

TINY BITS (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER) FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
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How to build your child's mental health

What children need are two things: They need home to be warm and they need to feel like people around there like them and they need life at home to be predictable. They need to know what to expect. They need a good sense of structure and reliability around them. So, for the warmth part, enjoy your baby, enjoy your child, play with them, talk to them, cuddle them. Doing those things will feel good for your child and feel good for you, and it releases natural hormones that are going to help you bond with your baby.

When should you start thinking about your baby's mental health?

You should start thinking about your baby's mental health right from the moment you meet. From the very beginning, your child will look to you for love, learning, and safety. When you provide your child a warm and tender relationship, help them to feel protected, comfort them when they are upset and help them navigate the world, that is how you lay the groundwork for a lifetime of positive mental health.

How does stress affect the emotional development of my child?

You are your child's first teacher, and your child is going to learn all about feelings from you. When you have feelings, especially painful ones, think about how you express them, to express them in a way that is honest but not overwhelming or frightening.

There is a stress response that gets activated when babies become frightened, or they worry that someone has forgotten them, or their needs are not being met. Our job as parents is to help them to calm that stress response. When that stress response has calmed, everything goes back to normal, and your baby learns that the world is a safe and reliable place. Some babies do not learn that. They are in stressful situations, and they do not receive the emotional support that they need to feel calm again. When children are in stressful situations and they do not have a loving adult to help them feel better, that can lay the groundwork for emotional difficulties down the line.

What are some coping techniques for dealing with stress?

First make sure you have good social support. Everyone needs somebody to tell their worries to, and a person or a group who helps them to feel connected and accepted. Another coping technique is to find a happy distraction. Sometimes we just need to take a mental vacation. Maybe read a good book or go spend time with someone you care about. Just take your mind from whatever is making you stressed. That will help you reset and feel better. Finally, an important way we take care of ourselves when we are stressed is to take really good care of our bodies, make sure you are getting enough sleep, eat well, and get as much physical activity as you need. Those are the things that you can do that will take good care of you and help you take good care of your baby.

Excerpts from: [How to build your baby's mental health: Mini Parenting Master Class | UNICEF Parenting](#)

