



# Understanding Early Childhood Mental Health: A Practical Guide for Professionals

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Integrating infant mental health services into early education programs leads to better child outcomes and stronger parent–child relationships—the big question is how to do it appropriately and effectively. Clear answers are in this accessible textbook, created to prepare early childhood professionals and programs to weave best practices in mental health into their everyday work.

Ideal for preservice university courses, in-service professional development, and program administrators, this introductory text combines the authoritative guidance of more than a dozen respected mental health and early childhood experts. Professionals will get a **primer on infant mental health**, strengthening their knowledge of key issues such as screening and assessment, attachment, emotional dysregulation and aggression, risk and resilience, maternal depression, and children's exposure to trauma. Then they'll get **practical, research-based guidance** they can use to

- **recognize indicators of mental health problems in very young children**, including emotional dysregulation and behavioral and developmental changes
- **promote parents' and caregivers' mental health** through direct and indirect supports, including regular mental health screening, community partnerships with mental health providers, and parent education
- **build on child and family strengths and mitigate risk factors** such as poverty and violence
- **strengthen parent–child relationships and interaction** through play and effective caregiving routines
- **maintain their own mental health**, building positive relationships with co-workers and reducing the effects of compassion fatigue and secondary stress
- **participate in reflective supervision** to sharpen their ability to think critically and solve problems
- **conduct sound program evaluation** that includes the input of families, staff, and the surrounding culture and community **work effectively with outside mental health consultants** when child and family needs extend beyond the program's scope

With this highly readable introduction to key mental health principles, the next generation of early childhood professionals will fully understand the latest research and best practice—so they can support optimal caregiver-child relationships, enhance professional collaboration, and strengthen child development.

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