

# My 1st Year

EARLY CHILDHOOD  
MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

## BABY BOOK

### CONSULTANT'S NOTES

## Introduction

Early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) is intended to support caregivers in developing an increased awareness and understanding of the impact of their interactions on a child's social-emotional (SE) well-being. It serves as an effective strategy for addressing challenging behaviors and supporting young children's SE development in early care and education settings. The "My 1st Year Baby Book" is a tool designed to support your work as an early childhood mental health consultant. You can support caregiver practices through introducing and facilitating the use of this tool with providers and parents as an intentional and structured opportunity for skill building and development.

Why is the first year of life so critical? The first year of a baby's life is an exciting time filled with wonderful new experiences, and caregiver's daily interactions with babies lay the foundation for their long-term physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development. Even at an early age, young children are active participants in their own learning and development. It is important, therefore, that caregivers use many opportunities to stimulate and support the immense amount of growth young children will experience between birth and 12 months.

The following sections are a brief summary of the developmental categories included in the book. They lend clarity to the many milestones children will typically achieve between birth and 12 months.

### **Physical Development: "How I Grow"**

From the outset, babies want to explore their world. They are excited to move their eyes, mouths, and bodies toward people and objects that comfort and interest them. They practice skills that let them move closer to desired objects and also move those objects closer to themselves. Over time, children's need to master movement, balance, and fine-motor skills remains constant.\*

**Thinking Skills: "What I Know"**

At one time, infants were thought of as passive and unknowing. It was believed that until they mastered language, young children were incapable of thinking or forming complex ideas. Today, we know that from the very beginning, young children are aware of their surroundings and interested in exploring them. Research has proven that from the first weeks of life, babies are active learners, busily gathering and organizing knowledge about their world.\*

**Communication Skills: "What I Say"**

Long before children can say words or join them into sentences, they are active language learners. Within a few short years, young children go from newborns without language to excellent communicators and lively inventors and tellers of stories. As with adults, their communication occurs both verbally and nonverbally.\*

**Social Emotional Skills: "I'm O.K."**

Social and emotional skills are much harder to pinpoint than signs of physical development because this area emphasizes abilities that increase self-awareness (a recognition of who I am in relation to others) and self-regulation (the ability to meet one's own needs). Research shows that social skills and emotional development are a very important part of school readiness.\*

*\*Language adapted from "The ABCs of Child Development" and AAP's "Child Health Topics—Stages of Development"*

## What Should This Tool Be Used For?

"My 1st Year Baby Book" is designed to assist caregivers in better understanding their child's first year of development. The tool focuses on key developmental milestones and associated activities caregivers can do with children to then later reflect on their experiences. This book offers caregivers simple ways to:

1. Recognize the key developmental milestones for their child's first year of life.
2. Observe, capture and reflect on their child's developmental experiences in pictures and words.

The booklet is divided into four categories of development:

1. Physical development ("How I Grow")
2. Thinking ("What I Know")
3. Communication ("What I Say")
4. Social-emotional development ("I'm OK")

Each category contains four separate groupings by age range:

1. Birth-3 months
2. 3-6 months
3. 6-9 months
4. 9-12 months

Each page of the book highlights a key developmental milestone, provides room for caregiver observations, and includes an activity that illustrates something special about the baby at particular points during their first year of life.

## How Should This Tool Be Used?

You are strongly encouraged to go through the tool with program directors, Early Head Start coordinators or small groups of providers or parents onsite. You can use the tool with small groups of parents, or providers may wish to introduce it to parents at their sites. Either option works, based on feasibility.

If working with providers, you are encouraged to go through at least 2 of the 16 pages of activities with them. If providers choose to work with parents in completing the book, they are encouraged to go through at least 2 of the 16 pages of activities with parents as well.

It should take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to present background information on infant first-year development, go through two pages of activities, and answer any questions caregivers may have about using the tool on their own going forward.

**ECMHC Needs**

- "My First Year Baby Book"
- Paper and pen for jotting notes

**TIPS**

1. Prior to using the tool with caregivers, you are encouraged to visit the childcare center and observe the children in their daily routines. Ask providers for the names and ages of children so that you may write specific observations about them. Use the



developmental milestone categories from the book as an observational guide.

2. Share your observations with caregivers when discussing stages of development and particular milestones. Through your observations, you may be able to share things with caregivers that they had not noticed before about a particular child or reaffirm their thoughts about the child's development.
3. Familiarize yourself with the developmental milestone concepts, examples, and vocabulary provided in the booklet and guidance materials in order to help caregivers better understand and label a child's developmental accomplishments.
4. You are encouraged to enlist the assistance of a child developmental specialist if possible. They may be helpful in having discussions with caregivers about the differences in development for typically developing children and children with developmental delays.
5. You are encouraged to go through at least two to three pages of the book with caregivers.
6. Encourage parents to jot notes on the paper you provide them before they write any permanent information into the booklet. This will allow them an opportunity to determine exactly what they want to write before doing so.
7. Caregivers should not be overly concerned about completing the book in a linear fashion. If their

child is already 9 months old, they should be encouraged to begin completing the book at that age range and are free to fill in information for the previous months when they have the opportunity. The goal is simply to complete the book within the first year of baby's life, or close to his/her first birthday. That way, memories are fresh and have less time to fade as the baby rapidly changes.

### Warm-Up Activity

Prior to conducting a session, ask caregivers to bring in a favorite photo of their child or a child they work with from their first year of life.

Ask caregivers to show the picture to the group and share the following:

1. Who took the picture?
2. Where was the picture taken?
3. What was happening in the picture at the time it was taken?
4. What might the child have been experiencing at the time (feeling happy, sad, excited, etc.)?

Explain to caregivers that the discussions they had in the warm-up activity are very similar to what they will be recording in the observation/reflection components of the activity booklet. They should be encouraged to begin using the "My 1st Year Baby Book" at the stage of development depicted in the picture they present. For example, the caregiver brings in a picture of a baby crawling. This corresponds to Page 9 of the book, developmental category "How I Grow," under developmental milestone: crawling.

### Using the Tool

Briefly discuss with caregivers the developmental concepts included in the introduction of this guide so they have a clear understanding of the four developmental categories presented in the book.

You are encouraged to talk with caregivers about how children develop at different rates so that they are not unnecessarily concerned if their child does not reach the developmental milestones just as they are presented in the book. This is an ideal time to have the child development specialist you invited to guide the conversation.

For purposes of completing the book, if a child has not reached a developmental milestone during the age ranges presented, encourage parents to still complete the pages, making note of the actual age at which their child reached a particular milestone.

Again, encourage caregivers to begin using the 1st Year Baby Book at the stage of development depicted in the picture they presented during the warm-up activity. If they did not bring in a picture, suggest that they begin completing the booklet on a page that reflects their child's current age. For example, if the child is 7 months old they should first proceed to a tab that reads 6-9 months; let them decide which developmental category to begin with. Caregivers can go back and fill in information for earlier months on their own outside of the session.

