




**Helping Child Care Teachers Nurture  
Early Childhood Mental Health**

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**Social & Emotional Competence**  
From FAN - The Child Mental Health Foundations & Agencies Network

- Confidence
- Friendliness
- Good peer relationships
- Tackles & persists at challenging tasks
- Has good language development
- Effectively communicates frustrations, anger & joy
- Listens to instructions & is attentive




Early childhood mental health is not the absence of mental illness but rather the presence of a feeling of safety and emotional security, comfort in connecting with trusted others, confidence in ones developmental trajectory, an expectation that dependency needs will be met, and an assumption of one's right to move, explore and communicate.



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**The Context for Mental Health**

Care provided in safe, interesting, and intimate settings where children have the time and opportunity to establish and sustain secure and trusting relationships with other children and with knowledgeable caregivers who are responsive to their needs and interests.



**Traditional Markers of Quality**

- Small Groups
- Low Ratios
- Caregiver Training
- Enriched & Safe Environments Caregiver Stability

### Quality of Care for Infants and Toddlers

Quality of care ultimately boils down to the quality of the relationship between the child care provider or teacher and the child.”

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development.*

Emotional competence establishes the foundation for success in all other developmental domains. It is the pleasure and delight that babies get from interaction with people that drive them to relate to people more frequently and more skillfully. Emotional motive drives skill development.

Stanley Greenspan

### Emotions Driving Learning

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### Steps to Being Held in Another’s Mind

- Attachment to a significant other.
- Feeling of loss when other is gone.
- Reminded of other’s thoughts about you when not present.
- Incorporation of ongoing emotional connection with those thinking about you.

### The Creation of Shared Meaning

- Individual meaning presented to others.
- Subjective acceptance by others of your point of view.
- Development of concept of common meaning.
- Negotiation of meaning.

### Humans in Relationships Regulate One Another

“The mammalian nervous system depends for its neurophysiologic stability on a system of interactive coordination, wherein steadiness comes from synchronization with nearby attachment figures.”

From “A General Theory of Love” by Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, & Richard Lannon

### Humans in Relationships Regulate One Another

The reciprocal process occurs simultaneously: the first person regulates the physiology of the second, even as he himself is regulated. . . . Together they create a stable, properly balanced pair of organisms.

From "A General Theory of Love" by Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, & Richard Lannon

### From Neurons to Neighborhoods Core Concept #3

The growth of self-regulation is a cornerstone of early childhood development that cuts across all domains of behavior.

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. National Academy of Sciences.

### Emotion Regulation of Infants

“ . . . Effective regulation of the infant is only possible within a supportive caregiving system. . . . By providing appropriate and changing stimulation in response to perceptions of infant state, moods, and interests, caregivers not only help keep arousal within manageable bounds, but they also entrain the infant’s own capacities for regulation.”

Source: Sroufe, L. A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E. A., & Collins, W. A. (2005). *The development of the person: The Minnesota study of risk and adaptation from birth to adulthood*. New York: The Guilford Press.

### Emotion Regulation of Toddlers

“ . . . the adaptation of the toddler period remains fundamentally a dyadic adaptation. . . . as [is] true for infants, toddlers require responsive and consistent involvement by caregivers to remain regulated. . . . [Toddlers] are not capable of self regulation, but within a supportive relationship, they are capable of ‘guided self-regulation’.”

Source: Sroufe, L. A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E. A., & Collins, W. A. (2005). *The development of the person: The Minnesota study of risk and adaptation from birth to adulthood*. New York: The Guilford Press.

### What the Baby Learns about Self from Interaction

- I am listened to or not.
- What I choose to do is valued or it isn’t.
- How I express my emotions is accepted or it isn’t.
- I am allowed to explore or I am not.
- Mostly my needs are met or they are not.

Source: Lally, J. R.

### Definitions of Responsiveness

- Contingent
- Appropriate
- Prompt

Source: Bornstein, M., & Bornstein, H. (1995). Caregivers’ responsiveness and cognitive development in infants and toddlers: Theory and research. In P. L. Mangione (Ed.), *Infant/toddler caregiving: A guide to cognitive development and learning*. Sacramento: CDE Press.

### Responsive, Reciprocal Relationships with Young Children

In a responsive, reciprocal relationship, the adult's image of the child is:

- Someone who is competent for her or his age and stage
- Someone who looks to the adult for nurturance and guidance
- Someone with whom to share meaning
- Someone who is capable of cooperating in a relationship with an adult and who thrives when given the opportunity to do so

### Responsive, Reciprocal Relationships with Young Children

The adult focuses on:

- Dialogue that fosters sharing attention with the child
- Dialogue that is not intrusive or demanding, but gives the child time and space to solve problems
- Dialogue that engages the child in learning and meaning making
- Dialogue that communicates respect

### Power Relationships with Young Children

In a power relationship, the adult's image of the child is:

- Someone who is not yet competent
- Someone who must be controlled
- Someone whose interests or desires are in conflict with the adult's interests, desires, and expectations

### The Importance of Responsiveness in Relationships

“Feeling felt’ may be an essential ingredient in attachment relationships. Having the sense that someone else feels one’s feelings and is able to respond contingently to one’s communication may be vital to close relationships . . . .”

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. New York: The Guilford Press.

### Impact of Responsiveness on Long-Term Development

Responsiveness and sensitivity of care in infancy [is] a major predictor of adaptation from the early infancy period on.

Source: Sroufe, L. A., Egeland, B., Carlson, E. A., & Collins, W. A. (2005). *The development of the person: The Minnesota study of risk and adaptation from birth to adulthood*. New York: The Guilford Press.

### Responsive Relationships are Spontaneous and Resonant

“Two people become companions on a mutually created journey through time. Interpersonal communication can be seen in spontaneous, resonant communication that flows freely and is balanced between continuity, familiarity, and predictability on one side and flexibility, novelty, and uncertainty on the other. Neither partner of a dyad is fully predictable, yet each is quite familiar.”

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. New York: The Guilford Press.