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The Early Years Pathway: Connecting Families for Lifelong Success

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NEBRASKA

— Young Child Institute —

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#NYCI2026


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DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

What is Early Childhood Mental Health?



- “.....Early childhood mental health (ECMH) is the optimal growth and social-emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development of the young child in the context of the unfolding relationship between child and parent.”

(Source: *Early Childhood Mental Health: A Report to Nebraska March 2002*)

“Most mental health problems will not become mental health problems if we respond to them early. Providing the right kinds of supports and interventions early on will reduce the extent to which this will be a potentially more serious problem later.”

Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.
Center on the Developing Child at Harvard
University

www.youtube.com/watch?v=L41k2p-YRCs

What it's not...

ECMH is not about pathologizing child behavior; but rather promoting the healthy alternative of social and emotional development.



What is social-emotional development?



Social-emotional development is defined as the developing capacity of the young child to:

- Experience, regulate, and express emotions
- Form close & secure relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

All occur in the context of a caregiving environment that includes family, community, and cultural expectations.

“The active ingredient in the environment that's having an influence on development is the quality of the relationships that children have with the important people in their lives. That's what it's all about.”

Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.
Center on the Developing Child at Harvard
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Why does ECMH matter?



- Overall Well-being
 - Learning to regulate our emotions leads to increased capacity to navigate stressful situations and developing safe conflict resolution skills
- Academic Success
 - Research shows that children with strong social-emotional skills tend to perform better in school and have the “soft skills” that employers are looking for
- Lifelong Benefits
 - ECMH establishes a foundation for developing healthy relationships in the future

The Cost of Doing Nothing.....

- Prevalence rate of **challenging behaviors** among young children in the classroom is approximately 10% or 1 out of every 10 children
- **Expulsions** from early childhood programs-perpetuates the cycle
- Around 40% of children enter kindergarten **lacking social-emotional skills**
- Over 65% of students identified with emotional and behavioral disorders **drop out of school**

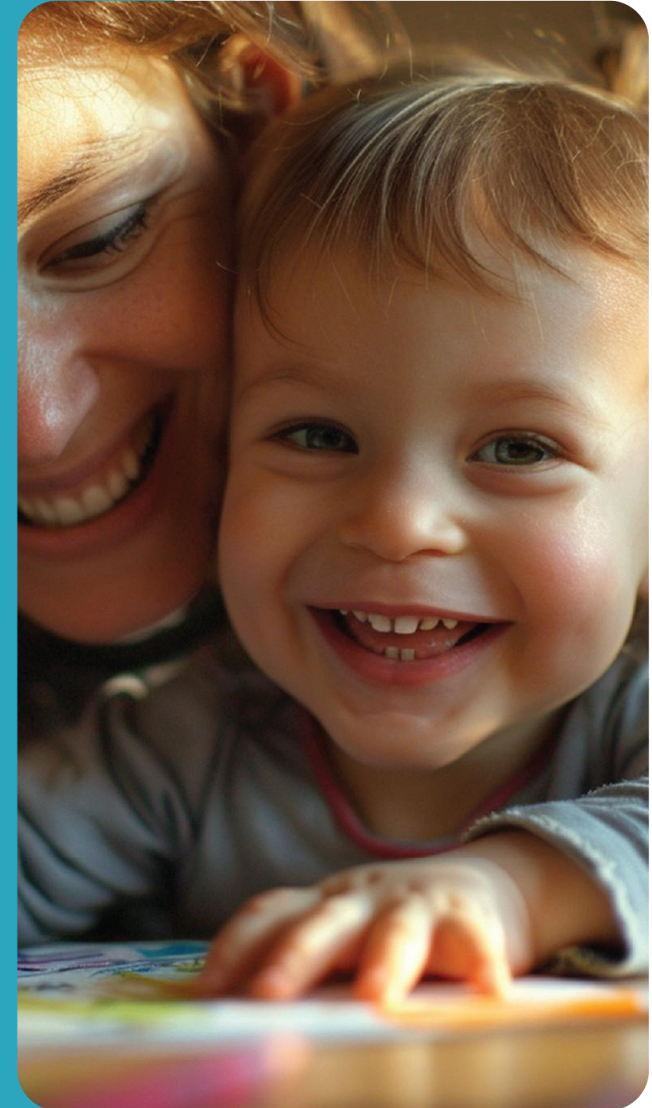
3 Services Available - Statewide



- **Circle of Security Parenting®**
 - The Circle of Security (COS) program is an attachment-based education curriculum designed to enhance the quality of relationships between adults and children.
 - 8 weeks
 - Reflective model, not prescriptive
- **Home Visiting**
 - Voluntary, evidenced based, trauma informed program for new and expectant parents
 - Families who are prenatal and/or with children up through the age of 5 years
 - Visits within the home and will fluctuate based on family goals and need
- **Kinship Navigator**
 - Voluntary program to connect kinship families with community support and resources
 - Typically 3 to 6 months
 - In 2025, 39% of kinship families served had a child between the ages of 0 – 8 years

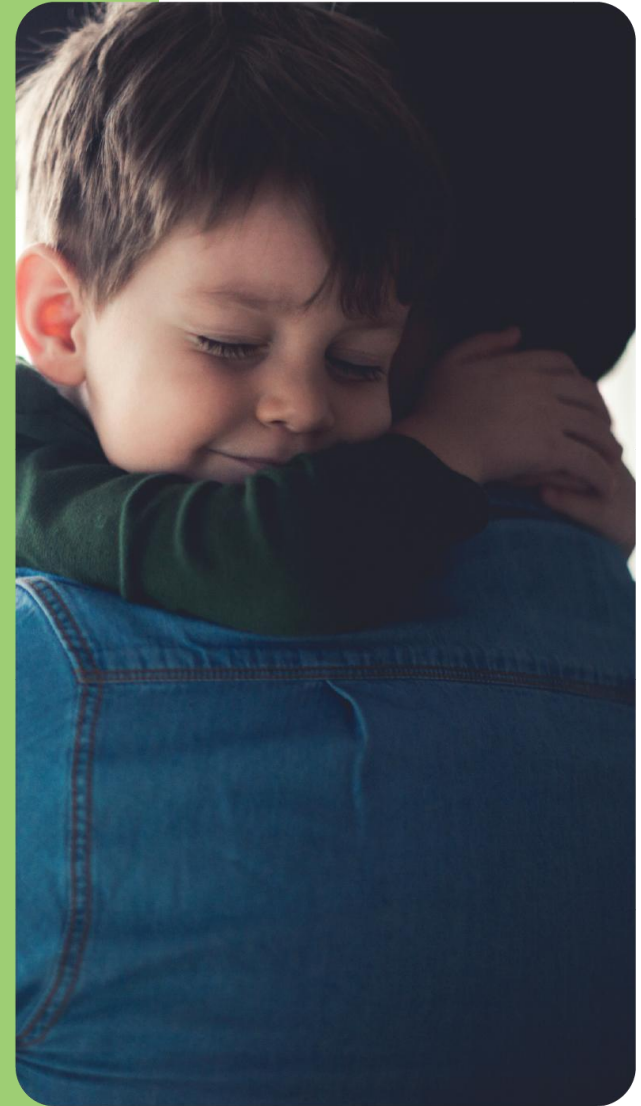
How do families access these services?

- 211 Nebraska Warmline
 - Single point of contact to access community-based services and resources
 - Partnership between DHHS, BoysTown-Family Helpline, NCCF Community Collaboratives, United Way
 - Statewide implementation by January 1st, 2027
- Circle of Security Parenting®
 - Class calendar on public website: necosp.org
 - DHHS contracts with NeAYC to coordinate referrals with family schedules
- Home Visiting
 - Contact local programs; refer to one-pagers
 - DHHS caseworkers can email Jamie Kramer for assistance
- Kinship Navigator
 - Call NCHS at 888-315-7347; or
 - Call LFS at 833-572-2053



Panel Discussion

- Alisha
 - Circle of Security
- Sophie
 - Home Visiting (Healthy Families America)
- Mitzi
 - Kinship Navigator



Questions??

- Thank you so much for giving us your time this afternoon!
- Jamie Kramer
 - Jamie.kramer@nebraska.gov
- Stacy Scholten
 - sscholten@nebraskachildren.org



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Thank you for attending this session.
Please be sure to **submit your feedback** online!

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