



Dear Readers



GET SCREENED!

Healthy Start offers services for you when you are pregnant or between pregnancies, and for your baby from birth to age three. Services are free and are not based on income, educational background or ethnic makeup. Healthy Start services are based on a “screening”—a simple set of questions to determine if there are any risks that could affect your pregnancy and your baby’s growth or development.

Services include education and counseling in childbirth, breastfeeding, parenting, nutrition, smoking cessation, and between pregnancy care.

Find out if you qualify for Healthy Start services by saying “Yes” to a Healthy Start screening! Even if you do not wish to obtain any Healthy Start services, by completing the screenings you are helping ALL mothers and their babies in your community.

One, Two, Three!

The Importance of a Baby’s First Three Years in the Development of Good Mental Health

In the past ten years, there has been much research and interest in “infant mental health.” Infant mental health refers to an infant’s social and emotional development during the first three years of life. (For the purposes of this issue, it does not refer to developmental/emotional conditions present at birth.) Studies show that it’s during these years that most children, if provided with the proper care and attention, form the basis for the ability to have healthy relationships with others, learn about social rules, control feelings and emotions in an appropriate way, have positive feelings of self-worth and have the confidence to explore their world. This issue

of “Blossom” discusses ways parents and caregivers can help children achieve good mental health.

What Are Signs of Good Infant Mental Health?

A normal child who has received love and care during the first three years should show positive signs of good mental health, including:

- The ability to respond with emotions that fit the situation
- The ability to use self-control and self-regulation

continued...



Central Healthy Start

For more information about Healthy Start services, call your local Healthy Start Care Coordinator:

Citrus County
Brenda Vorobok
(352) 726-1731

Hernando County
Janet Dick
(352) 540-6800

Lake County
Dianne Casson
(352) 357-1668

Sumter County
Gwen Whitehead
(352) 569-2959

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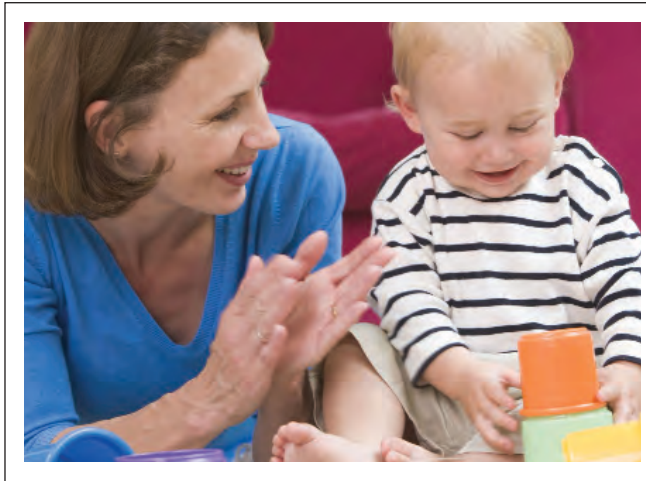
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Nature Coast*

Good Mental Health in the First Three Years, cont.



problems at home, at school, with friends or in the community. This is why providing for the child's mental health needs during the first three years is so important for healthy development and overall well-being.

The Most Important Relationship

The bond, sometimes called "attachment,"

formed between an infant and its mother (or other main caregiver) is the basis for an infant's emotional and social growth and for healthy brain development. This relationship sets the stage for all future relationships. It determines how the child views and responds to the world around him or her. If the bond is strong and loving, the child will have a sense that he or she:

- The ability to form close relationships with parents and caregivers
- The ability to explore, focus and learn
- The ability to keep trying even when discouraged (for example, rebuilding the block tower after it falls down)
- The ability to handle disappointment and change

All of these positive behaviors show that the child is forming a solid foundation for further social and emotional development.

What Can Happen if a Child's Infant Mental Health Needs Are Unmet?

A child born with no preexisting developmental/emotional problems but not provided with healthy, loving early relationships, may behave in several different ways. He or she may seem sad, joyless, depressed and inactive. There may be problems with eating or sleeping. The child, starved for affection, may seek hugs from everyone. On the other hand, the child may not allow any show of affection or comfort because past relationships have not been nurturing. Aggressive and angry behavior for no obvious reason may occur. Children who have not had their early mental health needs met may have long-term

- Is safe and secure
- Will have its needs met
- Can explore and discover from a secure base
- Can turn to others for comfort, help, play, protection and guidance

This loving, nurturing relationship helps the child feel valued and is an example of how to treat others. It helps the child cope with the challenges of growing up and handle disappointment and distress. Knowing that he or she is loved, cherished, protected and valued is the greatest gift a child can receive from a parent. It gives the child the emotional and social building blocks for a secure and happy future.

Possible Warning Signs

All babies have ups and downs. Sometimes they cry, are fussy and have trouble sleeping. These are normal behaviors for infants and young children. Some behaviors, however, may be signs that there are problems with the child's social and emotional development, or perhaps that more serious conditions are present. If the child shows any of the following behaviors, there may be cause for concern:

- Displays very little emotion
- Is difficult to soothe or comfort
- Does not look to familiar adults for comfort or help
- Is unable to calm or comfort itself
- Does not like being touched or held
- Does not like playing with others
- Shows no interest in sights, sounds or touch
- Is very fearful and on-guard
- Shows sudden changes in behavior

It's best to discuss any of the above behaviors with the child's doctor to make sure all is well.



Infant Mental Health

WORD SEEK PUZZLE

G Q Y E V Z R S Z C P G H S
P R O G M O D U H D P T U L
N E J P U O D J Z N L C F B
M H D T N P T U J A O S C C
N N I Y B R F I E F S A O L
B N L E A R N H O N Z F M A
E O E M T F L F E N M E F I
K N N V H A J N G R A U O C
T H K D T Z V I E I U L R O
Q O U N E R O L P X E C T S
P Q E J F B I H Q Q G Y E X
L M J F F J I M F D G I D S
K A T T A C H M E N T J D M
K O J R K F V C T M H J F M

ATTACHMENT
BOND
COMFORT
EMOTIONAL
EXPLORE
FOCUS
LEARN
MENTAL HEALTH
ROUTINE
SAFE
SECURE
SOCIAL

Useful Websites and Phone Numbers

Florida Association of Infant Mental Health

The mission of the Association is to improve children's social and emotional development. Website contains newsletters and resources. www.faimh.org

Early Steps

Florida's early intervention system that offers services to infants and toddlers (birth to 36 months) with significant delays or a condition likely to result in a developmental delay. www.doh.state.fl.us/AlternateSites/cms-kids/families/early_steps/early_steps.html
1-800-654-4440

National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families: Zero to Three

Informs, trains and supports professionals and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. Their mission is to promote the health and development of infants and toddlers. www.zerotothree.org

"Young children are telling us by their behavior that the world they are experiencing is overwhelming to them. Their 'SOS' signals are demonstrated through tantrums, noncompliance to adult requests, frequent anger, fear of being alone, poor attention, sleeping problems, over-activity and 'too easily falls apart' that are beyond the typical expected behaviors of children."

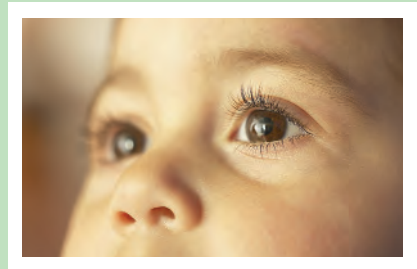
California Institute for Mental Health



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1785 NW 80th Blvd., Gainesville, FL 32606
Tel: (352) 313-6500 | Fax: (352) 313-6515
www.centralhealthystart.org

If you would like a presentation or more information regarding Healthy Start, contact your local Community Liaison:

Blaire Peterson
(352) 228-9047
bpeterson@wellflorida.org



Setting the Stage for Emotional and Social Growth

There are many ways parents can nurture their child's emotional and social growth.

- Smile, laugh, sing and talk to the baby.
- Comfort and reassure the little one when he or she is scared, angry or hurt.
- Learn the baby's "signals" and respond appropriately.
- Spend time with the baby that is free of interruption and distraction.
- Have daily routines. These help babies feel secure and to learn what is expected; for example, at nighttime parents may have a routine of bath, story time and bedtime.
- Set the example of how to have good relationships and to manage conflict.

- Have consistency in the baby's caregivers at home and at child care.
- Learn about the stages of child development.

Many of these activities are natural and instinctive to loving parents. It's exciting to know that just loving and caring for one's baby is the best way to make sure he or she has a great start in life.



Did You Know?

Early experience actually affects how the complex connections of the brain are wired. This means that the baby's brain is changed for good or ill by whether or not its infant mental health needs are met during the first three years of life.



SAY "YES" TO A HEALTHY START FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY!

Healthy Start services cover conception through maternal care for mothers and infancy-to-age-three children. In the early stages of your pregnancy, ask to be screened for Healthy Start services. After your baby is born, be sure to have your newborn screened for Healthy Start services at the hospital or birth center.