



A Focus on Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health

May 2025

The Importance of Reading to Children

This newsletter focuses on sharing information on infant/early childhood mental health and the importance of relationship-based approaches and supports that help infants and young children feel safe, supported, and valued by the adults around them. The newsletter, and the [Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation \(IECMHC\) program](#), is made possible by a partnership between the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) and the Pennsylvania Key.



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Welcome

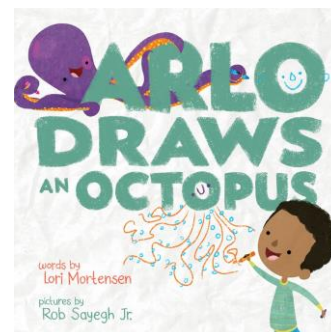
May's Bright Start newsletter issue focuses on the importance of reading to children of all ages. Early literacy helps develop and strengthen language skills and stimulates imagination and creative thinking. Shared reading experiences with trusted adults strengthen bonds and support personal, social, and emotional development. Developing a love for reading in early childhood encourages children to engage in lifelong learning and exploration.

Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.

-Margaret Fuller

Did You Know?

The 2025 PA One Book, *Arlo Draws an Octopus*, is written by Lori Mortensen and illustrated by Rob Sayegh Jr. When Arlo draws an octopus, he can't help but think that maybe he's not an octopus drawer. His drawing has a head that looks like a hill and eight squiggly arms that look like roads. It's an octopus disaster-piece! But just as Arlo vows never to draw an octopus again, he makes a discovery that changes his perspective about his drawing... and much more.



Pennsylvania's libraries and certified early learning programs have received copies to share with young children. Check out the [PA One Book website](#) for early learning activities, crafts, and resources related to the book. Follow the [PA One Book on Facebook](#) for family-friendly fun posts!

Reading with Infants and Toddlers

[Reading with Babies.](#) Reading and storytelling helps your baby get familiar with literacy and language skills. It stimulates imagination and allows an opportunity to bond. Learn about tips on how to share books with babies and what to expect. Check out the list of recommended books, included in this resource, to begin reading to your baby!



[Reading with Toddlers.](#) Reading daily helps toddlers develop and strengthen their language development. During storytelling, allow toddlers to describe and talk about what is happening in the story. Tips for a successful reading session include eliminating background noise, turning off the TV or electronics, and finding a quiet space to focus.

[How to Introduce Toddlers and Babies to Books.](#) Learn how to successfully nurture early literacy skills in your child's development. Do not be afraid to read for a few minutes at a time to help build stamina. Talk about the cover page and allow them to make observations with you. Do not forget to make reading part of your child's everyday life by integrating it into their daily routines!

Language and Literacy in Preschoolers

[Using Literature to Help Manage Children's Emotions.](#) Children's literature is powerful because it allows children to talk about feelings and emotions when they're not necessarily feeling them. Dr. Theresa Bouley discusses how children's literature can help children express and manage their feelings. Watch this great resource video in just under 3 minutes!



[Engaging Literacy Activities for Preschoolers.](#) Both families and teachers play a significant role in promoting literacy and language development for preschoolers. Songs and rhymes, creating with playdough, and reading aloud are some fun and engaging literacy activities for preschoolers. Learn more details about literacy activities for preschoolers in this guide!

[Language and Literacy in Three- and Four-year-olds.](#) Preschoolers are more inclined to learn early reading and writing skills when they can relate to what is essential. This resource details what children do to learn these specific skills. It includes what caregivers can provide and what they can say or do to foster this development.

[Growing Minds and Hearts: How Early Literacy Supports Social-Emotional Learning.](#) Let's explore how early literacy activities can foster empathy, emotional regulation, communication, and develop a positive sense of self. This blog lists practical ways to use books for socio-emotional growth!

School Age Zone

[Read Across America.](#) This resource leads to so many other resources. There are podcasts to listen to, articles to read, and book recommendations. Most school districts celebrate Read Across America Week, and it could be beneficial for SACC programs to do the same. It builds consistency and a sense of community between school and home time.



[How to Make Read-Alouds Fun and Effective for All Ages.](#) SACC programs usually have children from kindergarten to sixth grade. This resource provides strategies to use read-aloud time that are fun for all ages. It is so important to read aloud to children, even when they can read independently. Strategies include selecting the right story, strategic pauses and probing, examining difficult vocabulary, and more!

[Social-Emotional Learning Read-Alouds Can Support Literacy.](#) Read-alouds go beyond literacy—they also support social-emotional learning! While building SEL skills, caregivers and educators can use literacy activities as a follow-up to the text. This resource directs you to the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) website, mentions evaluating texts for cultural responsiveness (even provides a link to a rubric), and provides concrete steps for using literacy for teaching SEL.

[Reading Aloud in ESL classes: benefits, techniques, and classroom management tips](#). Although this article is for ESL classrooms in the school, it is also beneficial for SACC (School Age Child Care) teachers who have ESL students. It talks about different considerations when choosing a book to read to ESL students. The strategies provided could be helpful as SACC teachers support ESL students during homework time as well. This simple-to-read resource details the benefits of read-alouds and lists strategies to implement them successfully!

Classroom Activities and Resources

[Practical Strategies for Teachers/ Caregivers](#). The book nook is a built-in library with books that focus on social, emotional, and friendship skills. Even better, each book has lesson plans that help provide tips on using the book best to help children learn. It also includes a bilingual section with modules to develop behavior support plans and a downloadable PDF option.

[The Book Center in Child Care](#). This quick read discusses the importance of having a dedicated book center in your classroom and tips for how teachers can make the book center effective. It examines the teacher's role in making reading a vital program part. A book center is integral to a child care environment and fosters language development and social-emotional skills.



[Books to Help Little Children Handle Big Emotions](#). We can all agree that big emotions are at the heart of many of the behaviors we see today. That means we need to learn how to teach children what big emotions are and how we can help children regulate these big emotions. Books are a great way to help children see visually how other characters deal with their big emotions. It also lets them know they aren't alone in their strong feelings. Learn about these eight picture books that help focus on this skill!

[The Best Kids' Books on Mental Health 2024](#). This resource lists books for different age groups that focus on many mental health issues our children and families face today. Some of these include worry, anxiety, feelings, grief, moving to a new home, OCD, ADHD, autism, eating disorders, addiction, sadness, depression, and mindfulness. Each book in this resource includes a brief synopsis and lists the mental health issue it addresses in the story.

Family Focus

[Every Child Is a Reader \(Even If They Can't Yet Read the Words\).](#)

Did you know there is more than one way to read a book? Children and babies read books not only through words but also through pictures and by retelling the story. This resource shares tips from literacy expert Gail Boushey, who co-authored The Daily 5 based on extensive research on how children learn to read.



[Reading & storytelling with preschoolers.](#) Reading helps children learn new speech sounds and words to build language and literacy skills. This article reviews the developmental skills built through reading. It discusses ways to engage children in reading, make it fun, and also build skills. Some tips include trying out funny noises and sounds as you read or make a storybook together using your child's own made-up story and drawings!

[Why Is It Important to Read to Your Child?](#) Do you ever wonder why toddlers and preschoolers want to read the same book over and over again? This repetition actually helps them master the art of language! They are also exercising their right of choice and interest when it comes to reading. This article touches on the benefits of reading, from language development to emotional awareness and parent-child relationships. It also shares ways to incorporate reading into your family's daily life.

[Tips for Parents: Choosing Books for Infants and Toddlers.](#) This article gives concrete examples of what to look for when choosing a book for infants and toddlers, along with how to engage in age-appropriate reading. The examples are categorized into bullet points that include content, language, design, and read-aloud strategy for each age group. These tips were courtesy of the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL).

Office Hours

IECMH Consultation helps adults strengthen their relationships with young children and build capacity to respond to children's social-emotional needs. IECMHC can help reduce caregiver stress and increase caregivers' reflective practice skills.

IECMH Consultants are available by appointment to provide **IECMHC Virtual Office Hours** consultation via telephone or video conference. IECMHC Virtual Office Hours is a short-term, collaborative, problem-solving conversation to help you find the next steps for Child Social-Emotional Concerns | Child Behavioral or Developmental Concerns, Emotional Well-being of Teachers and Caregivers | Partnering with Families.

Appointments are held on the first and third Fridays of the month or other days/times by request. [Get more info.](#)

A flyer for IECMHC Virtual Office Hours. It features a photo of a woman working on a laptop. The text includes: "The Pennsylvania Key Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) IECMHC Virtual Office Hours For Early Childhood Education Professionals! Are you an early childhood education (ECE) professional, looking for support with: Helping a child who is struggling with behavior, attachment, peer relationships or emotion regulation? Helping teachers and families with self-care, stress, and coping, but not sure what to do next?" It also lists who can request the service, how it can help, and how to request an appointment. At the bottom, there are logos for "bright" and "THE PENNSYLVANIA KEY".

Accessing IECMHC Services

The Pennsylvania Key has streamlined the process for Keystone STARS programs to request [Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation \(IECMHC\)](#). Child care providers can request services by using the [Request for Service Form](#) (PDF). Completed forms can be submitted via email to PAIECMH@pakeys.org or faxed to 717-213-3749.

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at PAIECMH@pakeys.org with questions or concerns.

Accessing SACCMHC Services

With the generous support of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), the Pennsylvania Key IECMH Consultation team has expanded to include four mental health consultants to support School Age Child Care (SACC) programs participating in Keystone STARS. This service will be primarily tele-consultation support. Click here to request support. [Click here to request support.](#)

Share your feedback! We'd like to hear your thoughts on infant early childhood mental health. Are there resources you'd like to see? Questions you have? Tell us! Send your feedback to PAIECMH@pakeys.org.



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The Pennsylvania Key | 200 N. 3rd St., 2nd Fl. | Harrisburg, PA 17101 US

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