

VIRGINIA
INFANT & TODDLER SPECIALIST
NETWORK

“Achieving Excellence in Early Care”
www.va-itsnetwork.org



Infant and Toddler Social Emotional Wellness

When we think about healthy beginnings for infants and toddlers, we may often think of nutrition and a safe environment. However, we should also think of nurturing and supportive interactions with the caregivers in the lives of those children, including parents, grandparents, and child care professionals. Warm, supportive interactions are critical for emotional and mental wellness later in life. Early-life stressors can affect brain development and cause developmental delays, which might include emotional challenges. For infants and toddlers to reach their full potential, there are five points caregivers need to understand about mental wellness in early life.



Infants experience a variety of emotions. Infants as young as six months of age can begin to notice and react to moods of adults around them. Infants can experience various emotions, including happiness, sadness, fear, and express basic intentional behaviors.

Early, constructive connections support long-term emotional health.

Brain development largely depends on the interactions between infants and the caregivers responsible for them. An infant can gain a sense of predictability about their environment by receiving continuous responsive, comforting, and supporting interactions from their caregivers. This sense of predictability gives the infant the courage to explore and grow their independence. However, if this environment is lacking, the infant may have a weaker foundation for emotional development since they do not view the caregiver as dependable or supportive. A child's ability to create a healthy self-image starts in infancy and depends heavily on their early years.

It is essential to have realistic and appropriate expectations about how young children will develop. Emotional development is just as important as verbal, physical, or cognitive growth. To ensure that the caregivers' expectations of infants and toddlers are reasonable and that deficits, if any, are recognized, they should be aware of general social-emotional milestones. You can download a [milestone tracker app](#) and a [developmental milestones checklist](#) from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to your mobile device. The [CDC's Developmental Milestones](#) is another tool that offers tips and guidance on what to expect concerning the healthy emotional development of infants and toddlers.

Parents and other caregivers need to be aware of their emotional health and seek support as needed. Both the requirements of the infants and toddlers in care and the caregiver's own mental health needs must be considered. Infants and toddlers whose caregivers have mental illness are generally at a higher risk of developing social-emotional problems because of their interactions with the caregivers.

Young children are resilient and, with the proper support, can overcome potentially traumatic situations. Even if an infant has occasionally had negative experiences, repeated, regular, and quality communication between a caregiver and an infant can result in a more secure and stable relationship. Consistency is critical during infancy and early childhood.

Reschke , K. L. (2021). *Rocking and Rolling. Caring for the Mental Health of Infants and Toddlers*. NAEYC. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/spring2021/mental-health-infants-toddlers>.

Resource Spotlight



Early Childhood Mental Health Virginia

(ECMHVA): is a statewide effort that aims to create, implement, and sustain an extensive and coordinated early childhood system of care for

early childhood mental health, supporting children from birth to age five, as well as their families, caregivers, and providers. The Early Childhood Mental initiative works in collaboration with early childhood agencies and representation around the Commonwealth to identify opportunities to expand access to resources and services.

Upcoming Professional Development Opportunity

Celebrating PLAYFUL BABIES & TOTS 2023

Let's start the new year together! Please join us at one of five exciting professional development institutes that will focus on the importance of play and how caregivers can increase positive interactions by incorporating play and joyful learning into daily routines and activities for infants and toddlers.

February 25 - Martinsville
March 4 - Lynchburg
March 25 - Norfolk
April 22 - Charlottesville
May 6 - Dulles

Click [here](#) to register online now!

Did you know...?

The Virginia Infant & Toddler Specialist Network offers a variety of technical assistance services to infant and toddler child care providers in child care centers and family day homes to help support high-quality care. With the support of technical assistance together, we can:



- Strengthen and enhance your infant and toddler program
- Start or expand your infant and toddler program*
- Offer or enhance a breastfeeding area in your program*
- Integrate inclusion practices into your infant and toddler environments*
- Learn about best practices for the care and teaching of the infants and toddlers in your program
- Assist in planning and arranging environments, implementing curriculum, accessing resources, managing children's behaviors, and more

*Materials, resources, and incentives may be available to your program as part of the services provided

We are here to answer questions or assist in any way we can to help each

program meet their unique needs. For questions or more information, please contact [Janet Yang](#), Technical Assistance Coordinator, at 757-378-3167.

Did you know...?

In partnership with Virginia Department of Education, Child Development Resources co-launched Virginia Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) Pilot Program with University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) in 2021.



- ECMH consultants work throughout the Greater Richmond area, Charlottesville, and Albemarle County.
- ECMHC can be delivered remotely, in-person, or through a hybrid approach.
- ECMHC helps early childhood teachers promote healthy social emotional development of children from birth to age five.
- They provide coaching on practices that will improve children's social and emotional development in a classroom or learning environment.
- Consultation can include resources to help children express emotions, form healthy relationships, and regulate their emotions with the support of an adult.
- Consultants work with families who may need extra support to foster children's social emotional skills at home.

Please visit our [website](#) for more information.

For questions or more information, please contact [Lynette Williams](#), Pilot Project Coordinator, at 757-208-0288.



A nonprofit agency changing the lives of babies, toddlers & their families

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