



8 AREAS OF FOCUS TO PROMOTE INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN'S SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING



We all have a role to play in promoting and protecting the mental well-being of infants, young children and their families: a resource for service providers.

Use this resource to:

- Increase awareness of the importance of the early years in providing the foundation for mental health and well-being.
- Orientate, educate and align a shared understanding of factors that contribute to optimal social-emotional development.
- Tailor marketing and/or communication strategies promoting social-emotional well-being.

Our Kids Network Early Years Mental Health Committee: Prenatal to 6 years-old.



Halton Early Years Mental Health Committee

The Halton Early Years Mental Health Committee (EYMHC) is a cross-sector collaboration of service providers who work with infants/young children and their families.

The committee's vision is that families are strong and stable, emotionally healthy and equipped to nurture their children so that they are ready to learn and reach their full potential.

To meet this goal the EYMHC has developed a comprehensive Early Years Mental Health Toolkit for service providers working with infants/young children and their families.

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The Early Years Mental Health Toolkit

The Halton EYMH Toolkit is a resource to build the capacity of providers to promote the mental well-being of infants, young children and their families.

The toolkit includes:

- An evidence-based Common Message paper
- 8 areas of focus that promote healthy social-emotional development
- An interactive Community Model of Care
- Recommendations for screening & assessment
- Tools and resources that take a deeper look at promoting the social-emotional well-being of infants and young children

**Explore the Early Years Mental Health Toolkit
at ourkidsnetwork.ca/EYMHToolkit**

HALTON EARLY YEARS MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

8 Areas of Focus For Healthy Social-Emotional Development of Infants/Young Children



Brain Development & the Environment

Nurturing environments help to shape the developing brain.

The foundation for healthy brain development starts prenatally and is influenced by genes, experiences and the child's environment. Positive caring relationships and healthy, stimulating environments help to shape the developing brain and influence gene expression with positive outcomes seen through to adulthood.



Stress & Brain Development

Toxic stress interferes with healthy brain development.

Stress is a normal part of healthy development. However, toxic stress in childhood has the potential to interfere with healthy brain development. Supportive and caring relationships help to buffer the effects of stress for children.



Executive Function & Self-regulation

Executive function and self-regulation are a child's 'air traffic' control systems.

Executive function and self-regulation helps children to manage emotions, control impulses, plan and prioritize, stay on task, problem solve and master new skills such as numeracy and literacy skills. A child's capacity to develop these 'systems' is dependent upon caregivers who can model these skills within safe and supportive environments.



Temperament

A child's 'temperament' can change over time.

A child's emerging dispositions such as their activity level, emotional expression, attention and self-regulation are the result of complex interactions between genes, biology and environmental factors. It is important for caregivers to understand their child's natural strengths and adopt caregiving strategies that build on those strengths so they can thrive in different environments.



Resilience in infants/young children is fostered through healthy relationships, supportive communities and the prevention of adversity.

Resilience is not a 'fixed trait'; it can be promoted, strengthened and compromised throughout the lifespan. A person's ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity is dependent upon the presence of protective factors within themselves, their relationships and the society in which they live.



Positive Caring Relationships

Positive, caring relationships in the early years are the 'building blocks' for a child's social-emotional development.

In the early years, responsive adult relationships affect brain architecture through reciprocal serve and return interactions. Warm and responsive caregivers lead to greater social competence, fewer behavioural problems and enhanced thinking and reasoning in a young child.



Attachment

Consistent and responsive caregiving fosters secure attachment in infants/young children and sets the stage for healthy child development.

An infant/child who is securely attached to their caregiver(s) feels safe, secure, and confident, promoting their exploration of the environment and ability to take on new challenges and experiences necessary for healthy development.



Play

Play is the work of children. Learning happens through play.

Play positively supports children's social-emotional, fine motor, gross motor, cognitive, language and literacy skills. Play has an essential role in building children's resilience across adaptive systems; pleasure, emotion regulation, stress response systems, peer and place attachments, learning and creativity. Integrating play into everyday moments fosters critical skills for learning.

For more detailed information go to [Social-Emotional Development in the Early Years: A Common Message Paper \(2nd, Ed.\)](#), published by the Halton Early Years Mental Health Committee (EYMHC) to provide professionals with common messages on early social-emotional development.

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Brain Development & the Environment

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Take it Further...

Learn about it...

Brain development and the environment (p.8 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Building the foundation of the brain's architecture starts before birth and continues throughout early childhood.

Babies are born with an innate drive to explore their environment and seek proximity to their caregivers.

Healthy development occurs when infants have caregivers who respond to their cues (e.g. babbling, crying) in positive caring ways.

This '[serve and return](#)' process leads to the development of basic brain circuits, upon which more intricate circuits are built.

Sensitive periods in brain development occur in the early years. These 'periods' are dependent on the presence or absence of social experiences which can have significant, lifelong impact on healthy development.

Take a deeper dive.

Watch the following video:

[HOW BRAINS ARE BUILT: CORE STORY OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT](#)

Talk about it...

Tell caregivers and colleagues about brain development and the environment

Nurturing environments:

- Provide children with healthy, nutritious food.
- Are safe and free of chemical toxins.
- Are full of positive caring relationships that promote positive social interactions.
- Have caregivers that use behaviour management strategies that are; non-hurtful, age appropriate and promote the social-emotional development of young children.

The following video illustrates the important role positive social interactions with caregivers have on a child's healthy brain development:

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[Still Face Experiment: Dr. Edward Tronick](#)

Try it... Move from knowledge to practice

Encourage caregivers to create nurturing environments by:

- Understanding and responding sensitively to their [child's cues](#).
- Providing comfort and reassurance when their child is scared, hungry, tired, angry or sick.
- Developing routines that promote predictability and security.
- Using the [Looksee Checklist](#) (NDDS) to:
 - learn about and track their child's development,
 - form realistic expectations of their child,
 - identify age appropriate activities.
- Modelling healthy relationships and conflict management.
- Learning [stress management techniques](#) and modelling self-care so that they are better able to be emotionally present with their child.

Introduce caregivers to the [Developmental Asset](#) framework and the many supportive activities that promote nurturing environments and experiences.

Encourage caregivers to sign up for the free [Daily Vroom App](#) to learn how to make the most of everyday moments. Learn more about the Daily Vroom App at: [Become a Brain Builder today with the Daily Vroom App!](#)

Review ['Making the Most of Playtime'](#) for further ideas on how families can create nurturing environments for infants/young children.

Refer families to their local EarlyON Child and Family Centre, YMCA, Parks & Recreation Centre and/or library for programs and services that provide stimulating activities for infants/young children and their families.

Encourage caregivers to consider participating in parenting education programs to learn about strategies that promote positive behaviour and how to manage challenging behaviour.



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ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development
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Community Living Burlington

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Executive Function & Self-regulation

Executive function and self-regulation are a child's 'air traffic' control systems.

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Take it Further...

Learn about it...

Executive function & self-regulation (p.12 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Executive function encompasses a number of high-level cognitive skills such as inhibitory control, working memory and cognitive flexibility.

These foundational skills are essential for regulating more advanced emotions and skills such as:

- focus and attention,
- planning and goal setting,
- rule following,

- problem solving,
- impulse control,
- delaying gratification.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video.

[EXECUTIVE FUNCTION](#)

Talk about it...

Tell caregivers and colleagues about executive function and self-regulation

Executive function is the brain's "air traffic control" system. It helps children to simultaneously plan, monitor and manage multiple streams of information.

Self-regulation refers to how efficiently and effectively a child can handle and recover from stress.

Being able to manage and recover from stress creates the conditions necessary for a child to focus their attention and develop executive function skills.

Executive function and self-regulation promote other essential life skills that children need to succeed such as literacy and numeracy skills, working well with others and applying different rules in different settings.

Developing these skills is a long-term process which starts during infancy and continues to develop well into adulthood.

Language acquisition plays an important role in the development of executive function and self-regulation, as it helps children to:

- Label and reflect on their thoughts, feelings and actions.
- Make plans that they hold in their mind and implement.
- Understand and follow increasingly complex rules regarding their behaviour such as; getting along with others and engaging in play.

Try it... Moving from knowledge to practice

Encourage caregivers to:

1. Reduce children's stress.

Ensure that children have slept well, are fed and have opportunities to be active.

Limit and/or remove external stressors and stimulation such as television, radio, video games.

For some children, aids such as play dough to squeeze can be calming when stressed.

Protect children from toxic stress. Toxic stress redirects the brain's focus towards rapid stress responses, instead of planning and impulse control, negatively impacting executive function (Centre of the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016).

2. Teach healthy coping strategies when children are calm. Help children manage stress by reading them stories such as '[Tucker the Turtle Takes Time to Tuck and Think](#)', practicing yoga and/or '[mindfulness](#)' so when stress comes their way they are better able to cope.

3. Give children opportunities to practise and strengthen executive function skills by:

- Providing a safe and supportive environment in which to learn and grow.
- Taking turns, managing transitions (e.g. stop one activity then start another) and staying on task.
- Problem solving through active and pretend play, conversation, storytelling and board games.
- Developing their 'working memory' through prompts such as 'first we do this....before we do that' and using visual schedules.
- Referring to the guide book: [Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence](#) for further ideas.

4. Ensure children are on track with their development. Complete the [Looksee Checklist](#) and/or other validated developmental screening tools. Seek help if a child is struggling in one or more areas of development.

5. Model executive function skills and self-regulation.



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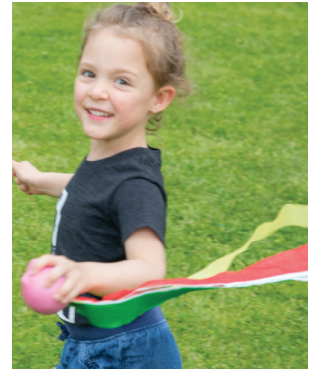
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Resiliency

Resilience in infants/young children children is fostered through healthy relationships, supportive communities and the prevention of adversity.

Resilience is not a 'fixed trait'; it can be promoted, strengthened or compromised throughout the lifespan. A person's ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity is dependent upon the presence of protective factors within themselves, their relationships and the society in which they live.



Take it Further...

Learn about it... Resiliency (p.17 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Resiliency is the ability to 'bounce back' from life's inevitable pressures and hard times.

Resiliency helps us to handle stress, overcome childhood disadvantage, recover from trauma, reach out to others and learn and grow from life's experiences.

Access to stable, supportive, caring relationships is central to a child's ability to develop resiliency.

With the help of supportive caregivers, positive stress experiences can be 'growth promoting'.

The capacity for developing resiliency can be strengthened at any age.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following videos:

[InBrief: What is Resilience?](#)

[InBrief: The Science of Resilience.](#)

[InBrief: How Resilience is Built](#)

Play the [resilience game](#) and learn how you can build resiliency in your community.

Familiarize yourself with the self-regulation resources found online at the [Canadian Self-regulation Initiative](#) which can help promote resiliency in infants/young children.



Talk about it... Tell caregivers and colleagues about resiliency

Resilient individuals are:

- Healthier and live longer
- Happier in their relationships
- Less prone to depression
- More successful in work/school.

Children are more likely to be resilient when they have:

- Strong, supportive adults in their lives who model resiliency, both within the home and their community.
- A faith base and engage in cultural traditions.
- A positive outlook including coping strategies, self-regulation and positive thinking habits.

Children need opportunities to develop the following inner strengths to support their resiliency:

- A sense of self-efficacy and control over what happens to them
- Confidence in their developing abilities
- Responsibility for making age appropriate contributions to family life.

Try it... Moving from knowledge to practice

Encourage caregivers to:

Nurture and strengthen faith and cultural traditions as a means of building resiliency and responding to adversity.

Learn about [Mindful Parenting](#) (may take a while to open this link).

Explore the [Resiliency Resources for Parents](#) which includes videos and parent friendly tip sheets on the following:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Caring Relationships | Positive Role Models |
| • Community Supports | Self-control |
| • Thinking Skills | Confidence |
| • Positive Outlook | Responsibility & Participation |

Check out the [Kids Have Stress Too! Tool Box Activities](#). A series of downloadable tip sheets that help promote positive coping/adaptive strategies in young children.

Build [Developmental Assets® \(DA\)](#) in young children. DA are the positive experiences that all children need in order to reach their full potential...the more they have, the more likely they are to thrive.

Support families by:

Address [health equity](#). Interventions focused on improving living conditions and addressing social and economic disparities, Social Determinants of Health, can foster resiliency in individuals, families and communities.

[Halton's Service Coordination Model](#) is a first step in addressing health inequity and promoting resiliency.

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Attachment

Consistent and responsive caregiving fosters secure attachment in a infants/young children and sets the stage for healthy child development.

An infant/young child who is securely attached to their caregiver(s) feels safe, secure, and confident, promoting their exploration of the environment and ability to take on new challenges and experiences necessary for healthy development.



Take it Further...

Learn about it... Attachment (p.21 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Attachment is the emotional bond between a caregiver and their infant/young child.

Secure attachment is formed when the caregiver consistently responds to the infant/child's needs (e.g. when infant is tired, hungry, frightened, sick or hurt).

Responsive and consistent caregiving teaches infants/young children that their needs will be met, leading to a sense of overall trust and security.

Secure attachment sets the stage for a child's learning and development by helping them to feel confident to explore their environment.

Talk about it... Tell caregivers and colleagues about attachment

You can't spoil a infant/child by attending to their needs e.g. picking them up when they cry, comforting them when they get hurt, soothing them when they are scared or sick.

Ways of communicating an unmet need can include: seeking physical closeness, crying, temper tantrum.

Responding to those needs builds trust and can lead to secure attachment with their child.

Children who are securely attached are:

- Confident.
- Better able to learn.
- Able to cope with stress more effectively.
- Likely to have less behaviour problems.
- More likely to have stronger social skills.

Culture & attachment:

The need for attachment is universal however, the way in which it is fostered by caregivers, families and children varies across cultures. Culture cannot be altered to be 'optimal' for development, but it is important to understand that culture provides the context for children's social and emotional development.

Culture affects a caregiver's decisions such as when and how children are fed, where they sleep, acceptable childcare arrangements, response to stressful situations, rules for discipline, and role expectations for the child and themselves. Understanding the beliefs and values on which different attachment practices are based, is fundamental in providing culturally relevant support to caregivers and their children.

Try it... Move from knowledge to practice

Engage in '[serve and return](#)'. Being responsive to a young child's cues (babbling, gestures, cries) and needs helps to build neural connections in their child's brain, strengthening their relationship.

Create a '[circle of security](#)' by allowing their child to explore the world, encouraging independence but welcoming them back when they need to be comforted.

Follow the child's lead, interact with them consistently and guide their behaviour.

When working with infants/young children adopt a 'family perspective' taking into account each caregiver's contribution to the attachment relationship.

Learn about different cultures and caregiving practices (e.g. attachment, feeding, sleep, toilet learning, child development and play) while understanding that families are unique and differ within cultures.

Share these resources with caregivers to promote healthy attachment.

[Comfort Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting Every Day](#)

Tipsheets with activities and experiences that are practical, easy-to-understand.

[My Child and I. Attachment for Life](#)

Helps caregivers to understand the principles of attachment and learn ways to promote attachment.



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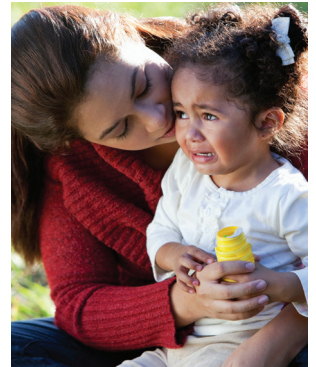
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Stress & Brain Development

Toxic stress interferes with healthy brain development.

Stress is a normal part of healthy development. However, toxic stress in childhood has the potential to interfere with healthy brain development. Supportive and caring relationships help to buffer the effects of stress for children.



Take it Further...

Learn about it...

Toxic stress and brain development (p.10 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Stress can have varying impact on the architecture of a child's developing brain.

Positive stress teaches problem solving and coping skills and is part of healthy child development. A child might experience positive stress when separating from their caregiver or on their first day of school.

Tolerable stress is a more serious temporary response to a stressor, such as a loss of a loved one or cherished pet. It can activate the body's stress response system to a greater degree with the potential for negatively impacting the architecture of the developing brain.

Toxic stress is the result of the prolonged and reoccurring activation of the stress response system. It can originate from [early adverse experiences \(ACE\)](#) which occur within the caregiving relationship, including but not limited to poverty, parental depression, intimate partner violence, abuse and neglect.

Exposure to toxic stress can permanently alter the brain architecture of the child and have lifelong implications for their health, learning and well-being.

Positive caring relationships help children learn to manage and cope with positive stress and buffer them from the impact of both tolerable and toxic stress.

Children exposed to environments of abuse and neglect before birth and in the first few years of life are at the greatest risk for compromised brain development. In the absence of protective relationships even small amounts of stress have the potential to derail healthy brain development.

Early interventions should:

- Teach families healthy coping strategies
- Eliminate sources of stress where possible
- Mitigate the impact of stress
- Strengthen caregiver-child relationships.

Talk about it... Tell caregivers and colleagues about stress and brain development

Learning to cope with stress and adversity is a normal part of healthy child development. Early experiences shape how young children respond and adapt to stressors. This response becomes hardwired and difficult to change as children grow into adulthood.

The brain develops within the context of relationships. Relationships can either relieve stress or be a further source of stress.

Children are competent and capable of managing everyday stress when given the tools and opportunities to practice healthy coping strategies.

For learning to happen children need to be [calm, alert and happy](#) – they must be able to manage stress and distractions. This requires a caregiver to be calm, present and emotionally available to help children manage their emotions.

Children do not always have the words to tell us that they are stressed so we need to ‘tune’ into how they are feeling and/or behaving.

Try it... Moving from knowledge to practice

Be aware of children’s stressors:

- 1. Physical:** hungry, tired and the physical environment such as too noisy or visually distracting.
- 2. Emotional:** strong positive or negative emotions such as extremely excited, mad, or separating from caregiver.
- 3. Cognitive:** learning new skills or problem solving.
- 4. Social:** getting along with others or taking turns.
- 5. Pro-social:** being empathetic and dealing with others’ stress.

Read the signs that a child may need help coping with stress.

Acknowledge their feelings – ‘name it to tame it’.

Help children to recognize when they are stressed and when they are calm.

Provide coaching and modeling on how to be ‘mindful’ when stressed and how to return to feeling calm.

Check in with your own stress! Take measures to reduce your own sources of stress.

Use these stress management resources/tools found on [Kids Have Stress Too!](#) ...they are free for downloading.

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Temperament

A child's 'temperament' can change over time.

A child's emerging dispositions such as their activity level, emotional expression, attention and self-regulation are the result of complex interactions between genes, biology and environmental factors. It is important for caregivers to understand their child's natural strengths and adopt caregiving strategies that build on those strengths so they can thrive in different environments.



Take it Further...

Learn about it... A child's temperament is not fixed (p.15 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Temperament traits are early, developing 'dispositions' in the areas of activity, affectivity, attention and self-regulation.

These 'dispositions' are a result of genetic, biological and environmental factors, inclusive of the [environment of relationships](#) and culture, working together throughout a child's development.

For example, temperament is influenced by both affective (e.g. emotional responses) and cognitive (e.g. attention and inhibitory control) processing 'systems' which are highly integrated and dependent upon one another.

By the preschool years as these two 'systems' develop and 'stabilize' they change the expression of more reactive temperament traits e.g. as children develop more complex executive function skills they are better able to modify their activity level, manage emotions and stay on task.

Revisiting the concept of 'goodness of fit':

Previously experts in the field recommended that caregivers adjust 'caregiving practises' to better support their child's unique way of responding to the world. This approach was referred to as 'goodness of fit'.

However, today's research suggests that we would better serve children by helping them accommodate and adjust to different 'environments' by scaffolding them (providing guidance and support) rather than changing the 'environment' itself.

Research has shown that there is a strong connection between temperament and a wide variety of critical life outcomes; relationships, academic achievement, health, and psychopathology.

Self-regulation and executive function can influence the expression of a child's temperament.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video: [What Problems Can Child Temperament Cause?](#)

Familiarize yourself with the many resources found online at the [Canadian Self-regulation Initiative](#) & [The Centre on the Developing Child Harvard University](#) that support building children's capacity for self-regulation.

Talk about it... Tell caregivers and colleagues about temperament

It is important to understand:

That there are no good or bad temperaments.

An adult's temperament can affect their interactions with their child. For example, for an outgoing caregiver it may be difficult to have a child who is shy.

A child's temperament can change over time.

Helping children develop self-regulation and executive function skills can greatly influence the expression of temperament traits at either end of the continuum (e.g. extremely sensitive, extremely reactive).

Children need caregivers to:

- Be aware of differences in temperament.
- Avoid labelling a child's temperament (e.g. 'She is so shy') as over time, what was a 'tendency' can in fact become how a child defines themselves.
- 'Scaffold' (e.g. guide and support) their child to help them to successfully manage situations that are experienced as stressful.

Try it... Moving from knowledge to practice

Encourage caregivers to:

Complete an online [interactive temperament tool](#)! This tool can help:

- Find solutions to everyday caregiving challenges.
- Develop insight into their [caregiving style](#).
- Raise awareness of their child's thoughts and feelings that might be impacting their behaviour.

Create opportunities for children to develop self-regulation and executive function skills.

'Scaffold' a shy or anxious child through a potentially stressful, new experience. For example:

- Prepare their child ahead of time by telling them what they can expect.
- Stay close to their child as they introduce them to the new experience.

- Talk with their child about what they see/hear in a reassuring manner.
- Model positive interactions with other people by introducing themselves and their child to others.
- Engage their child in an activity they enjoy.
- Invite other children to play along with them as their child becomes more comfortable in the new setting.
- Praise their child for making a new friend and conquering their fears!

Video: Dan Siegel on how to nurture and "scaffold" a shy child:

[Dan Siegel - Use Mind Sight to Nurture a Shy Child](#)

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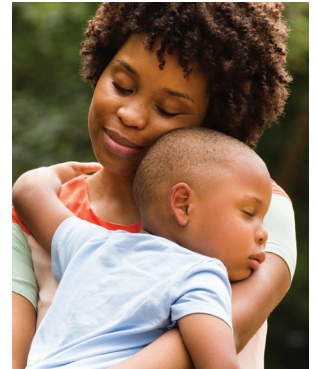
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Positive Caring Relationships

Positive, caring relationships in the early years are the ‘building blocks’ for a child’s social-emotional development.

In the early years, responsive adult relationships affect brain architecture through reciprocal serve and return interactions. Warm and responsive caregiving leads to greater social competence, fewer behavioural problems and enhanced thinking and reasoning in a young child.



Take it Further...

Learn about it... Positive caring relationships (p.19 EYMH Common Message Paper)

All children are born into families with certain beliefs, values and expectations related to child behaviour and development. Early childhood caregiving practices differ across cultures and influence how children are raised. Despite some differences there are key common themes across all cultures.

Positive caring relationships in the early years are the building blocks for children’s social and emotional development. They guide how children learn about the world and set the stage for all other relationships in a child’s life. Children can never have too many positive caring adults in their lives.

Strong, supportive and responsive adult relationships are linked to a number of positive outcomes in children including:

- Resilience
- Self-confidence
- Mental well-being
- Impulse control
- Motivation to learn
- Problem solving
- Develop empathy
- Ability to develop and sustain friendships.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video.
[Serve & Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry](#)

Talk about it... Tell caregivers and colleagues about positive caring relationships

Children’s social and emotional health starts to develop during the prenatal period and is dependent on having close relationships with caring adults.

When children feel safe and secure they are better positioned to learn. Warm and supportive caregiving leads to children with greater social competence, fewer behavioural problems and enhanced thinking and reasoning skills.

A child’s healthy social-emotional development influences how a child:

- thinks and feels about himself and others,
- learns how to manage their emotions in positive ways.

Everyone has a role to play in helping infants/young children to feel safe, secure and thrive.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video.
[Family Relationships Matter: The First Six Years](#)

Try it... Move from knowledge to practice

Encourage caregivers to:

- Respond to their child's needs (e.g. comfort them when they are tired, hungry, sick, upset or just need to be close).
- Provide a safe place for their child to explore and develop their skills.
- Follow their child's lead, interact with them, guide their behaviour and share in their fun!
- Use positive discipline to deal with challenging behaviour and teach children how to behave instead.
- Take time for themselves.

Share the following resources with caregivers and discuss how these resources can help them to build a healthy relationship with their child:

- [Family Assets](#)
- [Developmental Relationships](#)
- [Interactive Temperament Tool](#)
- [My Child and I Attachment for Life](#)
- [Healthy Babies Healthy Brain](#)
- [A Simple Gift](#)
- [The First Years Last Forever](#)



For more detailed information go to [Social-Emotional Development in the Early Years: A Common Message Paper \(2nd. Ed.\)](#), published by the Halton Early Years Mental Health Committee (EYMHC) to provide professionals with common messages on early social-emotional development.

EYMH Committee members:

Halton Region Health Department
Halton Region Social and Community Services
Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK)
Halton Children's Aid Society

ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development
EarlyON Child and Family Centres
Community Living Burlington

Our Kids Network (OKN) and EYMHC work in partnership to manage the [Early Years Mental Health Toolkit](#) on the OKN website.



Play

Play is the work of children. Learning happens through play.

Play positively supports children's social-emotional, fine motor, gross motor, cognitive, language and literacy skills. Play has an essential role in building children's resilience across adaptive systems; pleasure, emotion regulation, stress response systems, peer and place attachments, learning and creativity. Integrating play into everyday moments fosters critical skills for learning.



Take it Further...

Learn about it... The importance of play (p.23 EYMH Common Message Paper)

Play is universal.

It can take various forms: structured and unstructured, active or exploratory, with peers, adults or independently.

Play creates opportunities for children to develop early literacy, mathematical, thinking, problem solving, and social skills.

Culture impacts how play is viewed and valued.

Children learn about their culture through play as they create worlds that mirror their own.

A growing body of research shows that the skills important to school success are enhanced by play. For example, pretend play is related to children's abilities to begin to think abstractly and develop empathy.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[Brains At Play](#)

Talk about it... Tell caregivers and colleagues about play

Play:

- Supports healthy brain development.
- Builds healthy relationships.
- Develops children's physical literacy (strength, agility and coordination).
- Nurtures creativity and problem solving skills.
- Promotes essential social-emotional skills such as taking turns, sharing, cooperating, getting along with others, developing empathy and care for others.

- Creates opportunities to master new skills helping children to feel competent and capable.
- Fosters resiliency.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[The importance of play](#)

Try it... Moving from knowledge to practice

Create safe environments for children to play. Allow them to explore and learn about themselves and the world around them.

Structured and unstructured, both indoors and outdoors.

Integrate play into everyday activities. For example, counting apples while grocery shopping or by playing 'I spy my little eye!' on the car ride home.

Follow the child's lead and support their exploration.

Use what is found in the child's environment to provide playful experiences. Items such as large boxes cardboard rolls encourage imaginative play, after all...it is just [not a box!](#)

Provide play materials that allow children to see themselves and their culture in the materials i.e. books, dolls, posters, play food etc.

Download free APPs that provide practical ideas that promote learning through play:

- [Zero to Three – Let's Play!](#)
- [Daily Vroom APP.](#)

Refer to '[How does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)' and reflect on how you can strengthen program activities and your interactions with families/children through play.

- Direct caregivers to the [Healthy Baby Healthy Brain](#) website to learn how everyday play can build healthy brains.

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[Healthy Baby Healthy Brain: Playing Builds Brains](#)



For more detailed information go to [Social-Emotional Development in the Early Years: A Common Message Paper \(2nd. Ed.\)](#), published by the Halton Early Years Mental Health Committee (EYMHC) to provide professionals with common messages on early social-emotional development.

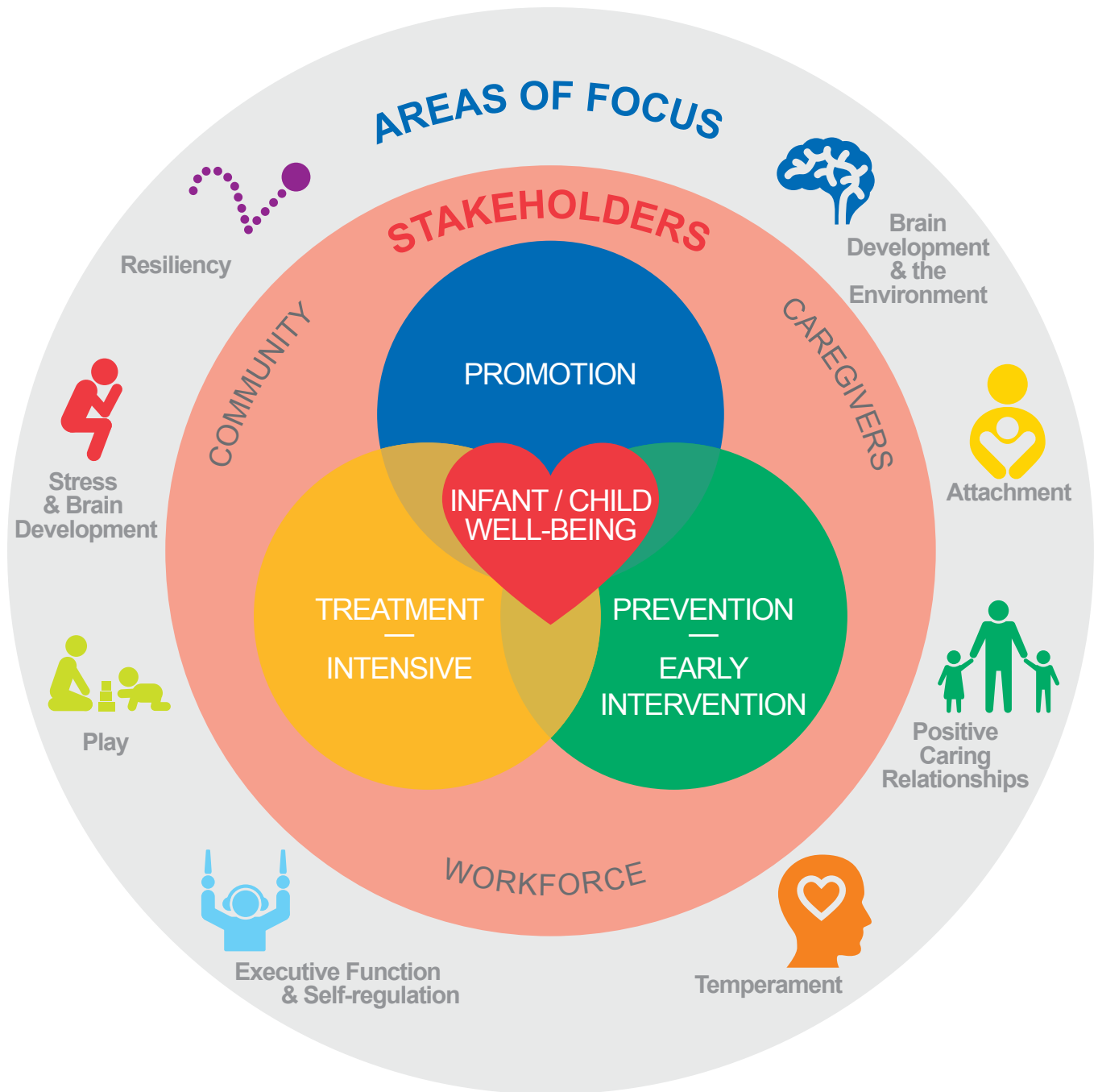
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HALTON EARLY YEARS MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT COMMUNITY MODEL



The Halton Community Model of Care reflects the full continuum of early years mental health services and supports: promotion, prevention and intervention.

Visit ourkidsnetwork.ca/EYMHToolkit to access this exciting new resource.

Social-Emotional Development in the Early Years: A Common Message Paper 2nd ed.



This important, comprehensive resource describes the factors that contribute to the healthy social and emotional development of infants/young children and how that process unfolds.

Download the Common Message Paper 2nd ed. at ourkidsnetwork.ca/EYMHToolkit

Explore the Early Years Mental Health Toolkit at ourkidsnetwork.ca/EYMHToolkit

Early Years Mental Health Toolkit

Building the capacity of providers.

Early Years Mental Health Committee

Cross-sector collaboration of Halton service providers.

Community Model

Tools and resources to promote the healthy social-emotional development of infants/young children.

8 Areas of Focus for Healthy Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Young Children

Eight areas of focus critical to healthy social-emotional development.

Screening and Assessment

Information on universal screening and assessment of infants/young children's social-emotional well-being.

Take it Further

Tools and resources for promoting the social-emotional well-being of infants and young children.

Our Kids Network Early Years Mental Health Committee: Prenatal to 6 years-old.

