

Nurturing Environments

Nurturing environments are those where:

- ◆ Children feel “listened” to. Children express themselves more in actions than in words. Most of their behavior has meaning. For the most part, children’s behavior is their best attempt to get what they think they need, whether or not the adult understands.
- ◆ Children feel safe and protected. There are different ways to raise a child, and parenting styles may vary. Using discipline as a form of teaching, and setting firm limits and consistent rules at home and in the early childhood programs help children feel and be safe.
- ◆ Children feel that they are loved and valued by the adults who care for them.

Infants: Babies grow so rapidly during the first year that “normal” development varies greatly from child to child. However, you may want to seek professional help if your baby shows no curiosity, extreme passivity, lack of response to adults, and constant difficulties sleeping or eating.

Toddlers: Danger signs for toddlers include extended periods of sadness when they lose interest in their daily activities, can’t sleep, lose their appetites, and have exaggerated fears of being alone. Other signs include abrupt changes in behavior; hyperactivity; and complaints about stomachaches, headaches, and dizziness for which no physical cause can be found.



“I know you are scared of something right now. Let’s think of what we could do to make you less frightened.” One technique is to draw a picture with the child of a big ball of scary feelings. Help the child make the ball smaller and smaller until only a tiny bit is left. Tell the child that he or she will soon feel that way too.

Preschoolers: You may consider seeking professional help if your preschooler withdraws from adults, peers, and friends; shows panic reactions; appears depressed or unhappy much of the time at home or school; acts much younger for an extended period of time; or constantly misbehaves at home or school in ways that are not typical for the child.

If you are worried about your child, you may wish to consult with a teacher, faith leader, pediatrician, or family doctor to refer you to a mental health professional.