

**FOR** **IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

April 17, 2020

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**Is Your Baby Stressed Out During COIVD-19?**
*Sunbeam Shares Tips for Identifying Stress in Young Children, and how to Cope*

**(OKLAHOMA CITY)** – This is the Week of the Young Child™, an annual celebration that spotlights early learning, young children, their teachers, families and communities. In honor of this week, Amy Chlouber, LPC-S, early childhood services director at Sunbeam Family Services, shares what stress looks like in babies, and how to help.

The brain develops more rapidly before age 3 than during any other time across our lifespan. In fact, 90 percent of the brain is developed by age 3, and 95 percent by age 6.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health refers to how well infants and young children are doing socially and emotionally in the earliest years of life. The well-being of caregivers has a direct impact on the well-being of babies and very young children. Caregivers can buffer the impact of stress and trauma when they are aware and present, both physically and emotionally.

According to (insert info), between 10-14 percent of children from birth to age 5 experience social emotional problems, like (insert example here). While babies and young children don’t necessarily understand, they are keen observers of things happening around them.

Babies and very young children aren’t immune to stress and trauma just because they’re young. Babies’ bodies remember experiences and sensations, both positive and negative. Memories are stored in the earliest weeks and years of life and can precede young children’s capacity to talk about them.

Little ones often have big feelings. Babies and very young children don’t have the ability to calm themselves. In fact, they need connection with caregivers to support them in calming. This is called co-regulation.

When babies and very young children sense caregivers are stressed, sthere may be an increase in challenging behavior and difficulty in calming and soothing the children. As a result, the only way they’re able to express a need for comfort is through behavior.

A stressed baby or very young child may become more fearful of things like separation, the dark and noises. There may also be an increase in meltdowns, crying, defiance or destructive behavior. She may have difficulty sleeping, waking in the night. In general, babies and very young children may be difficult to soothe and may need a lot of reassurance and “check ins” with their caregiver.

Keeping a routine, especially during COVID-19, creates some structure and a sense of safety for babies and very young children.

It’s important to notice your child’s behavior, which is communication. What’s he trying to communicate through his behavior? Sometimes crying, fussing and challenging behavior may be communicating a need to connect with you. Ways to support connection include dancing, talking, sitting with your child on your lap and staying near your child.

Use diaper changes and potty breaks as opportunities to connect. Make eye contact and sing a silly song. It might feel strange, but little ones don’t care what it’s about or if you got the words right, they just love to listen to and be with you.

Having fun and playing are important. Take breaks and go outside. Go for a walk and take deep breaths. Notice flowers blooming, the green grass, trees budding and point them out to your child.

Your children need you. Remember to limit screen time. The AAP recommends no screen time under the age of 2. Even “educational” videos can be too much and will never take the place of connection with you.

When taking care of babies and very young children, it’s also important to take care of you. On an airplane, adults are told that in case of emergency, put the oxygen mask on yourself first and then your child. That can feel like the opposite of what we want to do, but in order to keep little ones safe and help them feel secure, this is key to supporting them.

Take a break for you when you need to, and do so safely. Never leave a little one unsupervised. Breathe. Inhale through your nose 5 seconds, let it out through your mouth for 5 seconds. Repeat.

Connecting with others during COVID-19 while practicing social distancing is also important. Seek support from friends and family members on the phone or video.

Amy – any ideas on a closing?

For more information about Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health visit sunbeamfamilyservices.org or call (405) 528-7721.

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About Sunbeam Family Services

Founded in 1907, Sunbeam Family Services is one of Oklahoma’s longest serving nonprofits and is one of the original United Way of Central Oklahoma Community partners. Sunbeam’s mission is to provide help, hope and the opportunity to succeed through Early Childhood, Counseling, Foster Care and Senior Services. To learn more, call 405-528-7721, visit sunbeamfamilyservices.org, or join the conversation on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.