

TINY BITS (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER) FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
AUGUST 2023 TINY BIT

Yes, Mental Health Includes Babies

The First Three Years Set the Stage for Lifelong Success

Optimal child development, including during the perinatal period, is based on feeling safe, secure, and loved.

A warm smile. A familiar song. A gentle touch. With each positive interaction, babies develop important neural pathways that shape their future social-emotional and cognitive functioning.

Brain development in the prenatal and first three years of life advances at rates that exceed any other time period. This window of infancy and early childhood provides optimal opportunities to build healthy brain development, support the earliest relationships, and promote infant and early childhood mental health.

Research has consistently found that securely attached children experience better relationships with their parents and peers, heightened optimism, stronger self-esteem and enhanced problem-solving abilities. This is why early identification and intervention is key when it comes to infant and early childhood mental health. This includes understanding and identifying both protective and risk factors in pregnancy and the early postnatal period.

A few signs to look for may include:

- No eye contact at 3 months of age.
- Not attempting to communicate needs and wants at 12 months of age.
- Not walking independently by 18 months of age.
- Preference to play alone all the time at 3 years of age.

Earlier identification and intervention can make the difference

The perinatal period and a baby's first few years of life are critical for lifelong mental health. Early identification and intervention for children with developmental delays or disabilities can improve cognitive and social skills, lead to higher achievement and greater independence and promote family competence and well-being.

If you are concerned about your child, what should you do?

If you suspect a developmental delay, it is important that you talk to your child's pediatrician and discuss the possible need for early intervention services. Early intervention is a system that assesses children ages 0-3 for developmental delays or disabilities. The focus is on helping children acquire the typical developmental skills which develop in the first three years of life.

Excerpts: [Early Development | ZERO TO THREE](#)
[Yes, Mental Health Includes Babies | ZERO TO THREE](#)
[Identifying Children with Special Needs - Penfield Building Blocks](#)

