

THE SIX KEYS:

Strategies for Promoting Children's
Mental Health
In Early Childhood Programs



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Key 1: Provide responsive caregiving

**Why all the Fuss About a Child's
Emotional Development?**

We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say "it's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem." Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider these people my heroes.

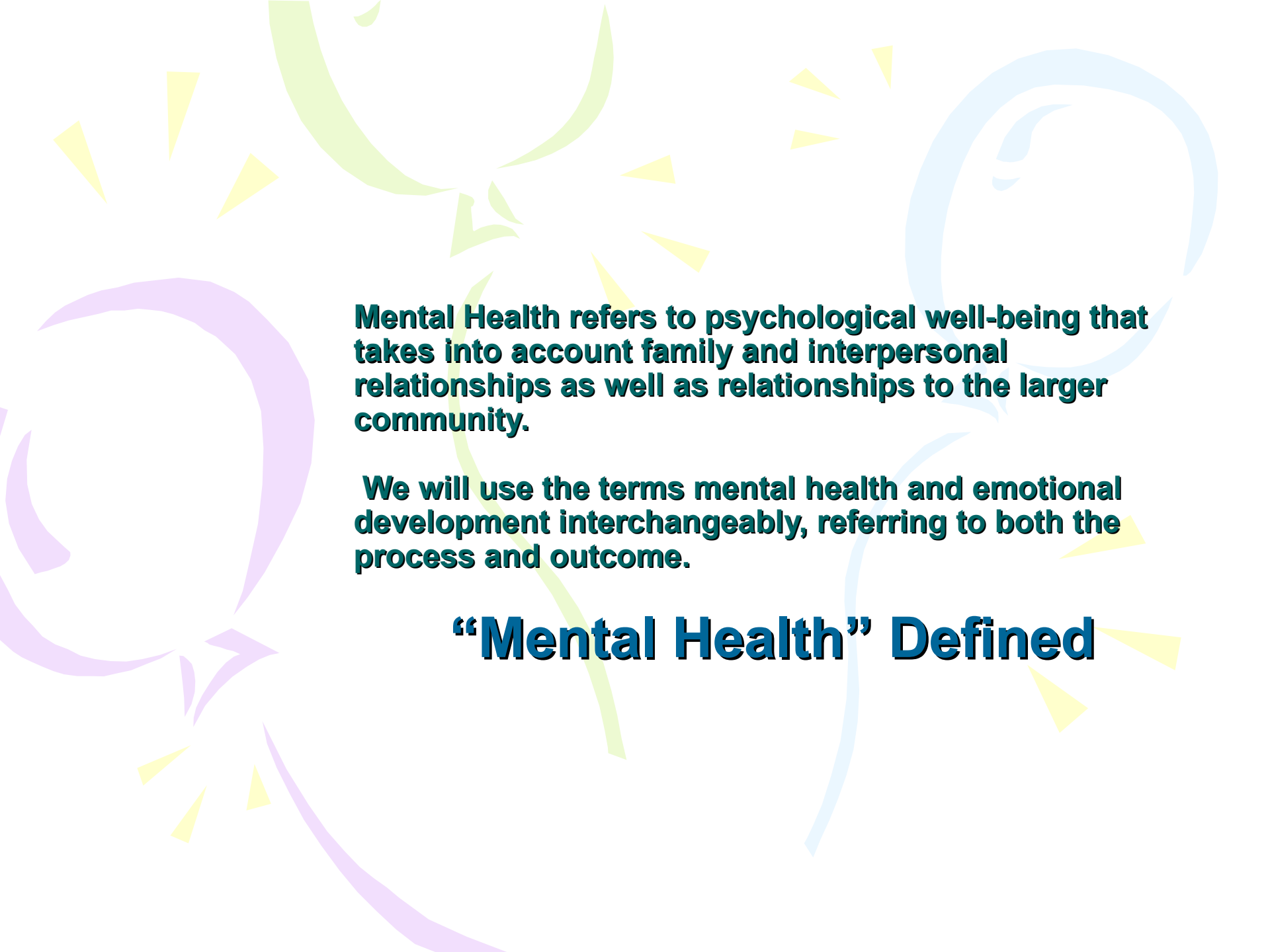
Fred Rogers





The World We Live In

- Our world today is often not the place we might have hoped it would be for raising our children.
- On any given day, we hear current events that make us wonder how we can ever raise capable, successful children.
- Our culture seems at odds with our values.
- Activity 1-1

The background features several large, overlapping, hand-drawn style swirls in shades of purple, green, and blue. Scattered throughout are numerous small, yellow, triangular shapes, some pointing towards the center and others pointing outwards, creating a dynamic and energetic feel.

Mental Health refers to psychological well-being that takes into account family and interpersonal relationships as well as relationships to the larger community.

We will use the terms mental health and emotional development interchangeably, referring to both the process and outcome.

“Mental Health” Defined

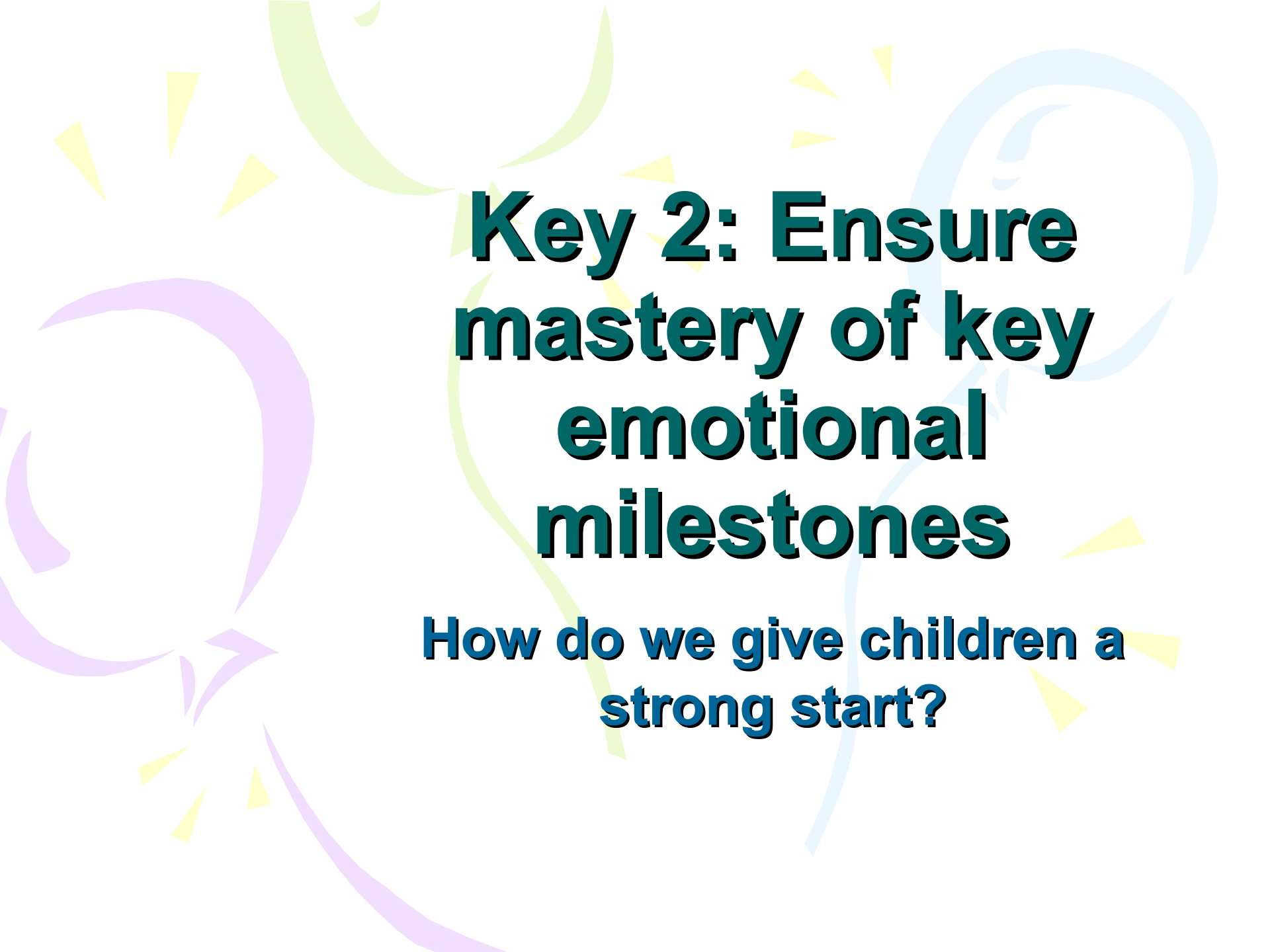
Early childhood practitioners have a significant role in ensuring healthy emotional development in young children.





So How Are the Children?

- The Masai tribe in Kenya believed that if the children were healthy and cared for, the community would be strong.
- How can we bring up children in our world, who will experience childhood in such a way, as to help them be happy and successful as both children and adults?

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Key 2: Ensure mastery of key emotional milestones

How do we give children a strong start?

All of us have special ones who have loved us into being.
Fred Rogers



Theoretical Models of Emotional Development

- **Ethological Model**-Infants come into the world already prepared for their social and emotional roles, based on their instincts to survive. A child is set to biologically bond with his caregiver so...if a caregiver provides *safety* and *security* the child/caregiver build trust enabling the child to survive and adapt thus creating positive emotional development. All children come integrally equipped with emotions that will be present the first two years of life, including happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, shame, and guilt. Children learn how to use these emotions from their social context; they learn which ones other people prefer and which are less desirable.
- **Cognitive Model**-A child can only understand emotions to the degree of their thinking and reasoning level; cognitive development informs emotional development. So the more a child learns intellectually the more sophisticated his range of emotions can become.
- **Attachment Model**-Infants begin their emotional growth through dependence on a secure relationship with their caregiver. The relationship with the primary caregiver becomes the model for all future social relationships with others. What he experiences is what he becomes emotionally and what he expects from future social relationships. Mental health is related to *secure, nurturing and responsive relationships*.
- <http://zerotothree.org> “*still face experiment*”

Emotional Development as Acquired Skills

- **Attachment**-the capacity to form and maintain relationships. At the foundation of the creation of a healthy child.
- **Self Regulation**-the ability to read and respond to internal states appropriately. If children are unable to recognize what's going on inside them, getting along with others and regulating behavior is difficult.
- **Affiliation**-the ability to join with others and contribute to a group. If children haven't developed self-regulation, they will have difficulty with affiliation.
- **Awareness**-the capacity to recognize the needs, interests, strengths, and value in others. Young children tend to group others very simply and with sameness, which interferes with seeing people as they really are. Children must be with people who are different. Children must have a chance to be with the elderly and children of other ages too.
- **Tolerance**-a child's capacity to understand and accept how others are different from themselves.
- **Respect**-the capacity to value the variety of gifts and capacities of others and in yourself. This concept is most difficult. If children cannot accept their own shortcomings, self-respect becomes difficult, causing them to focus on the shortcomings of others in a negative way. When we raise our children with "don't do this, don't do that", the brain spends much more time focusing on shortcomings instead of strengths. It is important to help children develop in a positive way.



How Do We Give Children a Strong Start?

Physical Development

Physical development is sequential and builds on what child experts refer to as “mastery of skills”.

*Ex: One must walk before he can run
or
one must babble before he can talk*

Once a child develops these skills he can move on to the next skill or level.

Emotional Development

Follows stages and milestones and is not as sequential as physical development.

Ex: A child learns to trust if he has had a secure relationship from a primary caregiver; trust is needed as a foundation for a child to develop autonomy and later...self control.

Culture, values and family systems factor in as they influence the child and his ongoing emotional development.

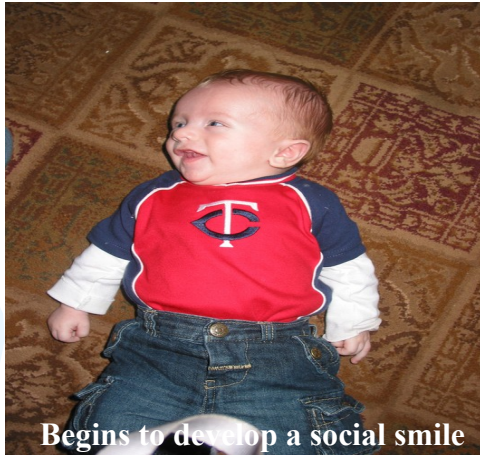


The Ounce of Prevention

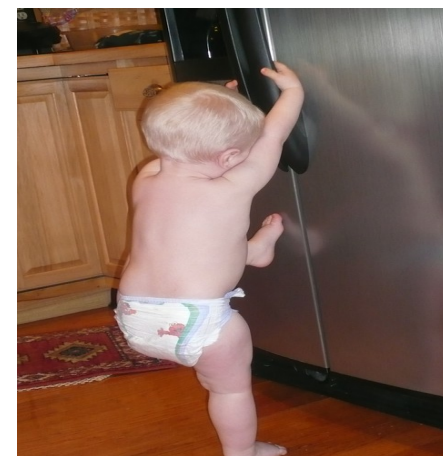
*Change the First 5 Years and You
Change Everything*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbSp88PBe9E>

Ensure Mastery of Emotional Milestones



Imitates behavior of others



By the end of 2 years



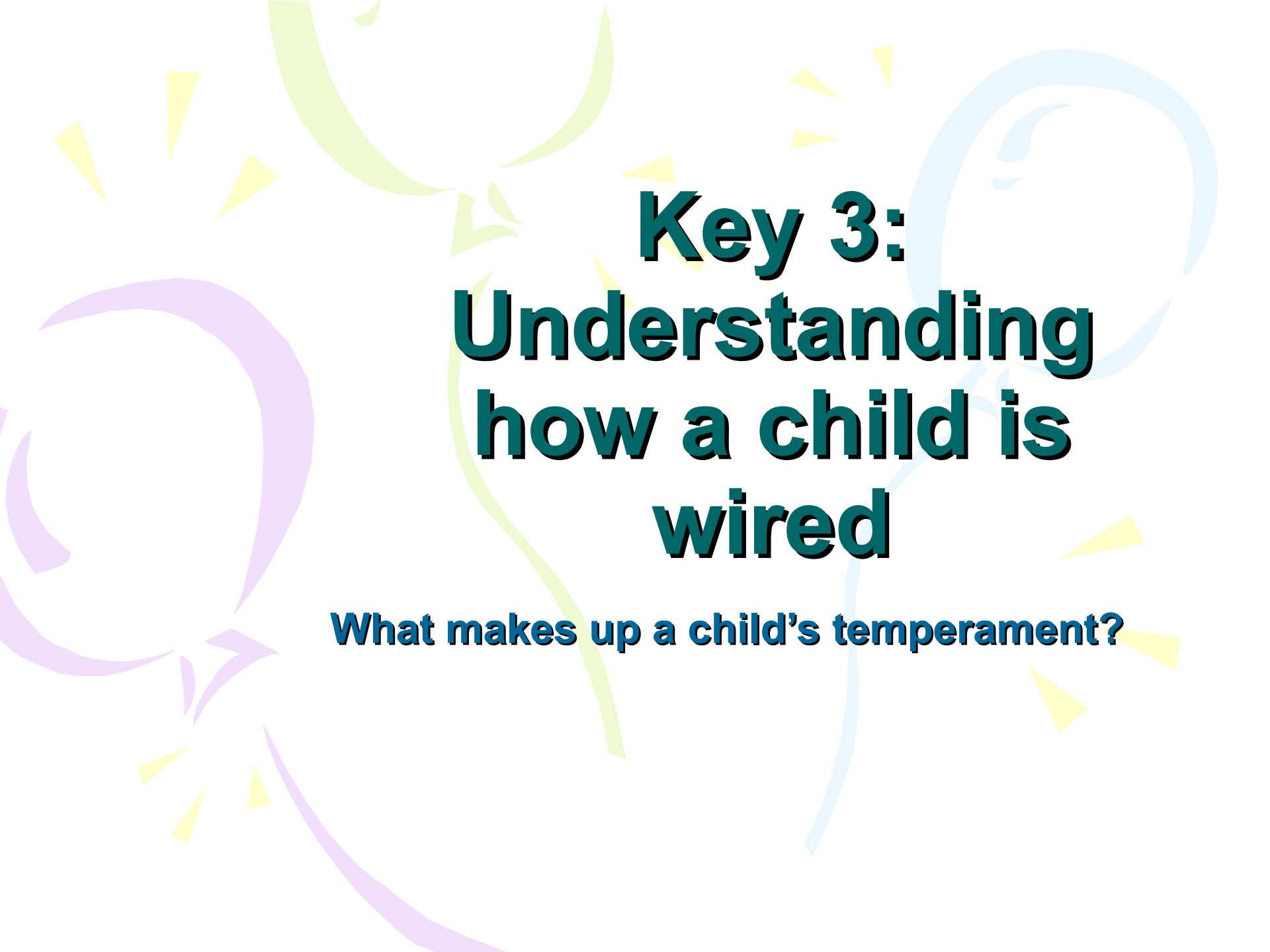
By end of 3 years





Social and Emotional Development Resources

- <http://www.csefel.vanderbilt.edu>
- <http://www.zerotothree.org/baby-brain-map.html>
- <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/early-childhood-mental-health/>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbSp88PBe9E>

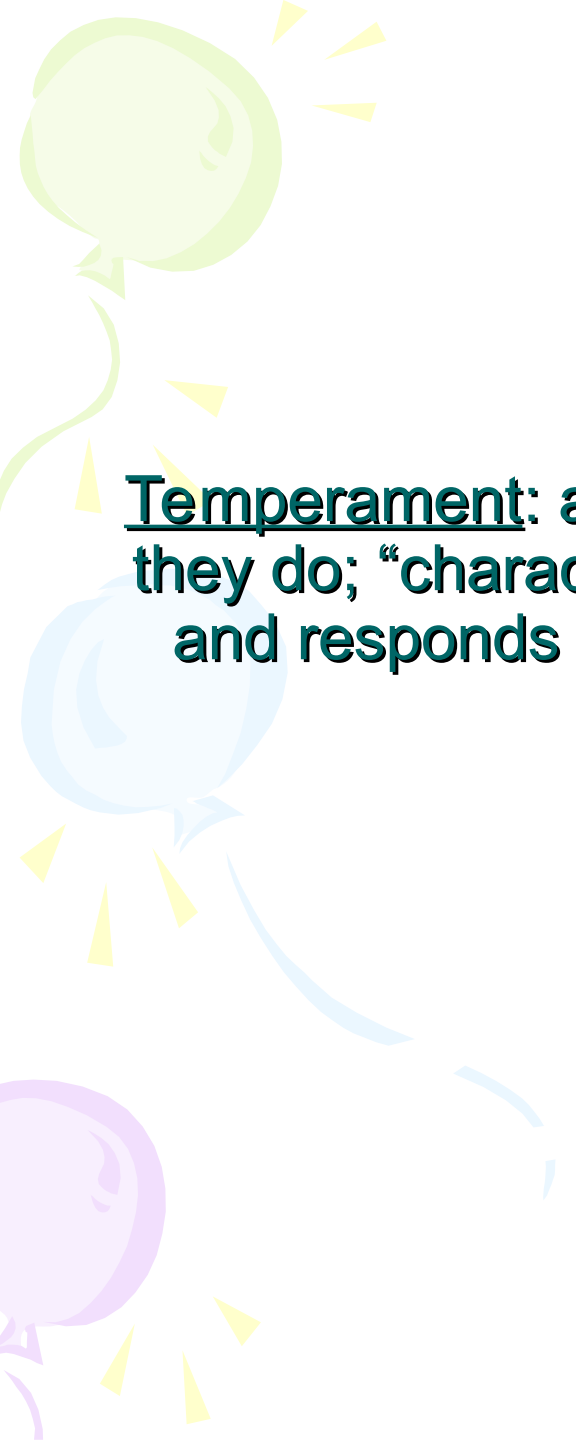


**Key 3:
Understanding
how a child is
wired**

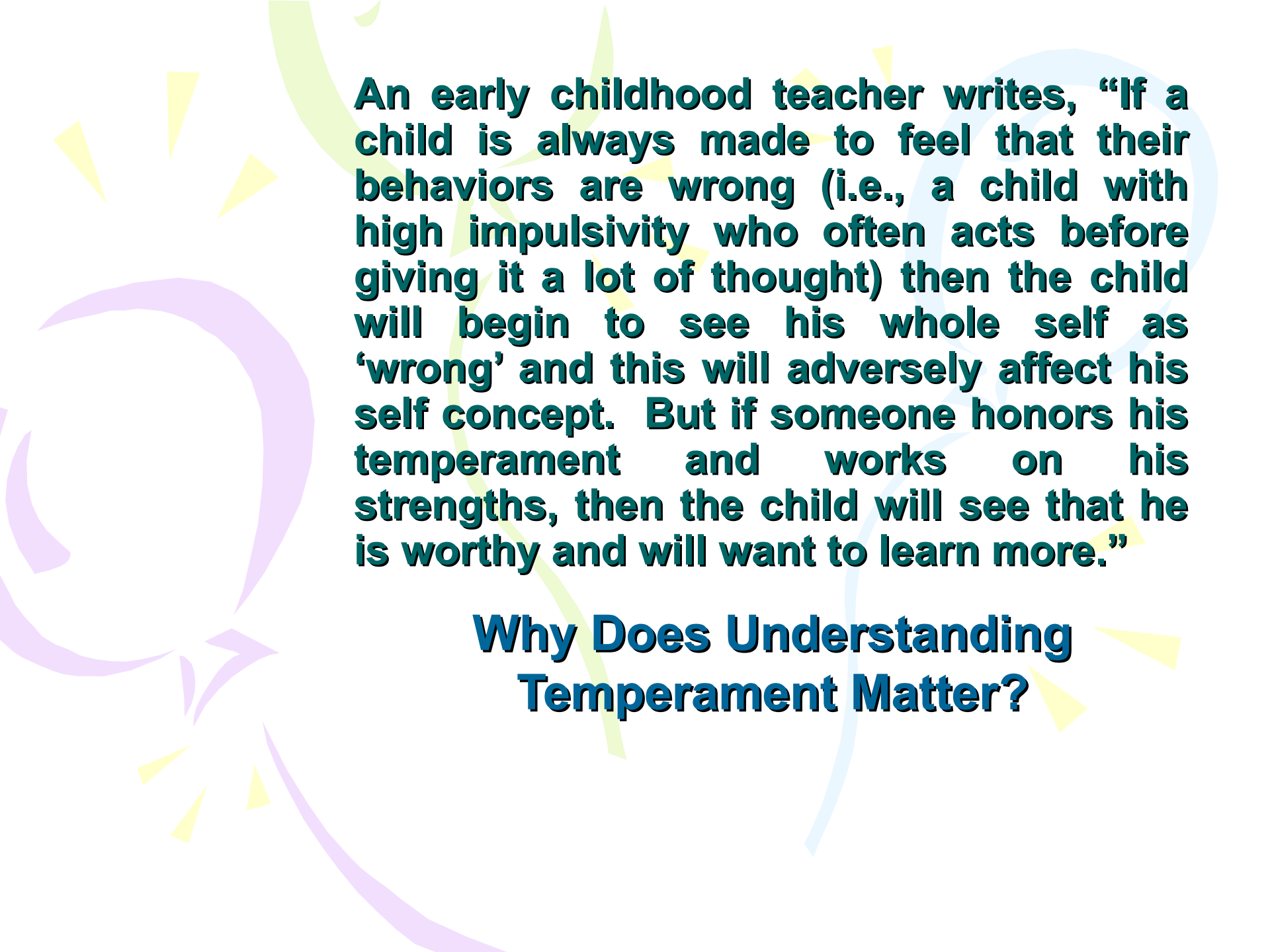
What makes up a child's temperament?

And that you're learning how important you are, how important each person you see can be. Discovering each one's specialty is the most important thing. Fred Rogers



A decorative vertical strip on the left side of the slide features three balloons: a light green one at the top, a light blue one in the middle, and a light purple one at the bottom. Each balloon is accompanied by several small, yellow, triangular shapes that resemble rays of light or streamers.

**Temperament: a person's behavior style, the "how" of what they do; "characteristic way that the individual experiences and responds to the internal and external environment."
(Warhol, 1998)**




An early childhood teacher writes, “If a child is always made to feel that their behaviors are wrong (i.e., a child with high impulsivity who often acts before giving it a lot of thought) then the child will begin to see his whole self as ‘wrong’ and this will adversely affect his self concept. But if someone honors his temperament and works on his strengths, then the child will see that he is worthy and will want to learn more.”

Why Does Understanding Temperament Matter?

Strategies for Working with Different Temperaments

Activity	Slowly introduce new, more active pastimes being careful to watch for over stimulation.	Allow time for large motor exercise. Provide safe environments, clear rules.
Regularity	Help the child learn to read his own body cues. Give a child words for hungry, tired, etc.	
Adaptability	Be aware of transitions and keep them to a minimum. Keep changes to a minimum.	
Approach/Withdrawn	Slow to approach/withdrawn: Give children ample time to adjust to a new person, place, etc. Introduce changes slowly.	Quick to approach: Continually check environment for health and safety. Help develop self-regulation skills.
Intensity		Help the child become more aware of his reactions and learn his own cues.
Distractibility		Be aware of sensory stimulation - keep to a minimum. Give fewer choices.
Mood	Negative mood: increase pleasant interactions for the child within the EC environment.	
Persistence	Be aware of triggers that may discourage a child from finishing a task. Build on what engages.	Be aware of and avoid power struggles with the child.
Sensory Awareness	Help increase sensory awareness by introducing new tastes, sounds, etc through art, music, cooking, etc. Reinforce exploration of new items.	
Emotional Sensitivity	Work with the child on expressing his feelings in words being more aware of others around them. Use videos, books to model the portrayal of emotions.	Help children find words to express their feeling about self and others. Validate feelings. Give the child time and space to regulate feelings.
Temperament	Low Activity	High Activity

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A child's mental health depends on caregivers who enhance natural temperament traits into healthy behaviors that promote emotional and social growth.

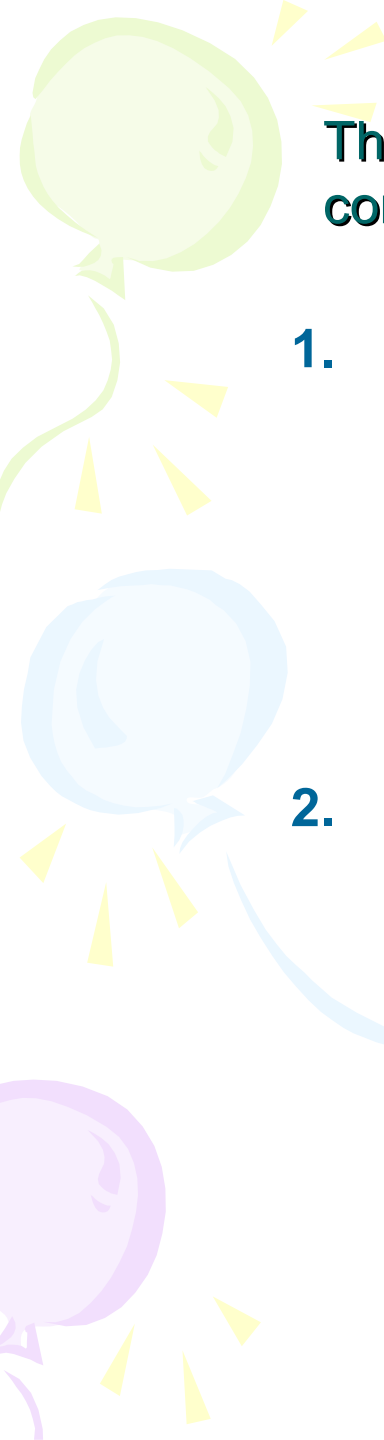
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Key 4: Teach self-regulation skills

What is emotional regulation?

Let's think of something to do while we're waiting. While we're waiting for something new to do. Let's try to think up a song while we're waiting. That's liberating and will be true to you. Fred Rogers





The ability to regulate their emotional reactions is a key component to healthy emotional development


1. It enables children to make and keep friends

- Children are taught, or not taught emotional regulation through their interactions with caregivers, peers, family, and other community members.
- They learn to react from what has been modeled to them
- Reactions will be reinforced by what ‘works’ for them in achieving their personal goals.

2. Emotional regulation helps build a positive self-view

- The knowledge of knowing she can control her feelings and impulses is empowering.
- Positive reinforcement will make her more apt to repeat her success.

The development of self-regulation is a cornerstone of strong mental health

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Later successful relationships with peers and within the community will depend on a child knowing his own feelings and how to regulate them with the skills he learned in early childhood.



Strategies to develop emotional regulation skills

- Teach specific methods to control impulses, like “Stop and wait,” “Slow down, stop, and think,” and “Take a deep breath, count to five, say ‘calm down.’”
- Model appropriate reactions to your own feelings and then explain to the children why you did what you did.
- Teach children how to control their emotions in different situations through role play or dramatic play.
- Help children learn to recognize each other’s emotions through role play or with expression flash cards.
- Always respect children’s feelings; never minimize a feeling.
- Build relationships and establish trust with each child.
- Practice specific skills for coping with fear and anxiety before they encounter stressful situations.
- Acknowledge when they are successful at self-control.



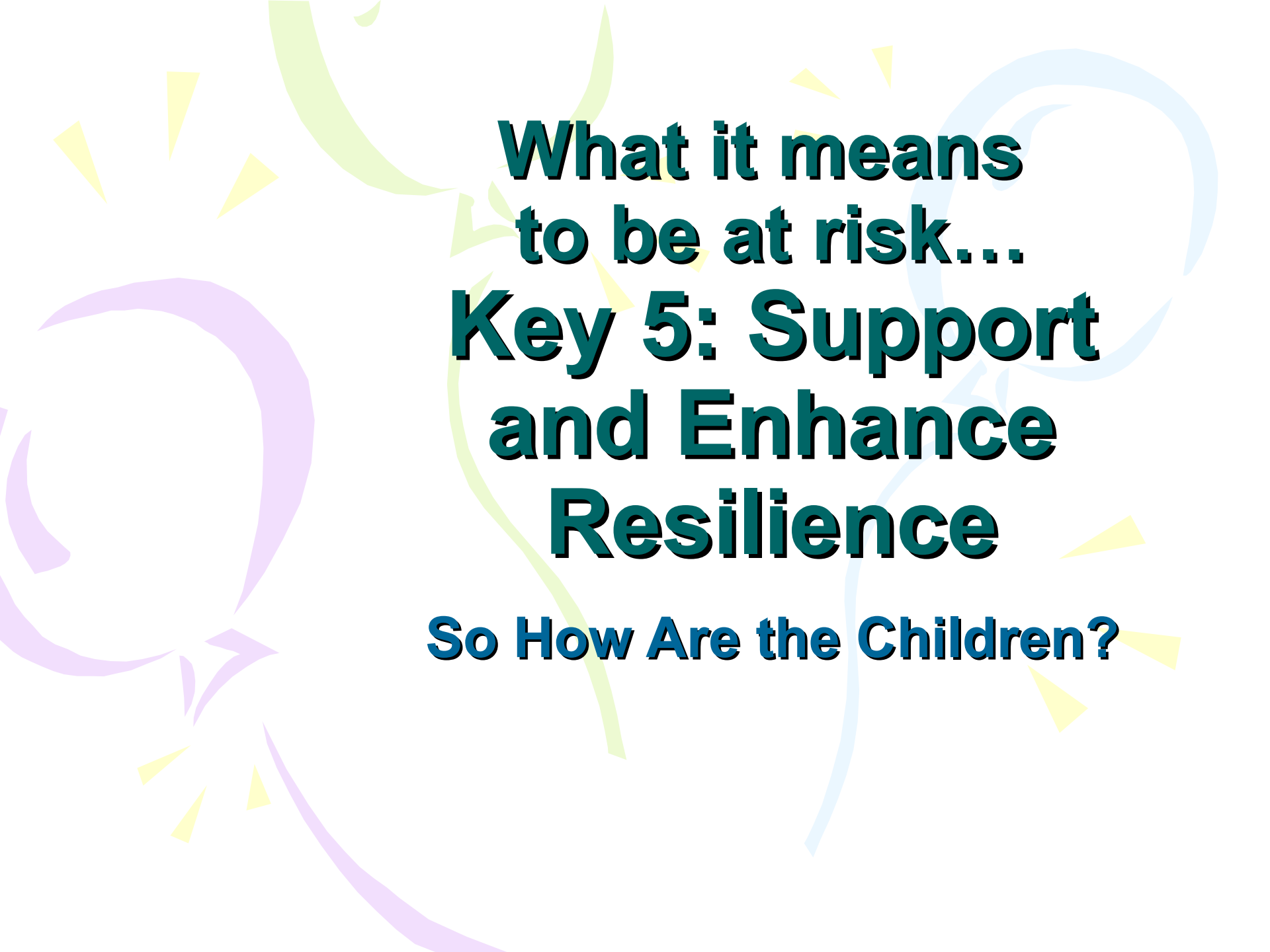
Problem-solving skills for children:

- Negotiating
- Compromising
- Recognizing and appreciating differences
- Generating alternatives
- Resolving conflict through discussion, peer mediation, “talking sticks”
- Language usage
- If/then consequences
- Perspective taking



Environmental Strategies

- Objectively look at your child care setting for sensory input that may be stressing children.
 - Sounds, smells or noise (i.e., fluorescent light buzzing, bright lights, loud/disruptive noise, etc...)
 - Having a keen outlook can prevent some behaviors from occurring that may lead to a child losing control.
- Incorporate a soft spot in your child care setting
 - Areas where children can go to relax, regroup, regain control of feelings. Include pillows, quiet toys, etc...
 - Providing mini soft-spots is proactive for helping children learn to regulate themselves.

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**What it means
to be at risk...
Key 5: Support
and Enhance
Resilience**

So How Are the Children?

We all long to be lovable, and capable of loving. Fred Rogers





So who are the children at risk?

- **An abused or neglected child** (every 10 seconds in the US a child is abused or neglected)
- **Children born into poverty**
- **A child with poor quality early care and learning experiences**
- **Children that have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event**
- **Children born to a teen mother**

Stressors

The demands placed on an individual that can be greater than his resources to cope with the event, whether it is biological in nature (as in a disability) or external (as in neglect)



Internal Stressors

Low birth rate	Disability	Prenatal substance abuse
Abuse of pregnant mother	Prenatal malnutrition	No prenatal vitamins
High delivery complications		



External Stressors

Unresponsive caregiving by primary caregiver	Parental Mental Illness	Poverty	Being born to a mother who did not graduate from high school
Family Violence	Chronic Neglect	Being born without health insurance	
	Poor Nutrition	Being born to a teen mother	Being born to a mother who receive late or no prenatal care

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Resilience

The ability to cope successfully in difficult circumstances, such as abusive situations, neglect, war, and poverty.

Characteristics in children who are resilient

- **Social competence** is the child's ability to engage in a positive way with people around them.
- **Problem-solving skills** in children who are resilient means the ability to plan, adjust to changes, anticipate consequences, and ask for help.
- **Autonomy and self-esteem** means the child believes in his own capabilities and will use those capabilities to do what he needs to do in order to get by or get through a difficulty.
- **Sense of purpose and future** is a child who is optimistic about the future. One who even in the face of great odds, that he/she will be successful.

What can you do as a caregiver to support and enhance resiliency

- Take time to get to know each of the children in your program.
- Observe them.
- Have children talk about their feelings.
- Make sure that children feel safe in your setting. Talk to them about being safe there.
- Build a sense of community in your child care program.

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Key 6: Teach friendship skills

Making and Keeping Friends

You are the only one like you. Like you, my friend, I like you. Fred Rogers



Social Competencies as Friendship Skills



- Knowing how to share
- Cooperate with others
- Problem solve a conflict among peers
- Learning how to talk to others
- Understanding feelings and actions of others

Strategies to enhance social skills in your setting

- Play “feeling” games about different play situations, like “how would you feel if...” and “what would you do next?”
- Show children how to enter play by modeling the action steps and giving them phrases to use.
- Teach children to treat each other as they would want to be treated...reinforcing often.
- Give children the words to use to express feelings during play, like frustration or impatience with another child. Role play situations that might come up and possible solutions.
- Make it safe for children to talk about their feelings by responding with non judgmental and affirming language.
- Give children tangible tools to get along with one another. Practice social skills like sharing and conflict resolution, with aids such as a “talking stick” or “conflict chair”.
- Realize that caregiver emotions and moods will have a definite impact on the setting and the children. Be aware of how your feelings may be influencing which children are asked to play and which may be left out.



Techniques to support social competency in children

- Use mealtime and family style dining to model intentional social skills like sharing, passing, asking for more and manners.
- Small group activities such as circle time or discussion time to practice listening and conversation.
- Use reading groups that help provide communication skills between peers.
- Have individual conversations with children during activities. Greet each child individually and also at the end of the day.
- Read specific books to children about friendship.
- Be a role model. Present specific skill sets on how to talk to new friends, introducing them, asking if they want someone to play with, etc.
- Give children openers and catch phrases to start conversation with others.

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Practical applications for skill development

**How do we encourage healthy
development in our early
childhood programs?**

What do you do with the mad that you feel when you feel so mad you could bite? Do you punch a bag? Do you pound some clay or some dough? Do you round up friends for a game of tag? Do you see how far you can go? It's great to be able to stop when you've planned a think that's wrong... Fred Rogers



Teach children to understand and talk about their feelings

- Encourage children to understand and talk about their own feelings.
- Help others understand empathy for the feelings, ideas and actions of others.
- Talk to the children as they interact and play interjecting when a child is playing with her baby doll asking “what’s the matter with the baby?”



Use Child First Language

- How we speak to children and speak about them makes a difference in how children see themselves.
- The impact of our words must help the child move forward in their emotional growth by building confidence, altruism, friendship, empathy, and self-regulation.
- We must model child-first language showing children that we respect them as an individual.

Support Secure Attachments with Children

- Help a child feel loved and secure by providing a trusting relationship based on secure and consistent caregiving.
- Acknowledge the child's fear by encouraging the use of words. This will allow the child to step out of their comfort zone and explore both physically and emotionally.

Building a Sense of Community for All Children

- Record daily highlights
- Classroom/childcare jobs
- Photographs
- Naming songs
- Community visitors
- Family photos



Tuning into Children

- Listen and respond to actions, feelings, and needs of children
- What is the child's mood as he enters the program or home?
- Engage and interact with children

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Set Up the Environment for Success

- Have open ended play materials
- Reinforce self-regulation skills
- Children need to feel secure in their environment - safe place
- Set programming that includes role playing, labeling feelings, writing about feelings, sharing feelings.
- A caring, responsive, consistent environment
- Nurturing responsive relationships



Six Keys Facilitator

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