



## Key Messages by Audience: Early Childhood Professionals (Child Care, Healthcare, Home Visitors, and others)

*In addition to these provider-specific messages, general messages from the “About Social-emotional Development and IECMH” document, as well as “Metaphors that Increase Understanding of Social-emotional Development and IECMH” will also be useful for this audience.*

- As providers (child care, health care, home visitors or others), we play an essential role in the healthy social-emotional development of the children in our care.
  - Social and emotional development begins at birth with infants building attachments and trust with their caregivers, learning how to self-soothe, and later, recognizing emotions in themselves and others.
  - Making friends. Waiting patiently. Caring for others. Resolving conflicts peacefully. Controlling emotions. Following the rules. These are all examples of social and emotional skills that children must learn gradually over time – with the support of caring adults.
  - Healthy social-emotional development lays a foundation for strong mental health.
  - It is important for providers to help parents and caregivers understand that their child’s mental health is a critical part of their overall health and well-being – and to reduce the stigma associated with talking about mental health concerns.
- As providers, parents and caregivers trust us to provide compassionate care for their children. Part of this role is to ensure parents and caregivers who have concerns about their child’s development receive referrals to screening, evaluation, and appropriate treatment.
- Many parents and caregivers prefer to get information in person from someone they trust, such as their child’s doctor, teacher, or child care provider, followed by information in writing.
- It is important for providers to recognize that many parents and caregivers get much of their parenting advice from their own parents or other family members. Therefore, providers should seek opportunities to spread messages about positive mental health and social-emotional development to other caregivers in the child’s life including grandparents.
- During infancy and the toddler years, mental health problems may present as difficulty managing or expressing emotions or the lack of secure attachments with caregivers. During the preschool years, mental health problems may result in challenging behaviors, including class disruption or withdrawal.
  - Instead of viewing challenging behaviors simply as a disruption, providers should be aware that these behaviors often are the result of social and emotional factors and represent a teaching opportunity (for both the parent or caregiver and the child), which can be effectively addressed within the home and through external support programs that are available in our community.