

# MENTAL HEALTH



NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Tips for Families from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness

## What is mental health?

Mental health means that young children are growing in their ability to:

- understand and share feelings
- have close and positive relationships
- explore and learn

### Why Is It Important?

*Having Positive Mental Health Makes It Easier for Children to:*

- Have close relationships with family and friends
- Do well in school
- Learn new things
- Solve tough problems

- Develop patience (or not give up)
- Focus on a task
- Ask for help

*When Young Children Are Worried, Sad, or Angry, It Can Be Hard To:*

- Make friends
- Follow directions
- Express feelings or wishes
- Follow simple directions
- Pay attention in class
- Solve problems in positive ways
- Do well in school



## Things You Can Do and Say to Help Your Child

### • For Your Infant

- Hold your baby during feedings.  
"I love cuddling when I feed you."
- Look at your baby and smile, smile, smile!  
"Hey, when I smile, you smile back."
- Talk about what you are doing.  
"I'm going to change your diaper now."
- Try to relax and have fun.  
"When I am happy, you are less fussy."
- Read and sing to your baby every day.  
"It is bedtime. Time for a story and favorite song."
- Take care of yourself.  
"When I am rested, I take better care of you."

### • For Your Toddler/Preschooler

- Make sure they always feel safe.  
"I know loud noises can be scary, but it's OK."
- Offer choices.  
"Do you want the blue shirt or the red shirt?"
- Practice patience.  
"Let's wait until the song is over and then we'll go outside."

- Show understanding.  
"You REALLY want another cookie! It is hard when you can only have one."
- Leave extra time.  
"I see you don't want to leave the playground. One more time on the slide, then we need to leave."
- Play together at least 15 minutes a day.  
"There is so much to do but it is important for us to play together."
- Follow her interest.  
"I see you want to play with the blocks. What are you going to build?"
- Praise your child when she keeps trying.  
"I love the way you keep trying to find the right piece for the puzzle."
- Practice following directions.  
"First pick up the blocks, then take out the cars."



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