DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF GEORGIA’S YOUNGEST CHILDREN

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) refers to how well a child develops socially and emotionally from birth to age 3.

PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS INFLUENCE BABIES’ SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM THE START

As early as 3 months, babies experience a range of emotions from joy to sadness, and anger to interest.

Children who feel loved, comforted, and have the freedom to play form more brain connections, resulting in increased ability to trust, relate, communicate, and learn.

INFANTS AND TODDLERS CAN FACE SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Negative experiences can affect a child’s social and emotional health.

- WITNESSING TRAUMA
- LIVING IN FAMILIES DEALING WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- UNTREATED PARENTAL MENTAL ILLNESS

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON INFANTS + TODDLERS INCLUDES:

- Difficulties coping with stress
- Feelings of helplessness, worthlessness and hopelessness
- Low self-esteem and feeling responsible for bad things that happen
- Physical symptoms
- Behavioral challenges such as excessive crying, distress, regression, aggression, withdrawal, and acting out traumatic events during play.
- Cognitive and language delays that place them at risk for early learning difficulties and later academic challenges.

9.5–14.2% of children birth to 5 years old experience emotional, relational, or behavioral disturbance.¹

TRAUMA EXPERIENCED BY INFANTS + TODDLERS interferes with the development of executive function and self-regulation skills, which allow individuals to plan, focus attention, and regulate emotion.

Nationally, 1 IN 10 CHILDREN endure three or more adverse childhood experiences—highly stressful or traumatic events.²

¹ National Center for Children in Poverty
² Vanessa Sacks, David Murphy, Child Trends

GEEARS
GEORGIA EARLY EDUCATION ALLIANCE FOR READY STUDENTS
think babies and act!
OUR OBJECTIVES FOR SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF GEORGIA’S YOUNGEST CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

DEVELOP A STATEWIDE NETWORK OF MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALTY SERVICES for infants, toddlers, and their parents/caregivers.

DEVELOP A CROSS-AGENCY INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE to drive strategic direction of statewide efforts.

EVIDENCE-BASED CHILD TRAUMA TREATMENTS SUCH AS PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION THERAPY (PCIT) SHOW A RETURN OF $3.46 PER DOLLAR SPENT.

ENSURE THAT MEDICAID PROPERLY COVERS MENTAL HEALTH SCREENINGS + SERVICES for mothers, infants and toddlers.

CREATE A LEGISLATIVE STUDY COMMITTEE on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and infant and toddler mental health to:
- Learn about ways to prevent and identify challenges
- Appropriately intervene with infants and toddlers
- Support parents and families.

Areas of study may include:
- What mental health services are available to infants and toddlers throughout the state.
- How developmental screenings are currently being conducted across settings.
- What role state agencies and child care providers can play in addressing IECMH.

• Nearly 50% of children under age 6 receive health care coverage through Medicaid or CHIP.
• States, including Georgia, should leverage Medicaid payment to support IECMH prevention, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment services for young children and their families.

Institute for Child Success
Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health & Developmental Disorders of Infancy & Early Childhood