

[www.kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca)

CMHA: Canadian Mental Health Association

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Collaborative Mental Health Care

<http://www.shared-care.ca/toolkits>

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre in British Columbia for Children, Youth and Families

<http://kelytmentalhealth.ca/>

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

<http://www.naeyc.org/>

NIMH: National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

Saskatchewan Early Childhood Mental Health Network

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

# Glossary of Terms

<b>Caregivers</b>	An individual who provides primary care to a child. This can be, but does not have to be, the biological parents.
<b>Cope</b>	To face and deal with problems or challenges.
<b>Early Childhood Mental Health</b>	A young child's capacity to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure relationships; and explore his environment and learn.
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>	Ability to control and appropriately express one's emotions.
<b>Familiarity</b>	Having knowledge of a situation, object, person, or expectations.
<b>Impulse Control</b>	Being able to stop, wait, and reflect instead of acting on urges or having the immediate gratification of desires.
<b>Mastery</b>	Having learned and being able to successfully complete a skill or have control of your environment.
<b>Neural Networks</b>	A network of neurons that are functionally or otherwise connected.
<b>Resiliency</b>	The ability to cope with and recover from stress, change, or trauma.
<b>Routines</b>	Actions that have been performed on a regular basis; sometimes in a precise order or connected to an event.
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	The personal belief that one can make a difference in his environment or control his environment.
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	Respect for and having a favourable opinion of oneself.
<b>Self Nurture</b>	Taking time to care for oneself.
<b>Temperament</b>	Emotional predisposition of an infant that modulates the interaction between the child and his/her environment.

# Feelings Puppets Activity

## *Importance*

Learning about emotions and how to manage and express emotions is one of the most important tasks of childhood. When caregivers learn to recognize children's feelings and encourage them to express those feelings, this helps promote mental health. Puppets create a safe environment to explore feelings as the child can discuss and learn through a "third party" or inanimate object.

## *Materials Needed*

Finger puppets or hand puppets (included in the toolkit).

## *Age*

18 months and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that they can help children become more skilled in understanding emotions. It is important for caregivers to help children learn how to identify what they feel and put it into words.

## *Activity*

Have both the adult and child select a puppet. Use the puppets to create a story. Explore different feelings in the stories such as sad, happy, angry, disappointment, or fear.

Adults can make this activity personal for the child by asking "feelings" questions like:

- What do you think "lion" can do to feel better? What do you do?
- Who can "cow" talk to when she feels sad? Who can you talk to?
- What do you look like when you feel angry?



# Feelings Chart Activity

## *Importance*

Understanding one's own emotions as well as others is an important component of early childhood mental health. Caregivers need to be aware of their own emotions, and increase their emotional literacy and awareness. It is also important that caregivers understand their child's emotions and what situations cause their child to feel certain ways.

## *Materials Needed*

Poster or large piece of paper, crayons or markers, stickers, paper, magazines, glue, scissors.

## *Age*

2 and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that being aware of emotions helps us know what we need and want (or don't want!). When children learn to understand emotions it can help them talk about feelings more clearly, avoid or resolve conflicts better, and become more resilient.

## *Activity*

The caregiver and child will be making a feelings chart together.

Cut blank pieces of white paper into fours. If you want, you can draw a template of a head with no face and photocopy it. Choose a variety of feelings (4-8 depending on the age of the child) and have the child draw a face that goes with each emotion. Label the emotion on the drawing.

Next, write on the poster board "Today I Feel..." and ensure that there is enough room left in the center of the poster to put one of the faces. Have the child decorate around the outside edge of the poster.

Once a day, caregivers can ask the child to place the emotion they are feeling on the poster and talk about what happened to make them feel that way. The child may choose one or as many emotions as he wishes.



# Music and Drawing Game Activity

## *Importance*

Music engages the brain. It can trigger the release of chemicals in children's brains and hormones in their bodies, which give a sense of well-being and confidence. Movement can also release stress related hormones from the body.

## *Materials Needed*

Bossy Frog Music CDs (provided in the toolkit), crayons or markers, large sheets of paper or a roll of paper (can be obtained from local newspaper office), and a table that children can work at.

## *Age*

2 and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that singing is an ideal way to foster language development, and the exploration of words and rhymes through a familiar tune enhances memory. Encourage caregivers and children to use this music game as an opportunity for self-expression.

## *Activity*

This activity combines art, music and movement together. Use a large sheet of paper to cover a table. Ask the children to walk around the table with a marker or crayon in their hand, drawing lines on the paper to the beat of the music. Vary the types of music played (fast, soft and soothing, etc.). Afterwards, ask the children: How did the music make you feel? What did it make you think about?

Variation: Ask children to draw pictures of what the music sounds like instead of line movements. Ask them to share about their drawings.







## Section 2: Brain Development

### What is Brain Development?

In early childhood, brain development involves the growth of the brain, an increase in the functionality and organization of the brain, and a hierarchal development of brain structures.

The brain is made up of several different areas that control everything we do from hearing and walking to problem solving. Each area of the brain has millions of brain cells or neurons. These neurons communicate with each other by passing chemical messages over tiny spaces called synapses. Synapses organize the brain by forming pathways that connect the parts of the brain together.

When a child is born, his brain contains millions of neurons that are not connected to one another. In order for an individual to function, these neurons will link together forming neural networks. Links (or pathways) are formed through repeated experiences. Think of these pathways as the brain's "wiring." During infancy, the development of neural networks is occurring at a faster pace than at any other time in a human being's development. The networks within the infant's brain become an increasingly complex web of visual, motor, language, and social emotional connections.



**The early years are when brain development can be impacted the most. Brain development begins in pregnancy and continues until early adulthood.**

## Why is Brain Development Important?

The early years (0-6 years) are a critical period for brain development as this is a time of rapid growth and development. In fact, by the time a child is four years old, his brain is already 90% of the size of an adult's brain, and has mapped out the way it will communicate with its different parts and the body. During these early years, there is the most opportunity to impact brain development. This is also a time when the developing brain is the most vulnerable.

The basic architecture of the human brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Like the construction of a home, the building process begins with laying the foundation, framing the rooms, and wiring the electrical system in a predictable sequence. Early experiences literally shape how the brain is built; a strong foundation in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes, while a weak foundation increases the odds of later difficulties (Alberta Family Wellness, June 10, 2013).

Not only can the function of the brain be affected during early childhood, so too can the actual structure of the brain. Children who are abused or neglected have been shown to have smaller brains and other structural differences compared to the brains of children who come from positive caregiving backgrounds.

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**Early experiences literally shape how the brain is built; a strong foundation in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes, while a weak foundation increases the odds for later difficulties.**

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## How Does the Brain Communicate?

Communication within the brain is called neurotransmission. Neurotransmission takes place using neurons (nerve cells) and neural networks (connections between neurons). Neurons communicate with each other through electrical stimulation that passes from one neuron to another. There are over 100 billion neurons in the brain. Many of these are already formed by the time that a baby is born, although some are added after birth. However, although many neurons already exist at birth, they are not connected in any meaningful way that allows for "communication".



**The wiring in the brain is not connected at birth. It is actively connecting and developing in response experiences that babies have. This wiring will affect their physical and emotional health throughout their lives as well as their capacity to learn and socialize.**

## What are Neural Networks?

Neurons that are stimulated together form connections and these connections develop into networks of interconnected neurons. These networks are developed and reinforced in a “use-dependent” fashion. The repeated stimulation of neural networks through similar experiences reinforces or strengthens them. When neural connections are not reinforced, they “die off” or “fade away”. If a child has frequent positive interactions, his brain will become “wired” to perceive, interpret and respond to positive interactions.

Consistent caregiving is one of the key forms of repetitive experiences of very young children. Stimulation through repetitive experiences, such as listening to the mother’s heartbeat, rocking, hearing soothing sounds, and routines, all help to build neural networks.

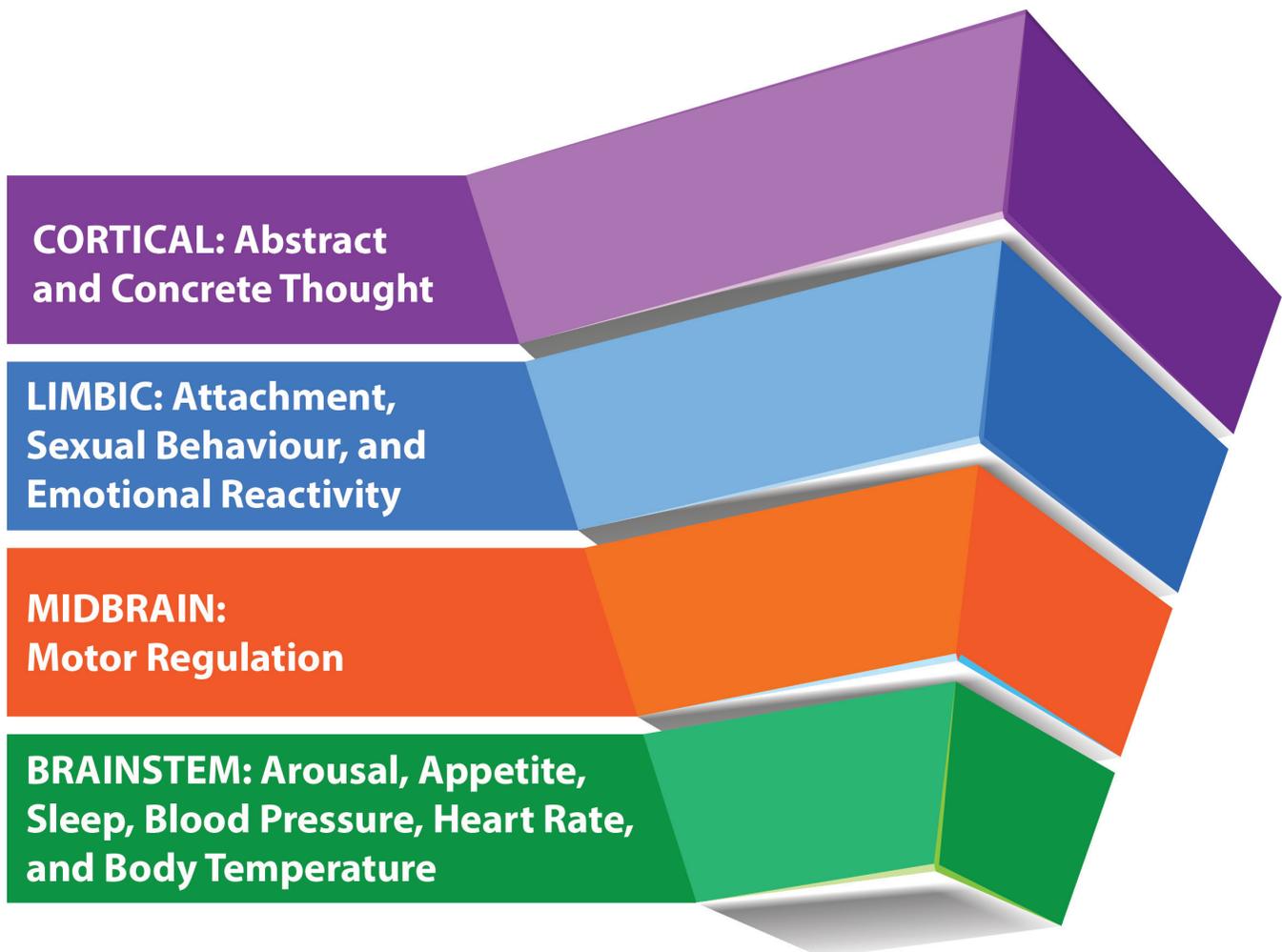


## How Does the Brain Develop?

The brain develops in a sequential and hierarchical fashion starting from the lower regions and working its way up. Picture this as a pyramid with the lower regions as the base. If the base is not properly developed, the whole structure will be impacted.

When a baby is born, the only area in his brain that is functional is his brain stem. This controls breathing, heartbeat, body temperature, hunger, and other basic survival functions. The cerebrum, the highest functioning area of the brain which is responsible for tasks such as memory and problem solving, is not functioning at this time.

**The brain develops in a sequential and hierarchical fashion.**



*(Adapted from [http://www.dichotomistic.com/mind\\_page\\_two.html](http://www.dichotomistic.com/mind_page_two.html))*

## If the Brain Does Not Develop Properly in Early Childhood, Can it be Fixed?

The answer to this is yes and no.

Brain structures that are underdeveloped in childhood or whose structures have been impacted by stress-related chemicals will not be able to be what they would have been if they had not been impacted.

However, neural systems are plastic and can be changed. This can be a lengthy process and some systems are easier to change than others. Change is easiest at an early age, but possible later in life as well. Change to neural networks must occur in the same order that development normally takes; therefore, it is important to start from the lowest areas of the brain impacted.



**Trauma and toxic stress can have lifelong impacts on a child's developing brain.**



## Can Trauma and Stress Impact Brain Development?

Even very young infants can experience stress and trauma. “Toxic” stress, which is much more serious than short-lived, everyday stress, is caused by persistent trauma such as extreme marital conflict, poverty, abuse, neglect, being

exposed to violence, or having a caregiver who misuses drugs or alcohol. Toxic stress is harmful to a baby’s developing brain. Brain structure, size and functionality can be impacted. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 7.

## Does Nutrition Impact Early Childhood Brain Development?

Brain development is impacted by nutrition prenatally and during the first two years of life. Children who are malnourished have smaller brains and neurons can be negatively impacted.

Breast milk contains nutrients that support brain growth and development. This is one of the reasons why breastfeeding is important during the first year of a child’s life. For the first six months of life, breastfed babies will get what they need from their mother’s milk. If breastfeeding is not an option, caregivers can use a store-bought iron-fortified infant formula for the first 12 months. The formula should be cow’s milk-based.

Iron is important for a baby’s development because it is linked directly to increased red blood cells and brain development. Also, myelination, a process that is essential for the proper functioning of neurons, occurs rapidly in early childhood and is dependent on the fat content in children’s diets.

Because of our northern latitude, Canadian infants are at risk of Vitamin D deficiency. Since breast milk has only small amounts of Vitamin D, babies who are breastfed should receive a daily supplement, which is available as drops.



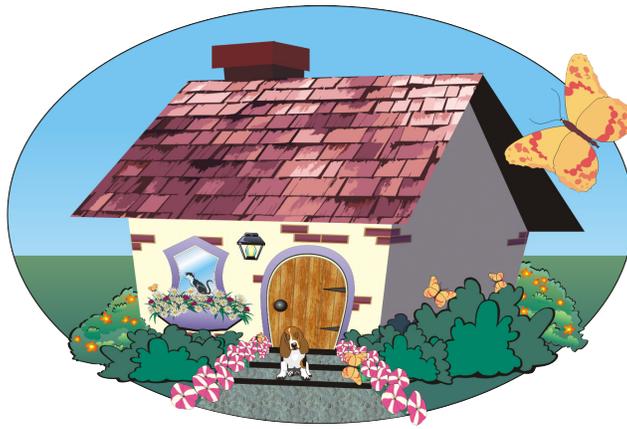
## Why are Caregivers Important in Early Childhood Brain Development?

Caregivers instinctively respond to young children in ways that promote brain development. Today's society pushes many products that make claims to help young children "get smarter". Unfortunately, these take away from a key message; that is, caregivers are a child's best teacher.

Consistent, loving care is the best stimulation for brain development. Language is also important. Research has shown that talking to and with young children helps to promote healthy brain development as well as a child's future language skills.



**Consistent, loving, responsive and nurturing caregiving experiences are essential for healthy brain development.**



## Brain Development Tips for Caregivers Handout

- Remember that early childhood (0-6 years) is when brain development can be impacted the most.
- Picture the brain like a pyramid where the lower region is the base which needs a strong foundation for other layers to build upon.
- Interact with your child frequently through appropriate touch, cuddling, hugging, holding, feeding, and rocking.
- Create a caregiving environment that is free from trauma and toxic stress.
- Breastfeed infants when possible. If breastfeeding is not an option, use an iron-fortified infant formula for the first 12 months.
- Keep in mind that your child does not require elaborate toys to promote brain development and that caregivers are your child's best teachers.
- Respond to your child's needs in a consistent, loving, responsive, and nurturing way.
- Talk to and with your child in a positive way to help promote language skills.



## Web Resources

Alberta Family Wellness Initiative

<http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/>

BestStart: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development  
Resource Center

[www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)

Better Brains for Babies

<http://www.bbbgeorgia.org>

Center on the Developing Child Harvard University

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

Healthy Baby Healthy Brain

<http://www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca/>

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

ZERO TO THREE: Baby Brain Map

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/brain-development/baby-brain-map.html>

## Glossary of Terms

<b>Axon</b>	Part of a neuron. These long arm-like projections take information from the cell body of the neuron and send information to other neurons.
<b>Brain Stem</b>	Most primitive part of the brain. Roles in cardiac and respiratory functions, remaining conscious, regulating sleep cycles, connects the nerve systems from the brain to the rest of the body, and regulates the central nervous system.
<b>Cerebellum</b>	The region of the brain that has a role in motor control, language, and attention.
<b>Cerebrum</b>	With the cerebellum, the cerebrum controls all voluntary actions of the human body. It plays a major role in learning, memory, language, communication, sensory processing, and movement.
<b>Dendrite</b>	Part of a neuron. These branch-like projections often receive information from other neurons.
<b>Myelination</b>	Myelination is the process in which the myelin sheath wraps around and protects the axons of neurons.
<b>Neural Networks</b>	A network of neurons that are functionally connected or otherwise connected.
<b>Neuron</b>	A cell that transmits information through electrical and chemical signaling.
<b>Neurotransmission</b>	Electrical movement within synapses caused by nerve impulses.
<b>Plasticity</b>	The brain's natural ability to change.
<b>Stimulation</b>	To encourage growth through activation or excitement.
<b>Synapse</b>	Space that exists between two neurons in a neural network that allows them to communicate with each other. When "communicating", one neuron will release neurotransmitters.

# Making Music Activity

## *Importance*

Music, especially rhythmic music or rhymes, helps to develop the brain by providing repetitive stimulation. Music can help focus a child and calm him. Dancing, drumming, and singing can help to release stress related hormones.

Music and language are so intertwined that an awareness of music is critical to a baby's language development. As children grow, music fosters their communication skills. When children listen to songs or rhythms it helps them learn to talk, read, and even make friends.

## *Materials Needed*

CD's (some are available in the toolkit), instruments, household items that can be makeshift instruments (e.g., a pot and a wooden spoon or a plastic container of beans).

## *Age*

Any.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that music develops the brain. Music can also help children relax, communicate, and cope with stress.

## *Activity*

There are a variety of ways to use music with a child.

Play CD's and sing along with the songs or use instruments to follow the beat. Dance along with the songs or make up actions to the words.

Use instruments to make up your own songs. Create a simple beat and have the child copy you. Ask him to create a beat and you can copy him. Make up your own words to the songs.

Be spontaneous and have fun.



## Face-to-Face Interaction Activity

### *Importance*

When babies are born, their range of eyesight is approximately the length of their caregiver's face to their caregiver's chest. This makes it very important to have close face-to-face interactions with their baby. Face-to-face interaction helps infants to feel secure, strengthens brain development, and builds attachment.

### *Materials Needed*

Mirror.

### *Age*

0-18 months.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that they can choose a variety of ways to put their baby in a position that allows face-to-face interaction. Emphasize to caregivers that active engagement with their baby is helping to develop their baby's brain.

### *Activities*

- Have the adult hold the baby so that their face is close to the baby's face. They can be sitting or lying down side by side. Make different facial expressions and wait for the baby to copy what is being done. For example, give a big smile, stick out your tongue, crinkle your nose or click your tongue.
- Have caregivers play peek-a-boo with their child to help make visual connections with them.
- Hold the baby in front of a mirror or hold a handheld mirror in front of the baby's face. Talk to the baby about what can be seen in the mirror. Some examples are: "oh look I see a nose," "can you see my smile," and "I can see your eyes."



## Puzzles Activity

### *Importance*

Research has proven that a child's brain development is influenced significantly when a child feels some control in his world. Puzzles provide an opportunity for this. Through puzzles, children learn to work directly with their environment and change its shape and appearance. In addition, puzzles help children to develop hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, shape recognition, memory, and problem solving skills.

### *Materials Needed*

Age-appropriate board puzzles (cardboard or wooden).

### *Age*

Any.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that puzzles teach children how to solve problems. It is helpful for caregivers to support and provide positive, descriptive feedback and guidance during this activity.

### *Activity*

Do simple puzzles with young children. Taking the puzzle pieces out will be the first skill that infants will master. They will enjoy banging the puzzle pieces together on the floor because it makes a lot of noise.

- Let children explore the pieces by playing with them, feeling them, and carrying them around.
- Observe how children match the picture of the puzzle piece and the hole where it belongs.
- Encourage children by talking and referring to the colours and shapes of the puzzle.
- Talk to children about how puzzle pieces come in different shapes and sizes. For example, some pieces have bumps with rounded corners and some have straight edges.
- Let children complete as much of the puzzle as they can. Praise them for what they accomplish, e.g., "You did it. You put the puzzle together."



# Reading Stories Activity

## *Importance*

Reading stories to children is an activity that will help caregivers to promote healthy child development. Stories can help children develop language, develop imagination, cope with stress, and relax. Reading stories to children at any age provides special quality time when their caregiver is focused specifically on them. Adults can use books to introduce or explore different topics with young children. Storytelling can be built into routines.

## *Materials Needed*

Children's books (many are provided in the toolkit).

## *Age*

Any.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that when they read to their child, the child's brain is stimulated. Hearing favourite stories over and over also helps strengthen brain connections.

## *Activity*

Books can be used in many ways. Encourage caregivers to have reading become part of a routine, such as at bedtime or other special time.

- Picture books can be used to imaginatively create a story together. Ask the child to tell you what they think is happening in the picture or make up their own story based on the pictures.
- Ask the child what they think will happen next before you turn the page.
- Create an alternate ending to the story.
- Point at the words as you read the story.
- Children love to read favourite books over and over again. Have them “read” the story to you. They will tell you the story from memory if they can't read yet.



## Section 3: Attachment

### What is Attachment?

Attachment is the deep and lasting bond that a baby develops towards his caregivers. Children of all ages form attachments to their caregivers. Attachment is not the connection that a caregiver feels towards their child. This is called the caregiver bond.



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**Attachment security makes a difference in young children's immediate and long-term health and development. When infants and toddlers feel secure or insecure in their relationships, there are lasting effects. It can even impact how they will parent when they are older.**

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A child's attachment to his caregiver can either be secure or insecure. Children form secure attachment relationships with caregivers who provide them with safe, sensitive, and consistent care. Secure attachment relationships are key to the healthy development of the child, including his brain development.

Young children can form more than one attachment. Usually they form attachments with the caregivers that they spend the most time with including their mother, father, grandparent, or day care provider. Children do not need to be related to adults in order to attach to them.

Children form attachments to all caregivers who provide care on a regular basis. It is important that all caregivers are supported to promote the development of secure attachment. For example, fathers often provide care for their child. It is important to encourage fathers to provide care in ways that promote attachment.

### Why is Attachment Important?

Secure attachment will help children cope with change and stress as they grow older, such as separating from a caregiver (starting child care or school), cooperating with other children, and developing self-control. Attachment also helps a child learn how to trust.

Caregivers play an important role in their relationship with their children. When caregivers act as a secure base, young children can explore the world around them. When children become distressed (frightened, hurt or tired) caregivers can provide a safe haven that children can go back to for comfort and reassurance, and then when ready, go out to explore again. This early relationship is one of the most important foundations of early childhood mental health.



**Infants and toddlers can have more than one secure attachment. They thrive when most or all of their relationships with the adults in their lives are secure.**

## Promoting Secure Attachment

- Encourage caregivers to participate in activities with their child.
- Provide opportunities for a child and his caregiver to experience sensory stimulation together, for example, playing with bubbles, water, or play dough.
- Help caregivers to understand the importance of supporting their child's exploration.
- Be a mentor and model basic caregiving skills with caregiver and child.
- Help caregivers to recognize and celebrate their child's developmental advancements.
- Ensure children are protected from inappropriate disapproval, punishment, shaming or teasing.
- Provide a rich and responsive language environment.
- Tell caregivers the best teacher for a child is a loving, nurturing, responsive caregiver and a safe environment in which to explore.
- Help caregivers to understand that responding consistently to a child does not mean that the child is being spoiled. Instead, it helps children learn to trust, to feel that they are important, to develop relationships with others, and to learn and grow.



## How Does Attachment Help Children?

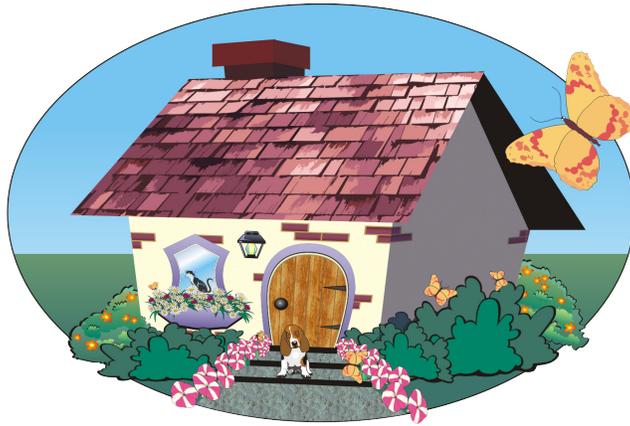
Attachment relationships can impact young children's immediate and long-term behaviour. Secure attachment relationships help young children to increase their self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Attachment relationships teach children how to act in a relationship and builds resiliency skills, including emotional regulation. Finally, attachment is a very important part of an infant's and child's brain development.



Attachment influences  
how the brain  
is structured.







## Attachment Tips for Caregivers Handout

- Understand that attachment is the deep lasting bond that your child develops towards his caregivers.
- Remember that secure attachment relationships are crucial to the healthy development of your child.
- Learn to recognize and respond to your infant's cues (like smiles, cries and cooing).
- Take part in activities that stimulate your child's senses such as playing with bubbles, water, or play dough.
- Recognize and celebrate your child's developmental progress.
- Lie with your newborn skin-to-skin so baby can hear your heartbeat.
- Provide your child with lots of physical comfort that includes safe, appropriate, cuddles, hugs, and skin-to-skin contact.
- Provide a rich and responsive language environment for your child.
- Allow your child to safely explore his environment and provide a secure base that your child can return to if he feels distressed (frightened, hurt or tired).

## Web Resources

Attachment Across Cultures

<http://www.attachmentcrosscultures.org>

Attachment Association of Canada

<http://www.attachmentcan.ca/>

Attachment Network of Manitoba

<https://attachmentnetwork.ca/>

Make the Connection

<http://firstthreeyears.org/parentingPrograms.html?submenuheader=1>

Attachment Parenting Canada

<http://www.attachmentparenting.ca/about.html>

Center of Excellence for Early Childhood Development

[www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel)

Circle of Security

<http://circleofsecurity.net/>

Connections for Life – Attachment Resource Kit

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)



## Glossary of Terms

<b>Attachment</b>	The connection that children feel for their caregivers who provide safe, consistent care. Attachment allows children to learn to regulate their emotions, explore their world, develop a sense of self-worth and concept, and recover from stress.
<b>Caregiver Bond</b>	The bond that a caregiver feels towards a child.
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>	Ability to control and appropriately express one's emotions.
<b>Insecure Attachment</b>	Occurs when a child does not have consistent, loving care.
<b>Resiliency</b>	The ability to cope with and recover from stress, change, or trauma.
<b>Secure Attachment</b>	Occurs when a child has consistent, loving care and feels safe and secure to explore his environment.
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	The personal belief that one can make a difference in his environment or control his environment.

## Skin-to-Skin Time Activity

### *Importance*

Skin-to-skin contact between a caregiver and a child helps to stimulate brain activity. Physical touch is crucial for the development of attachment behaviour and for early social development in young children. Touch provides opportunities for relaxation and comforting. Physical touch is important to help create a loving bond between caregiver and child.

### *Materials Needed*

None.

### *Age*

0-2.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Help caregivers to brainstorm about ways they can create opportunities for skin-to-skin time during everyday interactions with their babies. Explain that both male and female caregivers can participate in skin-to-skin time with their babies.

### *Activities*

- Feeding (breast or bottle)
- Massage on the back, feet and hands
- Rocking and holding baby close
- Giving the child a bath



# Explore Shapes and Textures Activity

## *Importance*

When caregivers learn how to understand their baby's cues and style of communication, it not only develops attachment behaviour, but also allows caregivers to understand when and how to engage their babies.

## *Materials Needed*

A variety of age-appropriate objects that have different shapes and textures. For example, toy blocks and balls that are different sizes, soft, hard, smooth and rough.

## *Age*

6 months to 2 years.

## *Note to Facilitator*

When engaging caregivers in this activity use the book "Your Baby is Speaking to You" by Kevin Nugent (included in the toolkit). Explain to caregivers that the attachment process is interactive and dynamic. Both caregiver and baby participate in an exchange of nonverbal emotional cues that make baby feel understood and safe.

## *Activity*

Offer different objects to the baby one at a time, explaining what the object is, and observe the child's response. Have the baby touch the object with his hands and play with it. For example, he may suck on the object or throw it on the ground. Give the baby time to thoroughly examine each object. Stop the activity whenever he shows signs of fatigue. Ask caregivers to observe the child's behaviour to look for cues and signs of communication.



# Copycat Games Activity

## *Importance*

Children love to imitate their caregivers. They also love when their caregiver imitates them. Through imitation babies will see that caregivers are responding to their efforts to communicate. This helps them to feel important and loved.

## *Materials Needed*

None.

## *Age*

Any.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that a secure attachment bond ensures that their child will feel secure, understood, and experience optimal development of his or her nervous system. This provides the child with a feeling of safety that results in eagerness to learn, healthy self-awareness, trust, and empathy. These types of copycat games also provide times of closeness for caregiver and child.

## *Activity*

Spend time each day copying the baby's actions. For example, if he claps his hands or makes a noise with his mouth, caregivers can do the same thing. It is okay to let both the caregiver and baby initiate the game.



# Creating Bedtime Routine Activity

## *Importance*

Routines provide the predictable safe environment that nurtures attachment. Optimal sleep helps to ensure that children are able to play and are ready to participate in daily activities, and it promotes growth and development. Maintaining regular sleep routines in childhood helps to create stability and balance in both the child's and caregivers' lives.

## *Materials Needed*

Soft blanket, storybook, pajamas.

## *Age*

Any.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that as their baby develops, regular sleep routines will also help their baby learn to self-soothe when he awakens at night. This will increase the amount of sleep everyone in the family gets. Discuss the importance of routines and sleep including how much sleep a child needs at different ages and the effects of sleep on physical growth, brain development, and other areas.

## *Activity*

Caregivers will develop a regular bedtime routine with their child. Have caregivers spend a few minutes thinking about their current routine and if there is anything they would like to add or change. This can include giving the child a bath, offering a small snack and brushing their teeth, reading a short story, saying soothing rhymes, tucking them in with a soft blanket, and giving hugs and kisses.







# Section 4: Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

## What is Self-Esteem?

As young children grow, they develop a sense of who they are. Self-esteem is the positive way that individuals feel about themselves. This feeling is rooted in a sense of being loved and cared for. Trust in their caregivers is the foundation upon which the developing self-esteem of young children is built.



**Developing a secure attachment with caregivers is the first step in developing a sense of self.**

Self-esteem is similar to self-worth (how much a person values himself or herself). Self-esteem fluctuates as children grow. It is frequently changed and fine-tuned, because it is affected by a child's experiences and new perceptions.

## Why is Self-Esteem Important?

Self-esteem impacts the way children act and feel every day. Self-esteem is not set for life at an early age. However, it is important to help children develop self-esteem as early in life as possible. All people, including children, see themselves in a certain way. For children, this picture includes who they are, what they can do, and how they think others see them.

**Healthy self-esteem is like a child's armour against the challenges of everyday life.**

Children with positive self-esteem are better able to develop emotional regulation and are more resilient than those with negative self-esteem. Children who know their strengths and weaknesses and feel good about themselves have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures.

## What is Self-Efficacy?

Self-efficacy is the personal belief that you are capable of having an influence over your environment or some control over your environment. A child with self-efficacy believes he has the skills to help him steer through life and reach his goals. Perhaps most importantly, self-efficacy is about learning how to persevere during a challenge or setback.

Self-efficacy begins to form in early childhood as children deal with a wide variety of experiences, tasks, and situations. The growth of self-efficacy continues to evolve throughout life as individuals acquire new skills, experiences, and understanding.





Self-efficacy goes beyond simply “believing in yourself.” Rather, a person needs to have a realistic sense of his strengths and weaknesses. This is what determines a person’s actions, willingness to set goals, and achievements in life. Caregivers can help nurture realistic self-efficacy in children by giving descriptive feedback and authentic praise, helping set short-term goals, and helping children learn from setbacks.

## Why is Self-Efficacy Important?

Building self-efficacy is an effective way to help children move towards achieving goals and feel confident in their skills. Higher self-efficacy is linked to a better ability to think productively by applying positive thinking skills when facing a challenge, higher motivation, stronger effort put into an activity or task, greater resilience, and lower vulnerability to stress and depression. Self-efficacy is important because it enables children to cope with adversity, learn from failure, and work through difficult challenges.

## Self-Esteem vs. Self-Efficacy

Self-esteem is the positive opinion one holds about one’s self-worth or self-value. It influences self-efficacy. However, high self-esteem alone does not give a child an optimistic attitude and willingness to persist when experiencing resistance. A child develops these characteristics through developing self-efficacy.

## Promoting the Development of Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

### *Play*

When children play, they use their imaginations, explore the world around them, develop skills, problem solve, and have control over their environment. This builds confidence and motivation to try new things. This is one of the basic building blocks of self-esteem.

### *Helping children believe they can succeed*

There are four important ways to help children develop self-efficacy.

**1. Mastery: helping children learn skills.**

Children develop a sense of mastery when they feel that they understand the task at hand and acquire an expertise. Mastery is developed when children equate success to something they can control. Caregivers can help children develop mastery by giving children opportunities to control their environment, make decisions, use and practice their skills, and try different paths to achieve their goals. Mastery reinforces stronger self-efficacy beliefs.

**2. Observing others: watching someone achieve a goal or overcome an obstacle.**

Children are avid observers. They listen and watch what caregivers say and do. The more similar children feel to the person they are observing, the more strongly the person's successes and failures shape the child's beliefs about their own abilities. Caregivers are children's primary role models. It is important for caregivers to model self-efficacy to children by sharing their own obstacles and efforts to work towards goals. When children watch caregivers persevere to achieve a goal or overcome an obstacle, it tells children they too can successfully manage their own environment.

**3. Direct persuasion by others: providing positive feedback to help children believe they have the skills and capabilities to succeed.**

Giving children authentic, descriptive praise is important for the development of self-esteem. Descriptive praise is based on accomplishments. It is very specific, mentioning exactly what the praise is being given for. Research has shown that children who receive such praise develop a sense of ownership over their accomplishments and integrate knowledge of their strengths and skills into their self-esteem. Those who hear general praise, for example, "good boy", quickly become impartial towards praise and tune it out over time.

**4. Mood: providing support to help children recognize and experience positive emotions.**

Positive emotions and mood build perceptions of self-efficacy. Negative emotions and mood weaken them. The positive emotions that children experience can enable them to see more solutions to problems they face. This can lead to strengthening children's perceptions so that they can effectively control their environment.



**It takes practice to respond more specifically to a child. Caregivers who develop this skill can learn how to communicate effectively with their children.**



## **Help Children Name Their Strengths**

Caregivers should encourage the child to focus on his strengths. Naming a child's strengths can help him integrate these into his growing concept of himself. Identifying strengths helps a child to rely on them when coping through a difficult situation.



**Adults can help children learn to cope with and learn from mistakes and failures by modeling that nobody is perfect.**

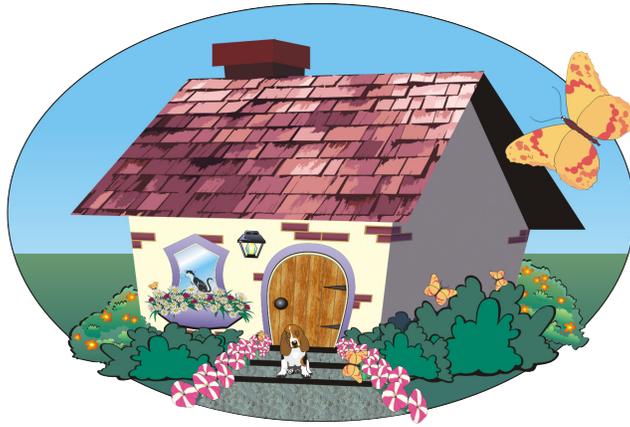
## Positively Dealing With Failure and Mistakes

Throughout their lifetime, individuals make a number of mistakes and may fail in some endeavours. This is natural and, at a young age, children need to learn how to deal with mistakes and failure without having these impact the way that they see themselves.

A child learns persistence when, after experiencing a setback, he continues to try again. When facing a setback, caregivers can tell children each failed attempt is a learning experience. It is a 'step' to get to where they want. This helps redirect focus from the failed result to a more constructive question, like "What can I do differently next time?" This way children learn to adapt to failure or disappointment, not succumb to it.

Caregivers can help children understand that it is okay to experience failure. A child who never learns to face setbacks does not learn how to rely on internal strategies to cope with them. Experiencing some level of failure allows children to increase their ability to handle life's disappointments. Children who believe that mistakes are a natural part of learning are more confident about trying new things. "That's OK. We all make mistakes. It's how we learn. Now you know to do it differently the next time."

**Experiencing setbacks and failure helps foster strong self-efficacy in children.**



## **Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy Tips for Caregivers Handout**

- **Act as a trusting, loving, and kind caregiver.**
- **Help your child to see himself in a positive way.**
- **Teach your child how to understand his strengths and limitations.**
- **Help your child to have success by taking small, age-appropriate steps to meet goals.**
- **Teach your child how not to quit during a challenge or setback.**
- **Provide opportunities for your child to play where he can make decisions, use his imagination, problem solve and develop new skills.**
- **Share stories with your child about your own challenges and talk about how you overcame them.**
- **When praising your child be specific about what he did well.**

## Web Resources

Caring for Kids

<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/>

CMHA: Canadian Mental Health Association

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Kidshealth

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/kh\\_misc/about.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/kh_misc/about.html)

Nobody's Perfect Program

[www.nobodysperfect.ca](http://www.nobodysperfect.ca)

RIRO: Reaching In Reaching Out Resiliency Skills Programs

[www.reachinginreachingout.ca](http://www.reachinginreachingout.ca)

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

William Gladden Foundation

[www.WilliamGladdenFoundation.org](http://www.WilliamGladdenFoundation.org)

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

## Glossary of Terms

<b>Autonomy</b>	The developing need for and sense of independence.
<b>Cope</b>	To face and deal with problems or challenges.
<b>Descriptive Praise</b>	Praise that is specific, descriptive, and based on accomplishment.
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>	Ability to control and appropriately express one's emotions.
<b>Grading</b>	Breaking down large tasks into small, age-appropriate, achievable tasks.
<b>Mastery</b>	Having learned and being able to successfully complete a skill or have control of one's environment.
<b>Resiliency</b>	The ability to cope with and recover from stress, change, or trauma.
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	The personal belief that one can make a difference in his environment or control his environment.
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	Respect for and having a favourable opinion of oneself.
<b>Self-Worth</b>	The degree to which an individual values oneself.



# Circle Time Activity

## *Importance*

When children are given time where they can be part of a larger group, they begin to recognize their role in a larger group and define themselves as an individual. Some circle activities give an opportunity to give time to each individual child. This helps children understand that they are important. Circle time with groups of children and caregivers provides excellent opportunities to build and practice self-esteem activities. Circle time also helps children practice impulse control, turn taking, and cooperation.

## *Materials*

Familiar songs that caregivers can sing and know the words to.

## *Age*

Any.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that circle time can be planned as part of a care provider's daily routine. When it is planned, it provides a place of comfort and predictability for the children.

## *Activity*

Have children or children and caregivers sit in a circle and lead them in fun and engaging songs, rhymes, finger-plays, dance and movement. Try to choose activities that encourage children to represent and act out thoughts and feelings.

## *Circle Time Ideas:*

- Songs and finger plays such as: Itsy-bitsy spider; The Wheels on the Bus; and Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.
- Physical movement such as Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes.
- Make music together by giving each child a simple instrument such as shakers, drums, music sticks, or other musical objects.
- Guess the object: Put a variety of objects with different textures in a cloth bag. Pass the bag around the circle so each child gets a turn reaching into the bag. The child chooses one item to feel (without looking) and describes the object (hard, soft, smooth, or rough).
- "I Spy".
- Simon Says Feelings – For example, "Simon says be happy!"



## Mirror Play Activity

### *Importance*

Part of building self-esteem is being able to recognize personal strengths and positive attributes.

### *Materials Needed*

Hand mirror.

### *Age*

2 and up.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that they can promote self-esteem throughout the child's life. Children remember positive statements that caregivers say. They store them up and "replay" them to themselves. Caregivers can practice giving their children words of encouragement throughout each day.

### *Activity*

Using a hand mirror, children and caregivers can practice making positive self-statements. Being able to talk to themselves (their reflection) when communicating what they like about themselves or about things that they are good at doing helps children internalize these messages. It is important that caregivers model positive self-talk so that children hear it.

Examples of positive self-statements are:

- I am smart
- I am good at ...
- I can ...
- I am beautiful
- I have many friends
- I am kind



## Building Blocks Activity

### *Importance*

Providing opportunities for children to master simple tasks through play are important in the development of self-efficacy. Descriptive feedback is also important.

### *Materials Needed*

Building blocks.

### *Age*

18 months and up.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that independent acts allow children to recognize their own strengths and capabilities. Independence also helps children develop the skills to solve problems and make good decisions.

### *Activity*

Encourage children to build towers, tall buildings and different formations with simple building blocks. As children stack the blocks, caregivers can provide encouraging words, such as “look how tall your tower is” and “you did it, you made the blocks stand on top of each other.” If the blocks fall down, caregivers can provide verbal cues for children to try again such as “that’s okay we can try again and build a different looking tower this time.”



## Art Activity

### *Importance*

One way that caregivers can help children develop self-efficacy is by providing opportunities to master graded activities. That is, activities that are broken down into small, achievable parts. Art activities are excellent for this as they help children master parts of the activity even if they have to have help on some parts. Activities should focus on the process and not the final product.

For older children, arts and crafts are also a way of expressing individuality and can help build self-esteem.



### *Materials Needed*

Scissors, glue, paper, markers, crayons, and anything else specific for the art activity that is being introduced.

### *Age*

12 months and up.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that art and craft activities allow an opportunity for children to let loose and have fun. In a relaxed and non-competitive atmosphere, children can explore their carefree and imaginative side.

### *Suggested Activities:*

**Family Portraits:** Use old magazines, sheets of paper, glue and child-safe scissors for this activity. Ask the children to look through old magazines and cut out pictures to glue on the paper to create a picture of their family.

**Egg Carton Caterpillar:** Cut one strip of cups (6 cups) from an egg carton. Let children paint and decorate their caterpillar how they like. Have caregivers help the children add pipe cleaners and eyes for their caterpillar. Paint the cups and let dry.

**Binoculars:** Take two empty toilet paper rolls and staple them together inside each end to look like binoculars. The child can decorate them with crayons, paints, or stickers.

**Foot Prints:** Place a wide roll of paper on the ground and ice cream lids with paint. Let children make footprints and handprints. Cut the paper once dry and use it for gift wrap.

**Silhouettes:** Have the children lay down on a long piece of construction paper and have caregivers trace their bodies. After this is finished, let the children colour and draw on the paper what they think they look like.

# Section 5: Empathy

## What is Empathy?

Empathy is the ability to understand how someone else is feeling in a particular situation and to respond with care. This is a very complex skill to develop. Empathy develops as a child's brain and thinking abilities develop.

### Being able to empathize with another person means that a child:

- Understands that he is a separate individual, his own person
- Understands that others can have different thoughts and feelings than he has
- Recognizes the common feelings that most people experience
- Is able to look at a particular situation and imagine how he, and therefore his friend, might feel in this moment

*(adapted from Parlakian, R., & Lerner, C.)*

Children are not born with empathy. The skill of empathy requires practice and can be learned. Caregivers play a critical role in developing their children's empathy by acting as an "emotion coach," and by setting an example of empathetic behaviour.

## Why is Empathy Important?

Empathy is important because it allows children to recognize the importance of taking others' feelings into account. Empathy is one of the most important social skills that deep interpersonal relationships build from. The key to empathy building is being able to identify and recognize different emotions in oneself so that these can be recognized in another person. By helping children develop empathy, it builds on self awareness. Through experiencing the feelings of others, children learn to be caring and compassionate, gain responsibility, and develop a social conscience.



**Understanding and showing empathy is the result of many social-emotional skills that are developing in the first years of life.**

**Empathy is the cornerstone of ability to love.**

## Promoting the Development of Empathy

### *Establish a secure, strong, loving relationship with children*

When children feel accepted and understood by their caregivers, community members, and professionals, it helps children learn how to accept and understand others.

### *Be a Role Model*

One of the best ways to promote empathy in children is for caregivers to model empathetic caring. When caregivers interact with others in a kind, respectful and caring way, it allows children to learn from this example.

### *The seeds for empathy are planted by responsive parenting during the infant-toddler period.*

### *Name Emotions*

Caregivers can help children give precise names to their emotions. Most preschoolers can use the terms happy and sad, but are at a loss to describe their emotions in detail. Caregivers can introduce

specific feeling words into everyday experiences to help children develop a feeling vocabulary. Some examples of feelings words caregivers can use are lonely, frustrated, frightened, joyful, shocked, proud, discouraged, hopeful, unwanted, contented, anxious, or delighted.

### *Validate Children's Difficult Emotions*

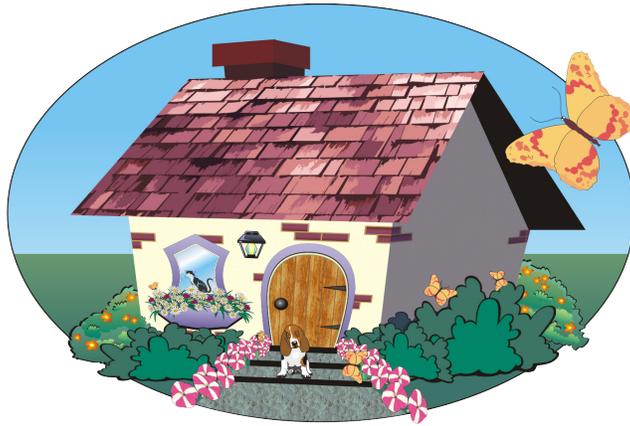
Sometimes when children are sad, angry, or disappointed, caregivers feel the urge to rush to fix it right away... to make the feelings go away because they want to protect children from any pain. However, these feelings are part of life and ones that children need to learn to cope with. Labeling and validating difficult feelings actually helps children learn to handle them.

### *Teach Conflict Resolution and Consequences*

If a child does something wrong to another child, caregivers can help the child to make the connection between the action and the reaction. When a child is made aware of the consequences of his actions, it helps him to become aware of the inner feelings of others. For example, "Annie, look at Molly - she's very sad. She's crying. She's rubbing her arm where you pushed her. Let's see if she is okay."



**Helping children find the right words that express what they are feeling is a great way for them to come to understand the feelings of others.**



## Empathy Tips for Caregivers Handout

- Support your child to feel accepted and understood.
- Model empathy by interacting with others in a kind, respectful, and caring way.
- Point out examples of other people showing empathy.
- Help your child find specific words to express what he is feeling.
- Teach your child how to solve conflicts.
- Help your child be aware of the consequences of his actions.
- Guide your child to work through and deal with difficult feelings.
- Teach your child to understand that other people can have different thoughts and feelings than he has.
- Remember that your child is not born with empathy and that it is a skill that is built over time.

## Web Resources

Kids Matter - Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative

<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/>

Raising Children Network

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

RIRO: Reaching In Reaching Out Resiliency Skills Program

[www.reachinginreachingout.com](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com)

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

SickKids TIPS: Building Self-Esteem in Young Children

<http://tvoparents.tvoparents.org/article/sickkids-tips-building-empathy-young-children>

Women's and Children's Health Network in Australia

<http://www.cyh.com/SubDefault.aspx?p=98>

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)



## Glossary of Terms

<b>Empathy</b>	The ability to understand and share the feelings of others.
<b>Self Awareness</b>	Awareness of your own individuality.
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	The personal belief that one can make a difference in his environment or control his environment.
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	Respect for and having a favourable opinion of oneself.
<b>Self-Worth</b>	The degree to which an individual values himself.
<b>Social Conscience</b>	A feeling of responsibility towards one's community and society.

# Kindness Flowers Activity

## *Importance*

Compassion cannot be learned by talking about it. Children must practice compassion in their daily lives. When caregivers help children practice empathy towards others, they are helping to nurture and encourage future empathetic behaviours.

## *Materials Needed*

Flip chart paper, popsicle sticks, coloured paper, glue sticks, crayons or markers, 2 plastic vases or cups.

## *Age*

3 and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that while some children seem to develop empathy more naturally than others, all children need help for this skill to grow. Caregivers should begin teaching them as early as possible.

## *Activity*

This activity can be used in a centre/group setting or can be adapted for use in the home.

On flip chart paper write: “What kind people say ...” and “What kind people do ...” Brainstorm together and write down answers on the flip chart.

Next, caregivers and children will work together to make a flower for themselves. Have caregivers help children draw or glue a picture of themselves on one side of the flower, decorate it and put their name on it. Glue the flower to a Popsicle stick. Caregivers should make a flower too.

Put all of the flowers in a cup or vase. Put the flip chart papers with the kindness words on the wall so that children can see them. Label the second cup or vase “Kindness Vase.” When someone says or does something kind, their flower gets put in the Kindness Vase. At the end of the day or program time, talk about all the kind things that happened.



# What's My Feeling

## “Mirror, Mirror, On The Wall” Activity

### *Importance*

This game helps children to think in terms of taking positive actions to respond to others' feelings. The key to empathy building is being able to identify and recognize different emotions in oneself to be able to identify those feelings in others.

### *Materials Needed*

A large mirror.

### *Age*

2 and up.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that they are their child's best emotional tutor. As caregivers continue this coaching, over time their child will better understand important concepts, such as how his or her actions affect others.

### *Activity*

The caregiver and child will take turns making faces that express different emotions into a mirror. Facial expressions might include anger, happiness, sadness, fear, shock, shame, surprise, nervousness, upset, silliness, or gratitude.

After saying the rhyme, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, what's my feeling? Make your call”, the caregiver makes a facial expression in the mirror and then asks: “what would you say or do to someone with this facial expression?” Caregivers should give credit for answers that are close and offer suggestions if the child doesn't know. Next, give the child a turn to say the rhyme, make a face, and ask the caregiver how they would respond.





# Section 6: Play

## What is Play?

Play is a spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable, and flexible activity that involves an interaction between our bodies, objects, and relationships with others. Through play, children develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral capacities. Play is both a source of relaxation and stimulation for the brain and body. Children are able to develop imagination, creativity, and problem-solving skills through play. Play involves both mental and physical stimulation which gradually becomes more structured as children develop.

There are many different types of play and children can be involved in more than one type at any time.

**Play is the way young children develop their sense of self, sense of the world and where they fit in.**

## Types of Play:

1. Physical/motor: simple, repetitive sensory motor activities, such as playing with toys, running, climbing, or jumping.
2. Social: revolves around social interaction with peers and helps children learn how to develop relationships and friendships.
3. Constructive: use of play materials as intended or not. For instance, building with Lego bricks.
4. Dramatic/fantasy: imaginative play that allows children to try out new roles, and possible situations, and to experiment with language and emotions.

## Why is Play Important?

Play has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child and a key part of optimal child development. During play, children use both their bodies and minds. They interact with the environment, with materials and with other people. Play is as important to children's physical and mental health as getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising.

*Find the full summary of the Rights of the Child at [http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)*

## What Role Does Play Have in Children's Development?

### *Brain Development*

Play is an important part of brain development. Play that includes sensorimotor, cognitive, emotional, and social experiences provides an important opportunity for healthy brain development. The complexity and types of children's play increase as children grow and their brains develop more connections. It is through play that young children engage and interact with the world around them.

### *Physical Development*

Active play is important for healthy physical development. Active play contributes to children's fine and gross motor development and body awareness as they actively use their bodies. Active play helps children build or maintain energy, joint flexibility, and muscular strength. As children play, they are continuously challenging themselves physically.



Through play all areas of a child's development can be enhanced.

### *Creative Development*

During play, children can explore, be creative and use their imaginations in a risk-free environment. Play stimulates children's imaginations, helping them to learn how to analyze and solve problems, be flexible, and discover the world around them. Play allows children to try out new ideas and experiment with objects in the world around them. This helps them to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. When young children use their imaginations in play, they are more creative, perform better at school tasks, and develop a problem-solving approach to learning.

### *Emotional Development*

Play creates an opportunity for young children to learn about expressing and managing their emotions. Children use play to release emotions, work through feelings, and understand their world better by play-acting in situations they can control. The give and take patterns of play provide children rich opportunities to practice the skills necessary to develop healthy emotional development.

**Children satisfy their natural desire to look for new experiences, pleasure, and express their ideas and problem solve.**

**Playtime with caregivers lets children know that they are cared for and valued. It also allows them a safe place to explore while having a safe place to come back to.**

***Social Development***

Playing with others helps young children to develop an awareness of their relationships with others and their role in these relationships. Play helps children develop interpersonal skills,

such as empathy, how to get along with one another, how to share, and to understand the consequences of their own behaviour. Young children learn through both their relationships with others and the world around them when they are engaged in play.



**In play, caregivers and children can engage fully with each other.**

## Play Helps Children To:

- Feel loved, happy and safe
- Learn about caring for others and the environment
- Express feelings like surprise, delight, and frustration, and develop early communication skills
- Develop physical skills by using their bodies to explore
- Connect and refine pathways in their brain
- Connect with caregivers, building a strong relationship that nurtures their self-esteem and self-confidence
- Develop:
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Language and communication skills
  - Visual tracking skills
  - Gross motor skills
  - Fine motor skills
  - Verbal and nonverbal communication skills
  - Creative thinking skills
  - Analytic skills
  - Problem solving skills
  - Planning and decision-making skills
  - Hand-eye coordination
  - Attention span
  - Empathy
  - Capacity to listen
  - Resiliency

## Promoting Play

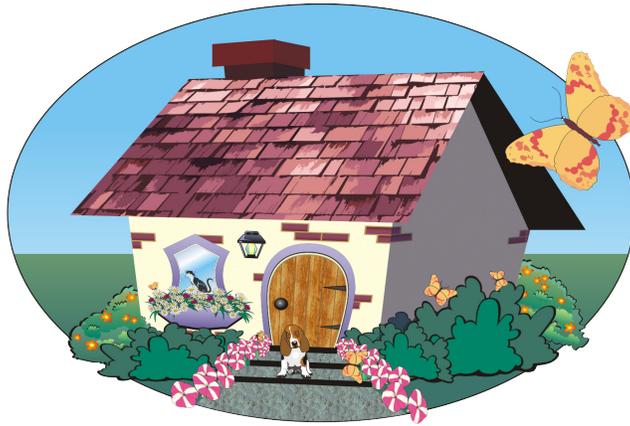
Play doesn't have to mean an organized activity or a dedicated period of quality time. For young children, play is their "work". It is through play and repetition that young children try out and master new skills. Everyday routines, for example bathing and feeding, provide opportunities for play.

Playtime is a learning time for young children. Through play children become aware of movement, observation, relationships, and emotions. Creating opportunities for children to play with others and also by themselves is important. Allowing time for child-led play ... even when this does not seem "fun" or "engaging" to the caregiver is equally important. Through child-led play, young children develop self-efficacy and self-esteem.

**Playing is one of the most important ways caregivers can nurture healthy child development.**







## Play

### Tips for Caregivers Handout

- Give children free, uninterrupted time to play (with safe supervision).
- Be careful not to control or structure play time too much.
- Be prepared to play the same thing repeatedly. Remember repetition builds brains.
- Give children a safe play environment that permits plenty of adventure and exploration without constantly hearing “no!” or “watch out.”
- Provide opportunities to help develop children’s 5 senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch.
- Join in the play: be active and have fun. This shows that you are interested.
- Let children be the guide during play.
- Take children on outings to help develop their imagination.
- Provide opportunities for outdoor play and experiences.
- Arrange opportunities for children to play with other children and adults, such as at the park or during a library story hour.

## Web Resources

BestStart: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Center

[www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)

CEECD: Centre of Excellence for Early Child Development

<http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca>

Good Toy Group

<http://www.goodtoygroup.com/>

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

<http://www.naeyc.org/>

National Institute for Play

<http://www.nifplay.org/>

Right to Play

<http://www.righttoplay.com/canada/our-impact/Pages/ProgramResources.aspx>

Saskatchewan in Motion

<http://www.saskatchewaninmotion.ca/>

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

# Glossary of Terms

<b>Analytic Skills</b>	Accurate and flexible thinking of a situation or problem.
<b>Attention Span</b>	The time that a person can concentrate on one thing.
<b>Brain Development</b>	The process of brain growth and neural connectivity.
<b>Cognitive Development</b>	The construction of thought processes, including remembering, problem solving, and decision-making, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.
<b>Constructive Play</b>	Play that involves the manipulation of the environment or building larger objects from smaller objects.
<b>Dramatic Play</b>	Play that involves creativity and imagination. It may also involve role playing or acting.
<b>Emotional Development</b>	Understanding of one's feelings and how to effectively express these.
<b>Empathy</b>	The ability to understand and share the feelings of others.
<b>Fine Motor Development</b>	The ability to control and manipulate the small muscles in the body, e.g., the muscles controlling one's fingers.
<b>Gross Motor Development</b>	The ability to control the large muscles in the body, e.g., the ability to control the hip and leg muscles allowing a person to walk.
<b>Hand-eye Coordination</b>	The ability of the brain to use the information coming through the sense of sight to control or guide the movement of the hands.
<b>Nonverbal Communication</b>	Sending and receiving messages from another person that does not include a verbal exchange, e.g., communicating through body language.
<b>Play</b>	Spontaneous, voluntary, pleasurable, and flexible activity engaged in by individuals or groups of all ages.
<b>Problem Solving</b>	The process of working through the details of a problem, accurately determining its cause, and coming up with a solution.
<b>Social Development</b>	The development of skills needed to socialize, e.g., communication, empathy, curiosity, and sharing.
<b>Social Play</b>	Play that involves interaction with one's peers.
<b>Verbal communication</b>	Communication that takes place through a verbal exchange.

# Finger Puppet Parade Activity

## *Importance*

Caregivers can help their baby's brain thrive by providing stimulating visual input.

## *Materials Needed*

Finger puppets.

## *Age*

Newborn and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that finger puppets are an engaging toy that supports oral language skills and communication, social/emotional development, and also help children learn and understand the world around them through imaginative play.

## *Activity*

Finger puppets are great fun for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. Finger puppets can even be used with newborns. Use puppets for visual stimulation with young babies, or to teach counting, build communication skills and encourage imagination with toddlers and preschoolers.

The caregivers select a couple of finger puppets to use with their baby. If the baby is very young, have caregivers slowly bring their finger into their baby's line of sight and wait until she or he focuses on the puppet. Have the caregivers speak slowly and introduce each puppet to their child. Guide caregivers to wait a moment, as if their baby is answering them and then continue the one-sided conversation.

With toddlers and preschoolers, caregivers can use the puppets to count to five by putting a puppet on each finger, make up stories, have conversations, or say rhymes with the child. Encourage caregivers to try using different voices for the puppets.



## Obstacle Course Activity

### *Importance*

Environments that invite children to move their bodies, explore their surroundings, and practice a variety of physical skills help children become proficient in the use of fine and gross motor skills.

### *Materials Needed*

Small soft ball, paper towel tube, empty pail or plastic container, sponge, chair, hula-hoop, pillow, bean bag, large open space.

### *Age*

2 and up.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain and help caregivers recognize that in a few short years, their child will go from being held and carried to running and jumping. Through physical play, caregivers can continually encourage activities that help their child learn and use new motor skills.

### *Activity*

Set up an obstacle course by placing various objects in stations in a circular fashion. Once the course is set up, have caregivers show their child what they would like him to do at each point. For example, climb over a pillow forwards and backwards, roll a ball through the paper tube or throw it into the bucket, kick a ball through the legs of the chair, or throw a sponge into the middle of a hula hoop, etc. For younger children, caregivers will have to guide and encourage children while they travel through the course. If appropriate, caregivers may wish to include imaginative play with the obstacle course such as letting children pretend to be a super hero or a fairy while trying to get through the obstacle course.



# Water Play Activity

## *Importance*

Water play encourages children to use their imagination and helps to build creative development. It also encourages children to try out new ideas and solutions to problems in a safe environment. Water play helps children to relieve tension by encouraging children to release their emotions by pouring, splashing, and swooshing.

## *Materials Needed*

A plastic square tub big enough to hold 2-4 liters of water, water safe toys such as rubber ducks and small plastic boats, small plastic cups of various sizes, plastic measuring spoons, small plastic strainers, small plastic bottles, small sponges, ice cubes, paint brushes, towels to clean up spills, plastic cover-up bibs for children to wear.

## *Age*

2 and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Ensure to discuss with caregivers the importance of supervision at all times when engaging children in any kind of water play or activity. Provide information about water play safety and emphasize that at no time during any kind of water play should children ever be left alone or unattended.

Explain to caregivers that water play allows thinking skills to be integrated with physical play, which creates a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

## *Activity*

Give each caregiver and child a small tub filled half full with clean lukewarm tap water. Allow caregivers and children to select a few toys to play with in the water. Encourage caregivers to let children freely use the toys to scoop, pour, and manipulate the water.

## *Suggested activities:*

- Pretend to mix up a watery soup.
- Add 1 or 2 ice cubes to the water and have children watch them melt and disappear.
- Use sponges to soak up water and then have the children squeeze the sponges into a smaller container.
- Add small plastic animals. Have children make animal sounds and play with their animals in the water.



# Section 7: Stress and Anxiety

## What is Stress?

Stress is the body's reaction to a situation that is perceived as new, unexpected, or a threat to oneself or loved ones. Stress is the way our bodies respond to the demands that are placed upon us by our environment, relationships, perceptions and interpretations of events and issues in our lives. Stress is part of everyday life and everyone experiences it. It can be difficult for caregivers to recognize stress responses in young children. Therefore, it is important that they understand when these are most likely to occur.

**Stress is a normal part of life for both children and adults, and the earlier children learn to manage stress, the happier and healthier they will be.**

## Why is Stress Important?

Many people do not believe that young children experience stress. However, even very young children experience stress. In fact, when it is considered that new situations cause stress, it is easy to understand that a young child experiences stress. High levels of unrelieved stress can lead to emotional, behavioural, social, and cognitive problems.

Since stress is an unavoidable part of life, it is important that young children are given the tools to cope with stress while they are still in a safe, protected environment. It is more important to teach young children how to deal with stress than to try to buffer them from stressful experiences. When caregivers learn how to help children deal with stress, they help children begin to build coping skills they will need throughout life.

## What Happens Internally When Stress Occurs?

When stress occurs, the brain signals the body to get ready to meet the challenge by stimulating the autonomic nervous system and releasing stress related hormones. The autonomic nervous system is the control center for many bodily functions including muscle tension, breathing, blood pressure, heart rate, pupil dilation, and temperature control. The stress response instantly activates the body either to get ready to flee from danger, or stand and fight it.

Even though some amount of stress is useful, and even helpful, the long-term consequences of constant stress are damaging to our mental and physical health. If stress is constant and unrelieved, the body has little time to relax and recover.

In addition, stress related hormones do not release naturally from the body. Over time, children and adults learn how to release these, e.g., by exercising, crying, laughing, or talking to a friend. When these are not released, the body remains in an active state of stress response. This is also referred to as hyper-arousal. When children are hyper-aroused, their stress response system can be triggered more easily than children who are not hyper-aroused. Caregivers act as external regulators of young children's stress response systems, helping them to calm themselves and release stress hormones.



## What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a reaction to stress that is defined as a feeling of worry or unease. Anxiety is a normal emotional state that all individuals will experience at various times in their lives. Anxiety is usually associated with anticipated fear of something that is about to happen or what might happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human reaction that involves both the mind and body. It serves an important basic survival function: anxiety is an alarm system that is activated whenever a person perceives danger or a threat. Experiencing mild anxiety may help a person become more alert and focused on facing challenges or threatening circumstances.

**When children are able to calm themselves, they are better equipped to behave in positive ways.**



For children, feeling anxious begins to develop during infancy and childhood as they show reactions to new and different situations. Anxiety is a normal and common part of childhood. In most cases, anxiety in children is temporary, and may be triggered by a specific stressful event. In some cases, however, anxiety in children can be persistent and intense, and can interfere with a child's daily routines and activities such as playing, making friends, or sleeping.

## Why is Anxiety Important?

Caregivers can help children develop the skills and confidence to cope with anxiety. Children and youth often develop more fears than adults do as they try to make sense of their world. Most childhood fears are normal and go away as a child grows up. Normal fears often change depending on the age and stage of development. For example, fear of monsters is common among four year-olds. It is important to think about age and what is common or "normal" when considering whether anxiety is causing problems.

As mentioned before, the stress response system is triggered when a person feels threatened by a situation. Anxiety both triggers the stress response system and is also caused by the activation of this system.



**It can be helpful to think of anxiety as a smoke alarm. We don't want to take the batteries out of the alarm in case there is a real fire, but we do want to fix the alarm so that it doesn't go off everytime we make toast.**



## What are the Long-term Effects of Stress and Anxiety?

When children's stress symptoms are not recognized or managed effectively, long-term effects can be serious and may include behavioural and social problems, and mental illness. A high level of unrelieved stress in children can interfere with a child's ability to learn and to get along well with others, and can cause illness due to a weakened immune system.

It's important to distinguish among three kinds of stress: positive, tolerable, and toxic.



**Children who feel loved and secure seem to have a natural defense against the harmful effects of stress.**

### *Positive stress*

Positive stress is a normal and essential part of healthy development, characterized by brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in stress hormone levels. Some situations that might trigger a positive stress response are the first day in a new daycare setting or being in a crowded environment for the first time. With the support of caring adults and caregivers, children can learn how to manage and overcome positive stress.

### *Tolerable stress*

Tolerable stress refers to adverse experiences that are more intense, but relatively short-lived. Examples include the death of a loved one, a natural disaster, a frightening accident, and family disruptions such as separation or divorce. If a child has the support of a caring adult, tolerable stress can usually be overcome.

### *Toxic stress*

Toxic stress occurs when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship – without adequate adult support. When toxic stress response occurs continually, or is triggered by multiple sources, it can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and have an increasingly negative impact on an individual's physical and mental health throughout his life.



**Toxic stress can have a negative effect on children's brain development.**

Prolonged exposure to stress hormones can impact the brain and impair functioning in a variety of ways, including:

- decreased brain growth
- disrupted development of neural networks
- damage to the hippocampus, an area of the brain responsible for learning and memory
- suppressed immune system
- reactive stress response system



## Promoting Coping Skills for Stress and Anxiety

The last section of this manual focuses on resiliency or the ability to cope with stressful situations in life. For this reason, this subsection will not go into too much detail.

### *Connection*

When children have secure relationships with their caregivers, they know that someone will be there to help them deal with their problems. Strong relationships also help children to trust and listen to the adult who is supporting them.

### *Home environment*

Children can learn skills that help them cope with stress easier when they have a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Good food, lots of time for physical activity, play, and daily routines make their world feel predictable and safe.

### *Comfort*

In order for children to learn to comfort themselves, they first must know what it is like to be comforted. Regardless of anything else caregivers might say or do to help a stressed child, the comfort of physical contact is one of the best stress relievers there is. In fact, the positive brain stimulation children get from being touched in early childhood helps build the brain's pathways that help people cope with stress. Verbal reassurances of safety and love, rocking, cuddling, holding, massage, singing, and telling stories are some other strategies that caregivers can use.

### *Time and space to unwind*

Children need quiet time. Like adults, children need time to unwind from the stress, stimulation, and activity that makes up their day. Childhood play is one of the best techniques available to work through stress.

### *Help children identify feelings*

Help children understand different feelings by naming various feelings they may experience. Explain how people show their feelings (through faces, bodies, words) and that showing feelings is an important way for others to understand how they are feeling. Help children notice how different feelings “feel” in their own body, for example tight hands or butterflies in their stomach.



**One of the critical ingredients that makes stress tolerable rather than toxic is the presence of supportive adults who help children learn to cope with and recover from difficult experiences.**

### ***Provide routines and structure***

Routines emphasize predictability and safety.

### ***Model calm and flexible behaviour***

It is very helpful when caregivers can stay calm when children are experiencing stress. Children look to others for guidance on how to respond in unfamiliar situations. They usually watch for cues from their caregivers and use these cues to help determine if the situation is safe or not. An important and helpful message for an anxious child to receive from a caregiver is that the caregiver has confidence both in the child and in the situation.



**Being understood and listened to, helps children feel connected to caregivers, and that in itself can alleviate a lot of stress. Children who live in supportive environments and develop a range of coping strategies become more capable of dealing with stress.**

### ***Teach problem solving strategies***

Caregivers can help children with their worries and problems by teaching them how to problem-solve by defining the problem, brainstorming all possible solutions and their consequences, and choosing the best solution.

### ***Take care of children's basic needs***

No one copes well when they are tired or hungry. Caregivers need to ensure to meet children's basic needs, including being well rested.

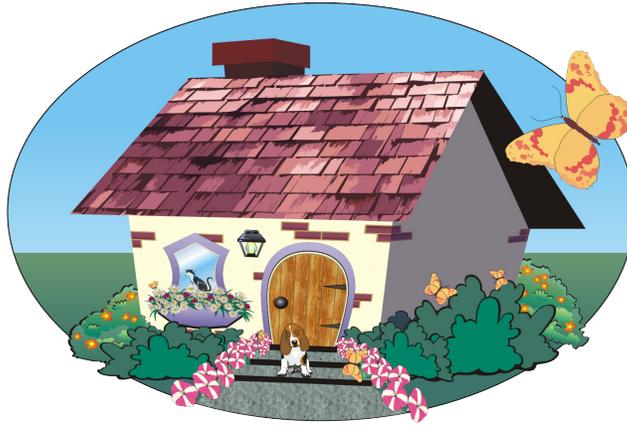
### ***Teach relaxation skills***

Caregivers can help children to relax by encouraging slow, deep breathing. Caregivers can help children practice this by getting them to imagine slowly blowing bubbles. Another way to relax is to ask children to alternately tense and relax their muscles. Caregivers can also help children to use their imagination to relax. Help children to imagine a safe and relaxing place and to notice the good relaxing feelings in their bodies.

**Children deal with stress in many different ways, but require direction and support from the adult caregivers in their lives to cope.**

### ***Engage children in regular exercise***

Exercise is helpful in relieving feelings related to stress and releases stress related hormones from the body. For young children, exercise does not have to be structured. Dancing in the living room or marching in the backyard are as important as a structured swim class.



## Stress and Anxiety Tips for Caregivers Handout

- **Help your child cope with stress in a safe, supportive, and protective environment.**
- **Provide physical comfort with reassuring words of safety and love.**
- **Allow your child to have time and space to unwind and work through stress through free play time.**
- **Encourage your child to name and express feelings through his face, body, and words.**
- **Provide an environment with predictable daily routines.**
- **Teach and model calming strategies. Try out different techniques to see what will work for your child.**
- **Take care of your child's basic needs including good nutrition and sufficient rest and sleep.**
- **Teach your child how to problem solve.**
- **Engage your child in regular exercise through structured and unstructured activities.**

## Web Resources

Canadian Paediatric Society

[www.caringforkids.cps.ca/behaviourparenting/Fears.htm](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/behaviourparenting/Fears.htm)

Center on the Developing Child Harvard University

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

Child Trauma Academy

<http://childtrauma.org/>

CMHA: Canadian Mental Health Association

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre in British Columbia

<http://keltymentalhealth.ca/>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<http://www.nctsn.org/>

NIMH: National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

Psychology Foundation of Canada

[www.psychologyfoundation.org](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org)

RIRO: Reaching In Reaching Out Resiliency Skills Program

[www.reachinginreachingout.com](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com)

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

# Glossary of Terms

<b>Anxiety</b>	Reaction to stress. Feelings of worry and unease.
<b>Autonomic Nervous System</b>	Control center for the body's basic functions, e.g., heart rate.
<b>Hyper-arousal</b>	When the body remains in a state of active stress response even when the original adverse condition is removed.
<b>Positive Stress</b>	Normal, everyday stress that is mitigated by support.
<b>Tolerable Stress</b>	Intense adverse conditions that are short lived and mitigated by support.
<b>Toxic Stress</b>	Long term or ongoing adverse conditions with inadequate support.

## Peek-A-Boo Activity

### *Importance*

This game can gently introduce concepts of separation and reunion for infants and toddlers. Games like hide-and-seek, peek-a-boo, and where's-the-baby are said to help babies understand that things go away and return.

### *Materials Needed*

Cloth or blanket.

### *Age*

0 to 2.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that this simple game helps their baby understand that objects can still be there even if he or she cannot see them. This game will help increase their baby's self-confidence and connection with their caregiver.

### *Activity*

Have caregivers put a cloth over their head or their baby's head and then suddenly remove it while saying "Peek-A-Boo".



# Make Believe Comfort Stories Activity

## *Importance*

Reframing is a cognitive behavioural skill taught to people who have problems with anxiety. It can also be used with children to help them view a stressor in a different way.

## *Materials Needed*

There are a number of books that talk about different topics included in the toolkit.

## *Age*

Any.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that reading or telling stories can be safe ways to explore strong emotions, which can help their child understand new or frightening events. Books about difficult problems, or hard to talk about subjects, can be used to help a child work through emotional problems they may be experiencing.

## *Activity*

Telling a story can be a great way to calm a child's fears. For example, if a child trembles during storms, make up a story about a magical being that makes lightning bolts and claps of thunder. As children get older, they can help to make up the stories as well.

Children's storybooks also provide ways of reframing frightening events.





# Bubble Breaths Activity

## *Importance*

Learning to breathe deeply is one of the most important skills for children to learn. Breathing deeply helps children to calm themselves. By breathing deeply, the brain and the body receive more oxygen and the stress response system can be turned off. Learning to breathe deeply should happen when the child is calm.

## *Materials Needed*

Bubbles (either commercial or homemade).

## *Age*

2 and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that breathing patterns cannot be taught just once to children. They need to be practiced so that they become a positive habit.

## *Activity*

Have children start by blowing lots of bubbles in the room. Most children will immediately begin to pop them as they fall. Then ask children if they can try to blow one big bubble slowly. As children are blowing a big bubble, tell them to “Take deep breaths from your tummy” and “blow out very slowly.”





# Section 8: Resilience

## What is Resiliency?

Resiliency is the ability to steer through life challenges and find ways to bounce back and to thrive. It is the capacity that some children have to overcome difficult circumstances and go on to lead healthy, successful lives. We are all born with the capacity for resilience. Resilience is not something we have or don't have, and it is developed over time.

**One basic principle about resilience is that it is very hopeful; building it is an ongoing process and you are never too old to learn new tricks. This is a very hopeful message for any caregiver.**

Resilience is not one specific thing, but a set of skills that people gain from their life experiences and relationships. These help them to solve problems, recover from negative events or feelings, cope with challenges, bounce back from disappointments, and reach out to others and take risks. Resiliency is developed over a lifetime.



## Why is Resiliency Important?

Resilience allows children to cope better with life's uncertainties and challenges, and adapt to change. Resilience allows children to feel hopeful and have high self-worth. It also allows children to develop the ability to solve problems, make decisions, and to view mistakes, hardships, and obstacles as challenges to face rather than as stressors to avoid.

Resiliency helps individuals cope with stress. No matter what their background, everyone experiences stress throughout their lives and being able to deal with it is a key part of mental health. When caregivers understand resiliency factors, they are able to help children in adverse circumstances to overcome the odds and grow up to become healthy and productive citizens.

People who are resilient:

- Are healthier and live longer
- Are happier in their relationships
- Are more successful in school and work
- Are less likely to get depressed



**Children whose caregivers help them manage stress, learn two things. One is that stress doesn't have to last forever. The other is that we can help ourselves or sometimes get the help of others to deal with it.**

## What Builds Resilience?

The following helps young children develop resiliency skills:

- A secure bond with a caring adult
- Relationships with positive role models
- Opportunities to learn skills
- Opportunities to participate in meaningful activities

## Resiliency Skills

Thinking skills play a big part in our ability to regulate our emotions and behaviour. There are seven thinking processes that directly affect abilities associated with resilience. Young children can learn these skills by watching and learning from the adults surrounding them.

### 1. Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is being in charge of our emotions enough to stay calm under pressure. Being in charge of our emotions does not mean that a child cuts off negative emotions or keeps them inside. Expressing emotions, both negative and positive, is healthy and constructive. Being in charge of his emotions is about calming down enough so that he can express his emotions in ways that will help, rather than hurt, a situation.

### 2. Impulse Control

Impulse control is the ability to stop and choose whether to act on the desire to take action. For example, when an individual becomes angry, he may want to shout and get into an argument. Impulse control enables a child to stop himself and decide what actions are appropriate and helpful to take in a situation. Controlling his impulses will help him finish what he set out to do and plan for the future. Impulse control is also the ability to delay gratification - to control his impulse to have something right now just because he wants it.

### 3. Causal Analysis

Causal analysis is the ability to analyze a problem and accurately decide what its cause is. Helping children develop the ability to analyze problems by first helping them identify the problem and then discussing together what they can do about it is very important. For example, a caregiver or professional could say, "There is a problem here because you both want to play with the same toy. What do you think you could do?" or "What do you think we could do to solve the problem?" To help children think more accurately and flexibly about whether a situation is permanent or temporary, challenge their initial assessment of the situation.

### 4. Realistic Optimism

Realistic optimism is the ability to maintain hope for a bright future. This kind of optimism is not about seeing only the positive things in life and turning a blind eye to negative events. It is about seeing things as they are and believing that the best can come out of a situation! It is the ability to work toward positive outcomes with the knowledge that they do not happen automatically, but are achieved through effort, problem solving, and planning.

### 5. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings and needs of another person.

Children learn to understand and support others' feelings by being understood and supported by those around them. Young children benefit when an adult helps them recognize their own feelings: "You look happy about doing that all by yourself." Later on, adults can help children recognize others' feelings: "Jenny's face looks sad. I wonder if she misses playing with her friend today."

## 6. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the feeling of being effective in the world - making a difference, having an impact. It is the belief that what an individual does matters. People who possess self-efficacy believe that they have what it takes to tackle most of the problems they face and bounce back when things get tough. Caregivers can help children experience competence by giving them choices that allow them to influence decisions that affect them, for example: “It’s cold outside. Do you want to wear your hat or pull up your hood?” Offering choices helps children feel that they have some control over what they do. Giving them opportunities to succeed, but still feel challenged, increases confidence.

## 7. Reaching Out

Reaching out is the ability to take on new opportunities that life presents. Resiliency research suggests that people who see mistakes as learning opportunities find it easier to take risks and try new things. Another important part of reaching out is being accurate and realistic about how much we can cope with and being willing to ask for help when we need it. We can find support from friends, co-workers, community organizations, and professionals. Caregivers can help children reach out for support by modelling that it is okay to ask for help and creating a readily available support system around them.

*Adapted from: Pearson, J., & Hall, D. (2012). Reaching In Reaching Out: Promoting Resilience in Young Children. Workbook Adult Skills Training. First Folio Resource Group, ON.*





*I Can ...*

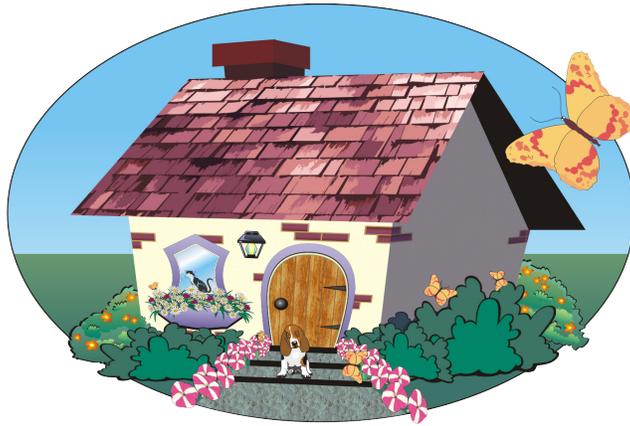
- Make a difference
- Talk to others about things that frighten me
- Find someone to help me when I need it
- Find ways to solve problems
- Control myself when needed

*I Am ...*

- A worthwhile person
- Loved and loveable
- Happy to do nice things for others and show I care
- Respectful of others and myself
- Willing to be responsible for what I do

*I Have ...*

- People around who I trust and who love and support me



## Resilience Tips for Caregivers Handout

- **Develop a secure caregiving bond with your child.**
- **Help your child learn how to express both positive and negative emotions in appropriate ways.**
- **Teach your child how to stop and choose actions that are appropriate and helpful to a situation.**
- **Teach your child how to look at a problem and correctly determine the cause.**
- **Guide your child to work through problems and work towards a positive outcome.**
- **Help your child to recognize and understand his own feelings.**
- **Give your child choices that will allow him to feel that he has some control over what is happening.**
- **Help your child to look at mistakes as a learning opportunity.**
- **Teach your child that it is okay to reach out and ask for help when he needs it.**

## Web Resources

American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience.aspx>

Building Resilience in Children from Birth to Six Years: BestStart

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy\\_chld\\_dev/pdf/BSRC\\_Resilience\\_English\\_fnl.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/pdf/BSRC_Resilience_English_fnl.pdf)

HealthyChildren.org

[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

Reaching In Reaching Out Resiliency Skills Training

<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/aboutresilience.htm>

Saskatchewan Ministry of Health: Resiliency in Children Fact Sheet

<http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/resiliency-in-children-fact-sheet>

Saskatchewan Prevention Insititute

[www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

ZERO TO THREE

[www.zerotothree.com](http://www.zerotothree.com)



## Glossary of Terms

<b>Attachment</b>	The connection that a child feels for a caregiver that provides safe, consistent care. Attachment allows a child to learn to regulate his emotions, explore his world, develop a sense of self-worth, and recover from stress.
<b>Causal Analysis</b>	The ability to look at a problem and accurately determine the cause.
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>	Ability to control and appropriately express one's emotions.
<b>Empathy</b>	The ability to understand and share the feelings of others.
<b>Impulse Control</b>	The ability to stop, think, and choose one's actions and reactions.
<b>Reaching Out</b>	Taking risks, trying new things, and reaching out to others when needed.
<b>Realistic Optimism</b>	Feeling hope for a brighter future.
<b>Resiliency</b>	The ability to cope with and recover from stress, change, or trauma.
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	The personal belief that one can make a difference in his environment or control his environment.

## Good Time Stories Activity

### *Importance*

Positive and optimistic thinking is important in resiliency. If a child always thinks negatively, he is more likely to give up, not feel in control, and suffer depression. Helping young children to reframe their thinking is important.

### *Materials Needed*

None.

### *Age*

1 and up.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that when it is nurtured, positive thinking is a powerful coping tool and helps foster resilience. Through positive thinking, a child learns to better manage life's inevitable disappointments. A positive-thinking child becomes a more resilient one.

### *Activity*

Before bedtime, help children to discuss the good parts of their day, no matter what kind of a day they had. Caregivers should also do the same about their own day.



## Asking for Help Activity

### *Importance*

Reaching out for help or support is part of building resilience. It is important for caregivers to help children understand that everyone needs help sometimes.

### *Materials Needed*

Books from the Learning to Get Along series (included in the toolkit).

### *Age*

2 and up.

### *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that asking for help is a sign of strength and mental health. Caregivers can teach their children that everyone needs help sometimes. There are many ways to get through the tough times. One way is to ask for support from family, friends and faith, or cultural groups.

### *Activities*

- Have caregivers read or tell stories to children about how others reach out to give or get a helping hand.
- Caregivers can tell children it is OK to ask for help. Sit with them and think of all of the people they could reach out to for help, if necessary.
- Encourage caregivers to work with children to choose a code word or signal that they can use to alert caregivers (or another caring adult) when they are in need of help.



# Belly to Belly Deep Breathing Activity

## *Importance*

Learning to control breathing rates is an important skill in emotional regulation and impulse control. An individual can calm himself just by breathing slowly and deeply.

Self-control is an inner strength that plays an important part in developing self-regulation. Self-regulation helps children learn how to handle life's disappointments, worries and frustrations. It makes it easier to focus on goals, finish what we start, and wait for things we want. These are all important to building resilience.

## *Materials Needed*

None.

## *Age*

1 and up.

## *Note to Facilitator*

Explain to caregivers that teaching self-control skills is one of the most important things that parents can do for their kids. By learning self-control, children can make appropriate decisions and respond to stressful situations in ways that can yield positive outcomes.

## *Activity*

Have caregivers hold their children closely, belly to belly and practice deep breathing. Caregivers can explain to children that this is something they can practice to help them calm down when they are frustrated or upset about something. Even very small children will calm when placed on their caregiver while the caregiver breaths slowly.

Visualization can be interwoven into the breathing exercise. For instance, when practicing belly to belly deep breathing, caregivers can encourage their child to imagine that there is a colourful balloon in his or her belly.



## Section 9: Toolkit Resources

### BOOKS TO USE WITH FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

#### 24-Hr. Cribside Assistance

*(Attachment)*

This is a new baby manual for dads that reads like a car manual. This booklet gives new fathers tips on the practical aspects of being a first time father.

*Creators: The Father Involvement Initiative  
Ontario Network*

#### Angie

*(General mental health, stress, anxiety, and resilience)*

“Angie” lives with her mother who struggles with alcoholism. Her younger sister has gone to foster care. Angie has been touched sexually by one of mom’s friends. When Angie tells mother, she isn’t believed. What can she do? How can Angie continue to love and protect her mom and keep herself safe? Who can she turn to for help? Can Angie handle another breach of trust? This story speaks to the issue of trust and abuse.

*Author: Fawn Einarson*

#### Bossy Frog Band Music CDs

*(Mental health, play, and self-esteem)*

The music on these DVDs was developed by a music therapist to:

- help children learn social skills and make friends
- inspire movement and facilitate motor skill development
- learn how to regulate emotions and calm down during quiet time and bedtime
- encourage singing and self-expression
- learn about their communities
- learn how to be good stewards of the environment

The four CDs included are:

- Be a friend
- Nature Sing Along
- Rocket Ship to the Sleepy Place
- The Bossy Frog

*Developer: Jeffery Friedberg*

#### Feelings Flashcards

*(General mental health)*

Understanding feelings is made fun with these 20 sturdy flash cards featuring 40 different emotions. Each card shows two opposite feelings, one on each side, rendered in words and lively pictures. Children will learn what it means to feel silly and serious, calm and nervous, brave and scared, and more.

*Author: Todd Parr*

#### Felt Feelings Books Series

*(General mental health)*

This series includes 8 books that are child-focused and can be used as a type of narrative therapy to reach troubled children with complex emotional and behavioural issues.

*Author: Lynne Steffy*

- **Crustback and the Wormhole**

This book is intended to be used with children whose parents are separated. There are many possible reasons why one parent might be less involved in a child’s upbringing; no matter what the reason, the lack of involvement can be very painful for the child. It can be especially difficult for children who have had frequent interactions with that parent in the past.

- **Elephant in My Room**  
This book is intended to be used with children who struggle to express feelings. Children are often disempowered and feel that they do not have a voice. They need to be allowed to express feelings in a healthy environment that fosters growth and self-expression. Inhibited feelings can contribute to anxiety and depression. As such, this story will be particularly effective with children who exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- **Glo's Amazing Journey**  
This book is intended to be used with children who are dealing with challenges created by illness or disability. The tale about Glo helps foster hope in children that they too can reach accomplishments when they do not allow obstacles to prevent them from working towards their goals.
- **Shelly's Shell**  
This book is intended to be used with children who have been sexually abused. The story introduces abused children to the concept of trust, the impact of trauma, defense mechanisms, and the use of coping skills. It encourages abuse survivors to nurture themselves and talk about how they are feeling.
- **Stretch**  
This book is intended to be used with children and families who are coping with family conflict. Given the numerous stressors faced by today's families, conflict is a common occurrence. Frequent, unresolved family conflict can be detrimental to child development and cause long-lasting emotional difficulties.
- **The Angry Lizard**  
This book is intended to be used with children who have been expressing anger in inappropriate ways. When children experience anger, it is important that they are supported to express it. The story does not endeavour to eliminate anger, but to help children understand that there are appropriate ways of expressing difficult emotions.
- **The Butterfly Blanket**  
This book is intended to be used with children who have lost a caregiver to illness. It was written to encourage children to express thoughts and feelings about death. It was designed to foster hope in bereaved children that, despite their death, their caregiver is still connected to them. This story promotes the concepts of faith, unity, and spirituality, without subscribing to a specific religion.
- **The Telling Bee**  
This book was designed to encourage children to disclose abuse or bullying. Many children endure the pain of being abused or bullied without disclosing the abuse to adults who can support them and protect them from future abuse. Unfortunately, when children do disclose abusive experiences, they are not always listened to or protected. The book explains the importance of disclosure and teaches children that they may need to reach out to more than one adult before they are helped.

## Free Spirit Learning to Get Along Series

*(General mental health, self-esteem, self-efficacy, empathy, stress, anxiety, and resilience)*

This series includes 15 books to help children learn, understand, and practice basic social and emotional skills. Real-life situations, lots of diversity, and concrete examples make these books appropriate for childcare settings, schools, and the home. Each book includes a special section for adults, with discussion questions, games, activities, and tips that reinforce the skills and ideas being taught.

*Author: Cheri J. Meiners*

- Accept and Value Each Person
- Be Honest and Tell the Truth
- Be Polite and Kind
- Cool Down and Work Through Anger
- Join In and Play
- Know and Follow Rules
- Listen and Learn
- Reach Out and Give
- Respect and Take Care of Things
- Share and Take Turns
- Talk and Work it Out
- Try and Stick with It
- Understand and Care
- When I Feel Afraid

## Gymboree 1001 Fun Ways to Play

*(Play)*

This is a comprehensive resource book that includes creative play ideas from child development experts for children age 1-5.

*Authors: Susan Elisabeth Davis and Nancy Wilson Hall.*

## I Love You Through and Through

*(Attachment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy)*

A toddler and his teddy bear illustrate a young child's happy, sad, silly, and mad side, and more! Babies and toddlers will feel loved all over when they hear this declaration of adoration and affection.

*Author: Bernadette Rosetti Shustak*

## I Love You Because You're You

*(Attachment, self-esteem, and self-efficacy)*

This story is described through a poem about a mama fox's unconditional love for her cub. This book describes the many feelings children can have, from happy to frightened, and will reassure them of their parents' affection and approval.

*Author: Liza Baker*

## I Was So Mad

*(General mental health and resiliency)*

This is a picture book about feeling angry. The short story easily depicts everyday frustrations that young children face and their feeling "mad" when they cannot do what they want. The book helps children develop problem solving skills by depicting characters choosing alternative activities that meet their needs.

*Author: Mercer Mayer*

## I'll Love you Forever

*(Attachment)*

A book about the gentle affirmation of the love a parent feels for her child. Nurtured by the unconditional love of his parent, a boy grows happily through the stages of childhood to become, in turn, a loving adult.

*Author: Robert Munsch*

## Ibby's Feelings

*(General mental health and resilience)*

This book tells the story of a four-year-old child who is witnessing domestic violence in her home. The book helps caregivers understand the impact of domestic violence on young children.

*Author: Baaqia Uqdah*

## It's Not Your Fault Koko Bear

*(Stress, anxiety, and resilience)*

This is a children's story and parenting guide that is intended for families where both parents plan to stay active and involved in their child's life. The story revolves around a bear whose parents are divorced and he does not want to have two homes. The book will help children learn what divorce means, how family life will change, and understand that the divorce is not their fault.

*Author: Vicki Lansky*

## Jay

*(General mental health, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience)*

Jay has been abandoned by his father, lives in poverty and is responsible for his two younger siblings. Confused about the value of his father's gang and angry that his father has gone to live with another family, Jay finds himself struggling with low self-esteem, worry, frustration, and feelings of abandonment. There is only one thing to do, develop a plan to win back his father. This leads Jay through many important lessons and to the brink of his world.

*Author: Fawn Einarson*

## Maybe Days

*(Mental health, stress, and anxiety)*

This book addresses the questions, feelings, and concerns foster children most often face. It also provides basic information that children want and need to know, including the roles of various people in the foster care system and whom to ask for help. An extensive section for adults caring for foster children describes the child's experience, underscores the importance of open communication, and outlines a variety of ways to help children adjust and thrive.

*Author: Jennifer Wilgocki*

## My Dad

*(Attachment)*

This book expresses the importance of a loving, protective father. All dads are different. They are clever, funny, brave, silly, and simply wonderful. But none is as special as your very own!

*Author: Charles Fuge*

## My Dad Loves Me

*(Attachment, resiliency, and self-esteem)*

By reading this book, children can relive the fun times they have with their Dad every day. Children enjoy playing with Dad, swimming and napping with Dad. This book depicts all of these beloved activities being done by cuddly animals!

*Author: Marianne Richmond*





## My Own Human Body

*(Saskatchewan CAPC Projects only)*  
*(General mental health)*

This book explains the human body in a series of words and pictures that are simplified for preschool boys and girls. As children turn the pages, they observe the human body's interior and learn about the functions of muscles, lungs, the skeleton, and the stomach and intestines. This book is both amusing and instructive, engaging younger children's natural curiosity about their bodies.

*Author: Giovanni Caviezel*

## Puppets

*(General mental health, play, stress, anxiety, empathy, self-esteem and self-efficacy)*

- **Finger puppets: 12 per project**
- **Puppets – Full Size: 8 per project**  
Puppets provide a sense of security that make it easier for children to express thoughts and feelings they might not otherwise feel comfortable sharing. Talking through a puppet allows children to explore feelings and enact situations in a way that they are familiar with. In addition, when children are encouraged to take the role of others, they learn to empathize. Puppets provide an essential link between learning and play which makes them wonderful teaching tools wherever they are used.

## The Human Body

*(All projects other than SK CAPC)*  
*(General mental health)*

This book uncovers the mysteries of anatomy and physiology to give young children a rich understanding of their bodies. This book tackles a number of topics that children are naturally curious about in a forthright and age-appropriate manner.

*Author: Pascale Hedelin*

## Wheels

- **Baby Stages**

*(General mental health)*

A Parent's and Caregiver's Guide to Social and Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers (Birth to 3 years).

*Author: Michigan Association of Infant Mental Health*

- **Behavior Has Meaning**

*(General mental health)*

This wheel is a 3-step approach to understanding and effectively managing behaviors such as tantrums and biting.

*Author: Zero to Three*

- **Preschool Stages**

*(General mental health)*

A Parent's and Caregiver's Guide to Social and Emotional Development in the Preschool Years (2-5) years.

*Author: Michigan Association of Infant Mental Health*

- **Rolling in to Fatherhood**

*(Attachment)*

This wheel outlines the importance of the father-baby relationship. Uniquely designed to capture the interest of new fathers, the wheel invites playful interaction that leads to relationship in the early years.

*Author: Michigan Association of Infant Mental Health*

## **When Dads Don't Grow Up**

*(Attachment and play)*

This book follows four father-child pairs as they spend happy, silly times together, popping bubble wrap, watching cartoons and taking part in shopping cart races. This story illustrates the importance of relationships between dads and their children.

*Author: Marjorie Blaine Parker*

## **Your Baby is Speaking to You**

*(Attachment)*

This book provides a visual guide for caregivers to help them learn about and understand the variety of behaviours that newborns display. This book can be used to help caregivers understand the non-verbal cues their baby is exhibiting.

*Author: Dr. Kevin Nugent*

## **Your Body Belongs to You**

*(General mental health, stress, and anxiety)*

A children's book focused on teaching children about appropriate safe touch, and that their body belongs to them.

*Author: Cornelia Spelman*

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BOOKS**

### **125 Brain Games for Baby**

*(Brain development)*

This book is a fun-filled collection of ways to help develop baby's brains. Included are everyday opportunities to nurture brain development in the critical period from birth through twelve months. Each game and sensory experience presented includes an annotation on the latest brain research and how the activity promotes brain power in babies.

*Author: Jackie Silberg*

### **Attachment Network of Winnipeg DVDs**

*(Saskatchewan CAPC Projects Only)*

*(Attachment and resilience)*

- **Listening to Baby DVD**

This is an interactive DVD about the importance of supporting attachment by noticing, understanding, and responding with sensitivity to babies' cues. Messages are told mostly in the voices of parents and illustrated by beautiful images of babies, from 2 weeks to 16 months of age, connecting with their parents in the 'dance' of communication.

- **Tuning in to Toddlers DVD**

This DVD is about parenting toddlers and helping them develop emotional regulation. Ten scenes apply parenting in gentle, everyday interactions between toddlers and their parents, followed by a brief narration. Through the narrator and voice-overs of children's voices, insight is offered into the thoughts and feelings of the parents and the toddlers throughout the scenes. At the end of each scene, there are questions that can be used for group discussion. The DVD introduces the program "Circle of Security."

## First Impressions Exposure to Violence and a Child's Developing Brain DVD *(Brain development, stress, and anxiety)*

This video illustrates the dangers of chronic exposure to violence on a child's developing brain. Viewers are given information on a child's developmental risk if regularly exposed to domestic violence and other violent situations. Young children and adults affected by violence share how exposure to violence has impacted their lives. Experts in child psychology and social work explain the connection between exposure to violence and mental health problems. The stories and research are presented, detailing the developmental challenges and resiliency of children who are exposed to violence.

*Developer: California Attorney General's Office, Crime and Violence Prevention Center*

## Growing up Resilient *(Resilience)*

The ability for children and youth to bounce back from today's stresses is one of the most important life skills they can develop. The book explores the individual, family and environmental risk factors, as well as protective factors that affect young people's resilience. Tips on how to help children develop resiliency skills follow each section.

*Author: Tatyana Barankin*



## **Out of the Mainstream**

*(Saskatchewan CAPC projects only)*  
*(General mental health)*

This book identifies aspects of mental illness which can compromise parenting and affect children's development. The book also includes information about efforts that professionals can take to intervene effectively. With chapters from professionals working primarily with children or adults, this book illustrates the ways in which the needs of mentally ill parents and their children can be understood.

*Author: Edited by Rosemary Loshak*

## **The Hand You Hold is the Legacy You Leave**

*(General mental health and attachment)*

This resource book weaves mental health programming into the lives of new parents and their infants, promoting the importance of secure and strong attachments early in life. Through creative delivery style and interactive sessions between new parents and a Mental Health Counselor, they try and capture a "real" moment with infants and their secure attachment figure.

*Created by: Lois Okrainec and Brent McKee*

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