

MENTAL HEALTH



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Tips for Families from the Head Start National Center on Health

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."

