



Investing Early

Why Infant Mental Health Matters for Oklahoma's Future

When we talk about mental health, we often think of teens or adults. But mental health begins at birth. Infant mental health refers to the emotional development of children from birth to age three—how they form secure relationships, express emotions, and begin to understand the world around them.

At the heart of infant mental health is the relationship between a baby and their caregiver. Responsive, nurturing interactions—like soothing a crying baby, making eye contact, and talking during daily routines—help build trust and shape the brain's architecture. These early bonds lay the foundation for lifelong resilience, learning, and emotional well-being.

In Oklahoma, where nearly one in four children under five lives in poverty, many families face stressors that can interfere with these critical connections. That's why infant mental health is not just a parenting issue—it's a public health priority.

Programs that support caregivers—through home visits, mental health consultation, and early childhood education—can change the trajectory of a child's life. Agencies like Sunbeam Family Services are leading this work, but broader investment and awareness are needed.

Infant mental health is built in everyday moments—during feedings, diaper changes, and quiet time together. When we support caregivers, we support babies. And when we support babies, we build a stronger, healthier Oklahoma City for generations to come.

A portrait of Sarah Rahhal, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a bright pink textured blazer over a black top and a gold necklace with pearls. She is smiling warmly at the camera.A blue ink signature of Sarah Rahhal, written in a cursive style.

Sarah Rahhal, LCSW
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