

## **DEFINITION OF INFANT MENTAL HEALTH**

Infant mental health is the **DEVELOPING CAPACITY** of the child from birth to three to:

### **EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS;**

Newborns and very young children are active partners in their relationships with adults. They fully engage in and experience emotions, from the very subtle to the very intense.

### **REGULATE EMOTIONS;**

Very young children are learning how to balance their feelings. For example, they practice calming themselves when upset, or interacting with an adult without getting too over-stimulated. Adults in their lives provide the comfort, security, consistency and predictability necessary to help children maintain this balance. Increasing self-awareness of the young child contributes to the emotional regulation that is a sign of well-being and mental health.

### **EXPRESS EMOTIONS;**

As very young children grow, they learn new ways to express their feelings. For example, when a young child feels over-stimulated by her environment, she may express her feelings in a variety of ways—e.g. cooing, crying, or turning away, burping, sucking a finger or even going to sleep.

### **FORM CLOSE and SECURE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS; and**

As very young children grow they develop strong connections to other people and through those connections learn what adults and others expect of them and what they can expect of adults. As young children grow they come to trust and depend on the people in their lives. Nurturing, protective, stable, and consistent relationships are essential to young children's mental health.

### **EXPLORE THE ENVIRONMENT AND LEARN**

An important aspect of infant mental health is the very young child's active participation in their own learning and development. Learning to control their bodies and environment, and sharing that mastery with caring adults leads to a positive sense of self. This is an essential component of the very young child's mental health and well-being.

all in the context of FAMILY, COMMUNITY, and CULTURAL expectations for young children.

**Infant mental health is synonymous with:  
HEALTHY SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**