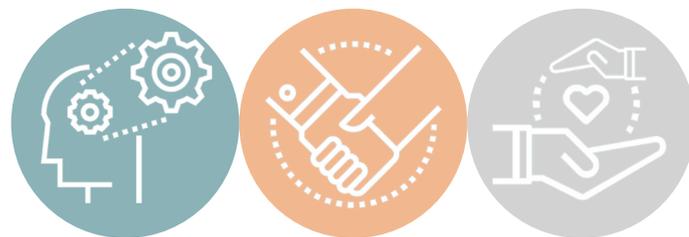


# A Call to Action on Behalf of Maltreated Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Canada



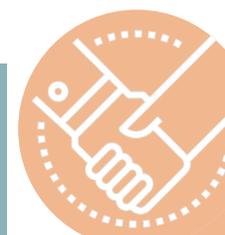
## Key Recommendations

Services must examine and strengthen policies and approaches for cases involving infants and young children in order to address the social and emotional impact of early trauma and maltreatment and reduce the risk of lifelong challenges.



### Change Knowledge Training and Education

Practitioners must be informed by relevant scientific knowledge of early childhood development in order to consistently offer services and supports in a developmentally appropriate manner, and to inform decisions towards the goal of enhancing the placement, safety, permanency and wellbeing of infants and toddlers.



### Change Policy Supporting Inter/ Intra-Agency Collaboration

Co-ordination and collaboration is imperative among families, communities, services, and child welfare agencies whose goal it is to assist at-risk families in ensuring the safety, permanency and wellbeing of infants and toddlers.



### Change Practice Promotion, Prevention and Intervention

Early intervention services must be developed to be accessible, responsive to the specific needs of the infant and family, and implemented in a timely manner to monitor and prevent the consequences of early adversity.

Caregivers, child protection workers, lawyers, judges, physicians and early interventionists all have a significant impact and role to play in ensuring that early adversity does not lead to lifetime consequences to health and well being.



**Infant and early childhood mental health, sometimes referred to as social and emotional development, is the developing capacity of the child from birth to five years**

**of age to form close and secure adult and peer relationships, experience, manage and express a full range of emotions, and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and culture** (Zero to Three, 2016, adapted from Cohen, Oser & Quigley, 2005, pg. 2).



The effect of early trauma, maltreatment and negative foster care experiences on healthy development can have lifelong implications if not properly addressed.

Understanding of the needs of young children in the child welfare system and the science of early childhood development provides a starting point as well as an impetus for adopting a developmental approach to child welfare services. Important progress can be made on behalf of these infants and toddlers.

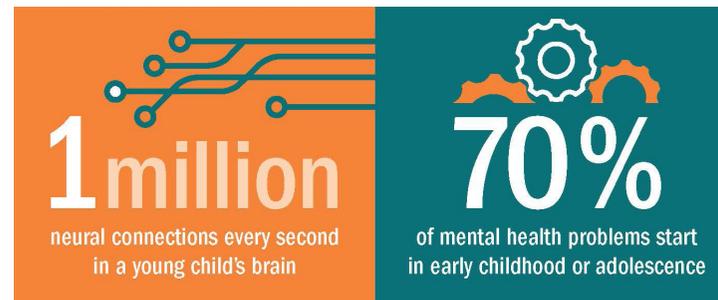
## Infant Brain Development



During the first three years of life, a baby's brain develops at a rate that is unmatched at any other point in their life. Over one million synaptic (neural) connections are formed every second during this time.

(Center on the Developing Child, 2009, Rev. 2017).

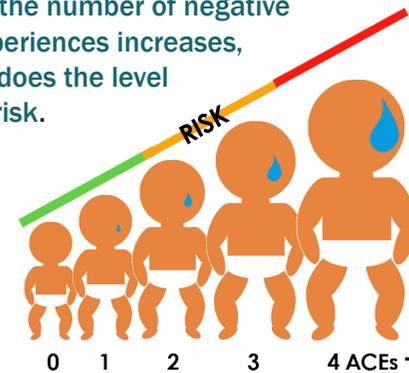
Early experiences, both positive and negative, have a decisive effect on how the brain is wired as infants and toddlers acquire the ability to think, speak, learn and reason. Early and sustained exposure to risk factors such as child abuse and neglect can influence the physical architecture of the developing brain, preventing infants, toddlers and preschoolers from fully developing the neural pathways and connections that facilitate later learning.



This scaffolding of the brain in response to negative experiences during the early years can give rise to several psychological difficulties including cognitive delays, poor self-regulation and attachment formation, and difficulty in paying attention, showing empathy, controlling their behaviour in social situations, and initiating social interaction.



As the number of negative experiences increases, so does the level of risk.



Children at risk must be provided with consistent and responsive care in order to alleviate or reverse the developmental threat posed by trauma, neglect and maltreatment.

## How can you support infants and toddlers at risk?

- 1) **Respond to a baby's distress!** Infants and young children need you to hear their voices and respond with care.
- 2) **Read and share the *Call to Action on Behalf of Maltreated Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Canada*** with professionals and policy makers within your agency and region, at meetings and through social media.
- 3) **Get Involved** - actively support and advocate for the adoption of these recommendations and encourage your agency to write a letter to endorse the Call to Action.
- 4) **Contact and advocate to your local MPP, Ministries of Child and Youth Services; Education; Health and Long-term Care, for policies that support these recommendations.**
- 5) **Submit a Letter of endorsement to IMHP to add your agency's voice to this Call to Action.**

Learn more and find supporting resources at:  
<http://www.imhpromotion.ca/Advocacy/Family-Law-Initiative>