

Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health

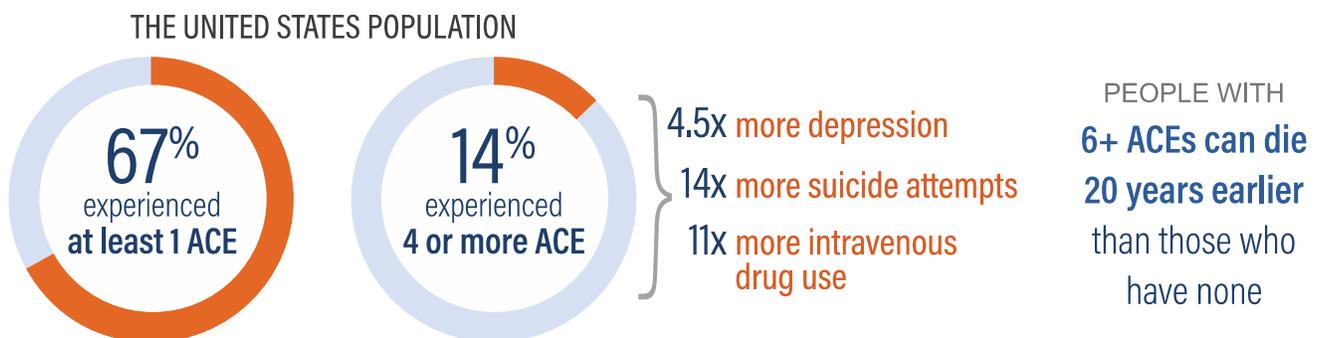
Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) is the developing capacity for children ages 0-5 to:

- 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](#)

A child's brain is 80% developed by age 3 and 90% developed by age 5. 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 and educational 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.

Early childhood education and care is an intervention to support infant and early childhood mental health. Research has found that positive, consistent caregiving relationships serve as a **PROTECTIVE** factor for children's mental health and promote **RESILIENCY**.

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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