

A photograph of a man, a woman, and a young child sitting together on a light-colored couch. The man is on the left, wearing glasses and a white sweater, looking towards the woman. The woman is in the center, smiling and holding the child. The child is on the right, wearing a pink top and looking towards the man. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH?

Early childhood mental health (ECMH) refers to children's developing emotional and social well-being from birth to age 5. It encompasses a child's ability to:

- Form secure and trusting relationships with caregivers
- Manage and express a full range of emotions in a healthy way
- Explore and learn about their environment

WHY IS EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH IMPORTANT?

The early years are crucial for brain development. Positive experiences during this time lay the foundation for strong emotional health, social skills, and future learning. Children with these skills will likely have healthier behaviors, better peer relationships, and a higher capacity to respond to stress. Helping children develop these skills can also improve family relationships and prevent abuse and neglect. When parent-child relationships are mutually rewarding, there is greater enjoyment, increased responsiveness, and decreased likelihood of maltreatment.

PROMOTING EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Child- and family-serving professionals can play a vital role in supporting ECMH by:

- **Educating Families:** Providing information about typical social-emotional development and strategies for fostering healthy emotional well-being.
- **Supporting Caregivers:** Offering resources and interventions to strengthen caregiver-child relationships and mental health.
- **Identifying Concerns:** Recognizing signs of potential mental health challenges and providing appropriate referrals.

CALIFORNIA TRAINING INSTITUTE RESOURCES

The California Training Institute (CalTrin) offers a variety of resources to support professionals working with infants and young children:

- **What is Early Childhood Mental Health Playlist:** Watch one or more short videos that explore the definition of early childhood mental health. [View playlist.](#)
- **Live Virtual Training, Self-Paced Courses, and Training Replays:** Participate in live training, browse archived training, or take a self-paced course on social-emotional development, supporting parents and caregivers, identifying early ECHM concerns, trauma and behavior in young children, and related topics. [Get started.](#)
- **Resource Blogs:** Explore resource collections on social-emotional development, child development, and Protective Factors that focus on developing children's social-emotional competence and building parents' skills in understanding their child's development. [View collections.](#)

By increasing our knowledge of early childhood mental health, we can strengthen families and promote healthy emotional development in children.