Nurturing Early Childhood Mental Health
Birth to Age 6

What is early childhood mental health?
Young children's mental health includes the ability to:

- **Form close and secure relationships with others**
- **Understand and manage their emotions**
- **Feel safe to learn and explore their environment**

Early mental health impacts all areas of a child's life now and in the future.

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Why is early childhood mental health important?

A child with good mental health will develop skills that will help him or her be healthy throughout life. These skills also help to prepare a child for school. Early skills for mental health include:

- Making sense of and controlling emotions
- Controlling impulses
- Understanding other people's emotions and expressions
- Forming secure attachments to caregivers
- Actively exploring the environment
- Developing and fostering a sense of curiosity
- Developing social skills
- Learning how to communicate with others
- Coping with changes and new environments
- Understanding and accepting differences among people

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As a parent or caregiver what is your role?

Young children are completely dependent on their caregiver(s). A young child's mental health develops based on experiences and relationships. New research is showing that caregivers have a significant impact on their child's mental health.

How can you help your young child develop good mental health?

- Be positive and consistent with your child
- Learn to understand what your child is communicating through his voice and body language and respond to him appropriately
- Comfort your child when she is upset
- Spend time playing with your child and allow him to lead the play often
- Look in your child's eyes and wonder what he is thinking and feeling
- Be engaged and present when you are caring for your child
- Protect your child and take charge when necessary
- Affectionately and appropriately touch your child often
- Encourage your child to explore her environment
- Teach your child about his emotions
- Let your child develop relationships with other safe adults in your community