

# Mental health: Babies and Young Children



Mental health support can start from infancy by creating a safe space for babies and young children, where they feel valued and supported. They can also learn, grow and thrive with a connected adult role-modelling the important skill of self-regulation.

Here are some ways:

- **Have moments of full presence**

We understand that our attention is needed for work, household management and depends on our personal capacity as well. We can do our best to organise our time and attention such that there are moments of full presence.

Some easy opportunities would be during caregiving moments such as diaper change, shower or meal times.

Children who have their need for quality connection met, feel satiated and are more ready for independent play or being with another caregiver / going to school.

- **Model self awareness**

Children learn from watching what we do. So if we want them to practice being self-aware, we can model this important skill so they learn how to pay attention to their feelings and needs, as well as pick up the vocabulary on how to verbalise them, and how to have those needs met.

- **Validate all feelings**

All feelings are valid, and we need to validate their feelings so that they know that all their emotions are accepted, and that they can safely and freely express themselves instead of suppressing them. Validating feelings doesn't mean you agree with how they feel or what they say they want to do; It's simply acknowledging that this is how they are feeling right now.

- **Help understand and meet needs**

All behaviours are actually children's attempts at communicating to us that they are feeling a certain way - hunger, fear, tiredness, discomfort etc.

They have to resort to these forms of communication such as crying, screaming, whining, hitting, kicking and biting because they have yet developed the ability to identify and express their feelings with words.

When we help them learn to understand and meet those needs, in a calm and safe way, they will come to relax and trust that their needs will be met and as they grow and mature through their childhood and adolescence, they will be gradually be more able to calmly communicate their needs.

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## A safe space for babies & young children

Model self  
awareness

Validate all  
feelings

Have  
moments  
of full  
presence

Help  
understand  
and meet  
needs



## A safe space for babies & young children

Have  
moments  
of full  
presence

It may not be possible or realistic to have full attention or presence with your child all the time.

However we can organise moments of full attention during certain times of the day, especially during caregiving moments of diaper change, shower or meal times.

Full attention can also help babies and young children feel satiated and be more ready for independent play or being with another caregiver / going to school.



## A safe space for babies & young children

Model  
self  
awareness

Model awareness of your own feelings, needs and coping skills

You can verbalise them so your child expands their emotional vocabulary and learns how to express themselves too

*"I am smiling because I'm so happy to see you!"*

*"I am breathing hard because I am upset"*

You can share how you intend to meet your needs, if any

*"I'm going to take deep breaths and slow down my breathing."*

*"I'm going to take cool off by taking a shower."*



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## A safe space for babies & young children

### Validate all feelings

All feelings are valid

Validating feelings doesn't mean you agree with how they feel or what they say they want to do

It means we accept that this is how they are feeling right now

Validating all feelings helps them feel safe to express themselves freely instead of suppressing them

It's the first step to helping them learn self-regulation



## A safe space for babies & young children

### Help understand and meet needs

All behaviour is communication

Babies and young children have yet to develop the ability to identify and express their feelings with words -

So they may cry, scream, whine and even hit, bite and spit as a way to get our attention to meet their needs

When we help them identify and meet their need, they can feel calm & supported

*"You are feeling hungry, lunch is coming."*

*"You are feeling scared of being in a new place; I am here with you."*

*"You are feeling tired, let's calm down and go to sleep together."*

