

WELCOME TO OUR

## *Early Childhood Mental Health Minute*

### The Mind-Brain Connection

How Thoughts, Feelings, and Learning Work Together



Welcome to March! This month, our theme is the incredible "Mind-Brain Connection." We'll be exploring how our thoughts, feelings, and actions are all linked to our amazing brains. It's a fascinating topic that helps us understand ourselves and our children better.

### How to Prepare

Think of the brain as the body's control center, a super-powerful computer. The "mind" is like the software that runs on that computer—it's everything we think, feel, learn, and imagine.

- Brain and Mind Work Together:** The brain is the physical organ, and the mind is how your child thinks, feels, and experiences the world.
- Early Years Are Critical:** In the preschool years, the brain is especially "plastic," meaning it can adapt and grow rapidly with new experiences.
- Emotions and Learning Are Linked:** When a child feels safe and connected, their brain is more open to learning. Stress or fear can make it harder for them to focus and remember.
- Repetition Builds Connections:** Repeated positive interactions strengthen brain pathways for skills like problem-solving, kindness, and self-control.

## What to Expect

In Pre-K, we're building the foundations for our children's future learning and emotional well-being by helping them make connections in their brains. Every time they learn a new song, build with blocks, or practice sharing, they're strengthening the pathways in their brains.

- **The Brain:** Your child's brain is incredibly "plastic," which means it's flexible and changing all the time. The more they experience and learn, the stronger those brain connections become. This is why new experiences are so important!
- **Emotions and the Brain:** When a child feels big emotions like anger or frustration, it's not "just being a kid." Their brains are still learning how to manage these feelings. A child's brain has a part that reacts to threats (the amygdala) that is very active, while the part that helps with logic and control (the prefrontal cortex) is still developing. That's why they need our calm support to learn to regulate.
- **The Power of Play:** Play isn't just fun—it's crucial for brain development. When children play, they are problem-solving, being creative, practicing social skills, and building language—all of which are essential for building strong brain connections.

## How to Help

Your 4-year-old's brain is growing at an incredible pace—making over a million new connections every second! These connections are the building blocks for skills like moving, talking, and solving problems. Every time you talk, play, or cuddle with your child, you're helping their brain grow stronger. The more warm and positive moments you share, helps to build a strong foundation for learning throughout their life.

### **Talk About Feelings**

- Use simple words for emotions (happy, frustrated, proud) so your child can label what they feel.
- Example: "I see you're smiling—you look happy!"

### **Read Together Every Day**

- Reading builds language pathways and imagination.
- Ask open-ended questions: "What do you think will happen next?"

### **Move and Groove**

- Physical movement (dancing, jumping, climbing) improves brain coordination and focus.
- Try a "freeze dance" game to mix movement with listening skills.

### **Mindful Moments**

- Teach short breathing exercises: "Smell the flower... blow out the candle."
- This helps children calm down and strengthens brain regulation skills.

### **Connect Through Play**

- Play pretend games to build problem-solving, empathy, and flexible thinking.

## Things to Try

Reading nightly with your child is a great way to wind down from the day, foster a love of reading, and provide a special, quiet, one-on-one time with each other. Look through your favorite books to talk about what is going on in them.

### **Books to Read:**

- I Can Do Hard Things- by Gabi Garcia
- The Power of Yet- by Saloni Gupta
- You!- Sandra Magsamen

### **Activities to Do:**

Play Simon Says or Follow the Leader. Take turns being Simon and/or the leader. These games require listening, attention, and physical coordination.