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1895



**The significance of early
infant/care-giver relationships:
what does infant mental health
literature tell us about these
fundamentally important
relationships?'**

**Edel Daly,
March, 2011.**

Purpose of Presentation

- 1. To raise awareness of the unfolding area of infant mental health (IMH).**
- 2. To encourage all of us to press for further resources and training to be made available to provide key services for the development of nurturing relationships for 0 to 3 yrs population.**
- 3. To explore what we as early childhood practitioners can do to support and assist parents in their parenting of infants and young children.**

Overview of Presentation

- **Brief Introduction to Infant Mental Health.**
- **Exploration of how the IMH approach can be adapted in various family support and other child and family work in the critical birth to three years period of development.**
- **How OMEP could work to advocate on the child's behalf for further resources and training to bring the benefits of the IMH approach to more children and families.**

IMH Principles

- **The infant is an active participant in the relationship and is vulnerable to trauma.**
- **“What happens in the early years affects the course of development across the life span” Weatherston, (2000:5).**
- **“Development occurs within the context of relationships, past and present” (Weatherston, (2000: 10).**

IMH Principles

- **'There is no such thing as a baby, there is a baby and someone'. Winnicott, (1966).**
- **Early relationships matter. IMH interventions focus on the parent/ infant relationship in order to support social and emotional health.**
- **At times the parent needs to be 'held' and mothered so they can respond to the infant's needs.**

IMH services include:

- **concrete assistance**
- **emotional support**
- **developmental guidance**
- **early relationship assessment and support**
- **infant-parent psychotherapy**
- **advocacy**

(Weatherston, D. 2000).

Using IMH principles in Family Support

Working with infants and their families we can apply many IMH principles to enable the parents to 'keep the baby in mind'.

These include :

- **working with the infant and parent together,**
- **building relationships within which the parental capacity can be affirmed, developmental guidance provided and**
- **Listening to parents recall and express feelings about their own childhood experiences. "When this mother's own cries are heard she will hear her child's cries" (Fraiberg, 1975).**

IMH and Family Support

- **“No social organism requires more cohesion than the family if it is to ensure the well-being of all its members” Bettelheim (1987).**
- **Helping to improve the psychological security of the care-giver also helps the felt security of the child, particularly the young child (Brandon et al, 1999: 284).**
- **Family support works directly with these principles in mind.**
- **Applying IMH, parents can be enabled through a supportive, therapeutic relationship to become more responsive parents.**
- **If the parent has a more fulfilling, positive experience of nurturing this infant, they can feel more empowered, and proud of their ability to parent which can result in more responsive parenting to any older children.**

OMEP-World Organisation for Early Childhood Education

- **'The aim of OMEP is to promote the optimum conditions for all children, in order to ensure their well-being, development and happiness, both within their family unit and the wider communities in which they live'. (OMEP Ireland brochure, undated).**
- **It is my hope that OMEP in conjunction with the Irish Infant Mental Health could advocate for children by calling for the development and promotion of Infant Mental Health Services to ensure the social, emotional and cognitive well-being of infants and young children within secure and stable parent-child relationships.**

What can we do from here?

- **We can learn more about IMH and through our supportive relationships with infants and their carers help to foster and support consistent, responsive parenting.**
- **Be aware of what is 'not good enough parenting' and refer for appropriate intervention.**
- **Seek further training in IMH**
- **Lobby for more resources and policies for 0-3years, particularly more specialist IMH and early intervention services.**

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Thank you for listening.

