

## We all have mental health... even infants and young children!

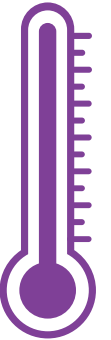
When we talk about infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH), we are talking about a child's ability to:

- Form safe, secure relationships with adults and peers.
- Experience, manage and express a full range of emotions.
- Cope with stressors.



A key part of positive mental health is about the special bond a parent or caregiver has with a child. How we respond to a baby can actually help build the physical brain. Being able to consistently respond in a warm and sensitive way to a baby's needs is **attachment**. A secure attachment promotes the development of healthy relationships and better outcomes in school, work and life.

Each of us has our own way of responding to the world around us. We are born with our own individual personality traits is **temperament**. Understanding yourself and discovering who a child is and how they interact with the world can impact mental health.



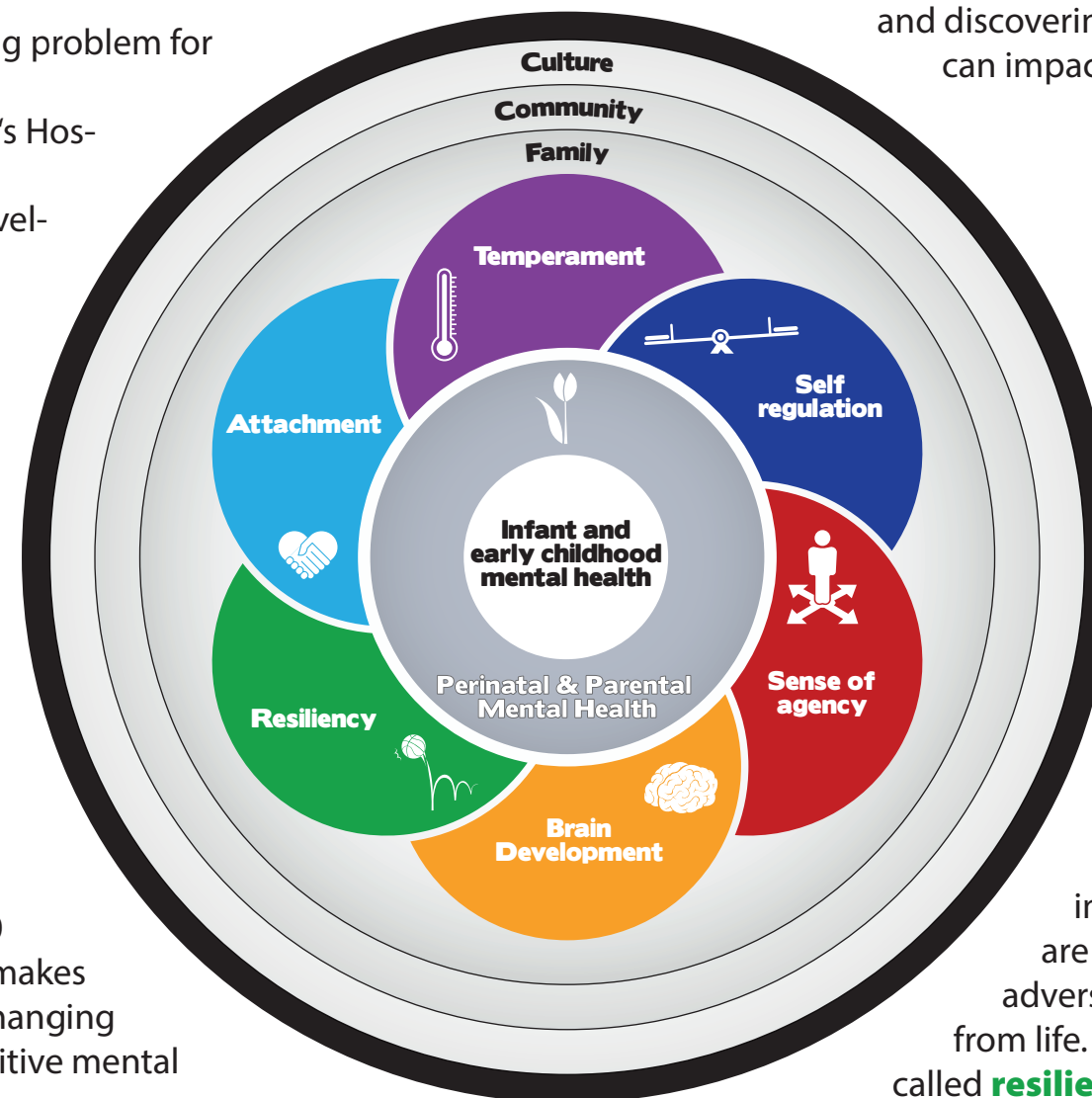
Unfortunately, mental health issues are becoming an increasing problem for many of our children.

- Since 2010, mental health emergency visits at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario have increased by 75%.
- One in four (26%) children in Ottawa are behind in their development as they enter school
- Children who experience high levels of daily stress without a caring supportive adult are at higher risk of depression, suicide attempts, alcohol and drug abuse.

**The good news** is that starting early can change the path of a child's mental health. A child's mental health is impacted by family, community, experiences and culture. Healthy balance in a parent or caregiver's life can help. This includes balancing social, physical, spiritual, economic, and mental health.

IECMH includes several factors, which will help set the stage for who the child will become.

A healthy brain starts to grow during pregnancy. The first 2000 days of life is the most critical time of **brain development**. It makes over 1,000,000 new connections every second and is always changing and developing... so remember it's never too late to build positive mental health!



Every parent or caregiver wants the best for their child. Although it may be hard to see a child go through stress, in small doses can be a good thing... in fact it is part of learning key skills for positive mental health. Providing a safe space for a child to learn and explore through play is key. Being able to try things for ourselves and explore choices safely is **sense of agency**. How well we are able to deal with stressors and get back to being ourselves is **self-regulation**. It takes time to learn and develop.

A child will look to you to learn how to cope with stress and build this important skill. There



are times in everyone's life where we go through periods of adversity or hardships. There is no way to completely remove stress from life. Being able to bounce back from adversity in a positive way is called **resiliency**.

Life can be stressful. Just remember: Pause. Moments matter in the life of a child. Learn more about what you can do to support and model positive mental health for your child.



**1 MILLION NEW BRAIN CONNECTIONS**