

Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health

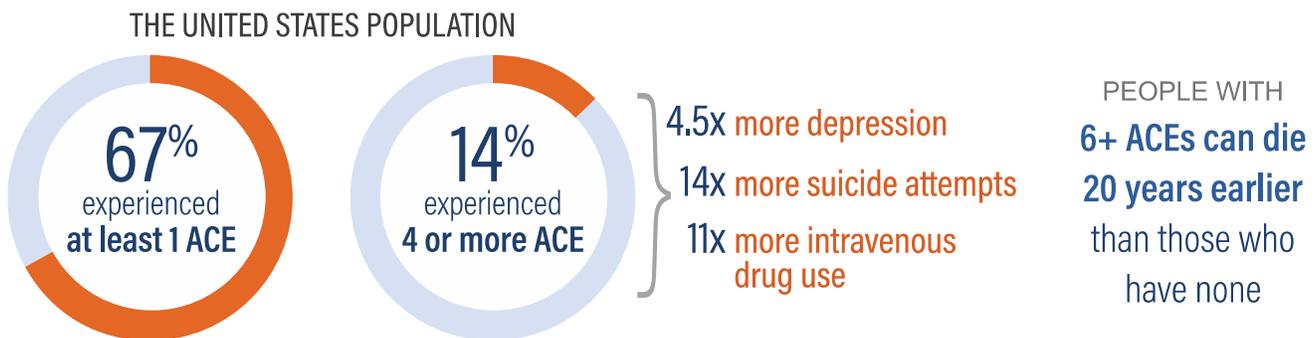
Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) is the developing capacity for children ages 0-5 to:

- Experience, regulate, and express emotions,
- Form close and secure interpersonal relationships, and
- Explore the environment and learn in the context of relationships

Mental health in infancy and early childhood is important

"Early experiences determine whether a child's developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health." – [Harvard Center on the Developing Child](#)

Adversity, or toxic stress in the form of abuse, neglect, and household challenges, during these early years can significantly stunt this development. Furthermore, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have been linked to poor health outcomes in adulthood.



Current Landscape

The greatest challenge in infant and early childhood mental health is **access**, both to treatment and to population level prevention models. Only 15-25% of children who need behavioral health services have access to it and receive it. Children of color, living in poverty, and in rural areas face the greatest barriers to access.

Areas for intervention in Massachusetts include:

- Workforce development and training specific to the needs of the infant and early childhood population that includes practitioners who encounter young children across sectors including, but not limited to, mental health clinicians, early childhood educators, parent partners, pediatricians, home visiting professionals, etc.
- Increase funding for the early childhood sector in order to provide adequate staffing, professional development, and increasing funding for the mental health consultation grant for family, friend, and neighbor providers. Continue funding the early childhood mental health consultation line item [3000-6075] in the state budget.
- Increase and improve data collection in early education and care settings in order to support the use of data driven, evidence-based practices.

- Eliminate suspension and expulsion in early education and care settings by providing greater social-emotional supports to children, families, and educators. Children of color, particularly boys, are suspended and expelled from preschool at a much higher rate than their peers.

RESOURCES

[The Pyramid Model/Early Childhood Positive Behavioral Supports](#) A positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) framework that uses system thinking and implementation science to promote evidence-based practices in early education and care settings.

[Mental Health Consultation](#) Mental health support and consultation for early childhood settings.

[City Connects](#) An evidenced based model for providing social-emotional supports for students and families.

[MassAIMH Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement](#) Professional development for those who work in settings that interact with early childhood mental health. This includes educators, clinicians, home visitors, etc.

[Trauma Informed Care \(TIC\) trainings—UMASS Medical School](#)

[Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout in Educators](#) Resources for identifying and coping with secondary traumatic stress and burnout in educators

[Handholdma.org](#) Online resource for parents looking for more information and supports for children's mental health in Massachusetts

[Children's Behavioral Health Initiative \(CBHI\)](#) Wrap around community- and home-based behavioral health supports for children and families who are eligible for MASSHEALTH.

[Talking to Parents about Mental Health](#) A guide for educators to support them in discussing students' behavioral health concerns with parents.

[Mental Health Guide for Early Education Professionals](#)

Resource brief by Nicole Simonson.

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