



5 THINGS TO KNOW *about laying* **A STRONG FOUNDATION** *for* **MENTAL HEALTH**

1 Social and emotional well-being leads to a thriving state.

At a young age, children begin to build essential skills for engaging in our society, like managing emotions, problem solving, getting along with others, and coping with adversity. Social and emotional development is the foundation for good mental health and maximizes children's lifelong ability to learn, engage in our workforce and communities, and contribute to a thriving Iowa.

2 Communities need tools and families need support.

Promoting young children's social-emotional well-being means preparing our entire community with the right tools and systems of support. Resources, like Sesame Street in Communities, help educators, health care providers, and family support professionals work alongside caregivers to build skills with kids. Screenings can identify concerns, so families are connected to services early. Creating the conditions for families to access what they need to be healthy—including quality housing, nutritious food, and affordable health care—increases caregivers' capacity to focus on nurturing relationships.

3 Early childhood is a critical period for development.

Mental health begins in early childhood. The first years of a child's life are when the brain has the most potential to form a sturdy foundation for all future development. Genes provide the basic blueprint for the brain's architecture, but experiences influence which connections in the brain are made. Nurturing adult relationships during this time especially help kids form brain connections that, over time, enable them to regulate emotions, problem solve, focus on learning, and make friends.

4 Social-emotional development is a key part of a children's mental health system.

Investing in strategies that foster social-emotional development and increase caregivers' capacity for family relationships is an important part of building the entire children's mental health system. We need services and supports that address the mental health crisis young people are experiencing today, as well as prevention and early intervention strategies that protect children's mental health.

5 Our kids cannot wait.

The pandemic has caused prolonged stress, disrupted routines, and isolation for families—all of which are impacting kids during their most critical period of development. Now is the time to invest in children's healthy development and family well-being, so Iowa emerges from the pandemic stronger—and we create a better world for our children and grandchildren.