Infant Mental Health Overview

Supporting Competencies
Reducing Risks

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Objectives

- Be able to define Infant Mental Health
- Understand the elements of Promotion and Relationship-based Preventive Intervention
- Identify the strategies & tasks of best practice approaches to Relationship-based Preventive Intervention services
- Identify knowledge areas and skills needed for infant-family practitioners
- Understand differences and basic qualifications for endorsement through AimEarlyIdaho and how they relate to Infant Mental Health

Competencies Covered:
Theoretical Foundations
Knowledge Areas
- Infant/young child & family-centered practice
Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health is the developing capacity of the child from birth-five to…

- form close and secure adult and peer relationships;
- experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions;
- and explore the environment and learn—all in the context of family, community, and culture.

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Beliefs That Guide Practice

- Infants, toddlers and parents develop optimally within the context of nurturing relationships.
- The birth of a baby into a family offers the hopefulness of new relationships and possibilities for growth and change.
- Early relationships and events that occur in the first years of life are significant to the course of development throughout one’s life.
- Negative life events and unresolved relationship losses can interfere with parental sensitivity. This undermines the developing attachment relationship.

Infant Mental Health Services contain the following:

- Parent and child are seen together
- Services are generally home-based
- Services focus on developing and/or sustaining a nurturing parent-child relationship (a relationship that adequately meets the needs of parent and child)
- Services are flexible, individualized and family focused; services are comprehensive, including concrete needs, developmental guidance and/or clinical support
- Services are particularly appropriate for families with multiple risks
Infant Mental Health Training Needs

Self-Assessment: What do I need to support my ability to promote Infant Mental Health within the families I serve?

Infant Mental Health

- Promotion
- Relationship-based Preventive Intervention
- Treatment

Promotion

- Includes everyone in the field!!
- All forms of public education & awareness raising that stress the importance of supportive, responsive, & nurturing interactions between parents & children in the early years.
- Those who have an opportunity to form relationships with parents/caregivers of young children have an opportunity to promote practices that optimize infant development & mental wellness.
Relationship-based Preventive Intervention

A way of delivering a variety of services to infants, toddlers and their families which includes …

- A focus on the importance of parent-child interaction
- Knowledge of the parallel process
- The deliberate use of the practitioner’s self-awareness

The importance of parent-child interaction

- Key – listen carefully to families to help them identify, clarify & address issues that may be affecting the developing relationship with their infant/toddler
  - Increasing family coping skills
  - Underscoring & supporting positive family relationships
  - Building resilience in children by shifting the balance in risk & protective factors

A Best Practice Overview for Relationship-based Infant Mental Health - Preventive Intervention Services
Establish working relationships with parents to enhance and sustain more optimal relationships between parents and children.

Emphasis is on the use of the working relationship to support emerging competencies in early parenthood and to reduce the risks of dysfunction in infancy or significant developmental delays.

Help parents to envision more satisfying, joyful relationships with their babies by observing and discussing strengths and positive parent-infant interactions.
Designed to support children and families within the context of relationships and communities.

The focus is on the infant or toddler within the context of the parent-child relationship. The infant or toddler and parent(s) together are at the center of the intervention.

REMEMBER …

All development takes place in the context of a relationship.

The parent’s “learning” also takes place in the context of a relationship.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER!!!
Parallel Process

Parallel process describes the interlocking network of relationships between supervisors, supervisees, families, and children.

Reflective supervision and leadership in infant and early childhood programs: Mary Claire Heffon and Trudi Murch

The concept of parallel process is a foundational aspect of relationship-based work.

Describes the ways in which the experiences that a staff person has with her supervisor can affect the way she interacts with a family.

In turn, the way the staff person interacts with a child, parent, or colleague can then positively spill over and influence the parent’s relationship with her child.

Services are comprehensive, covering all domains, including concrete needs, problem solving skills, and family relationships, as well as infant or toddler development, parent-infant interactions, and early developing attachment relationships.

Services are flexible and individualized according to the reason(s) for referral, the identified needs of each infant and/or parent, and the concerns that are expressed by parents about their children and themselves.
Services are provided in a way that is **supportive**, **affirming** and strengths-based. Services are designed to be culturally sensitive, **non-intrusive**, and **nonjudgmental**.

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**Small Group Exercise**

1. Who in your agency/community embraces IMH principles or practices?
2. In what ways do you utilize a relationship-based approach in your work?

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**Intervention Strategies & Tasks**

**Building the Working Relationship**

- Visits regularly in the home assuring continuity of contacts
- Available for telephone support and center “drop-ins”
- Listens without interruption
- Shares parent’s pride & pleasure in the infant/toddler
- Meets material needs
- Nurtures the parent
- Provides a stable and consistent relationship experience for the parent
- Provides positive and responsive emotional support, comfort, and trust
- Is nonjudgmental and accepts parent’s feelings
- Uses verbal/nonverbal communication to affirm and accept parent
- Offers positive reinforcement of parent’s interactions and care of the infant/toddler
Intervention Strategies & Tasks
Providing for Material Needs
- Facilitates access to community service agencies
  - Food, Clothing, Furniture
  - Housing, Utilities
  - WIC
  - Health Care for Infant/Toddler & Parent
  - Legal Assistance
  - Job Training/Education
  - Early Intervention Services
  - Mental Health Services
- Discusses Safety Issues
- Assists with transportation to Program Events

Intervention Strategies & Tasks
Supportive Counseling
- Observes surroundings and what occurs
- Listens to the parent
- Feels what life is like for this infant/toddler and this parent; defines risks
- Responds thoughtfully and supportively
- Identifies and reinforces feelings
- Sets limits for behavior
- Boundaries of the working relationship
- Assists parents in setting boundaries for themselves and their children when appropriate

Intervention Strategies & Tasks
Problem Solving Skills
- Assists parents with problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Models problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Supports parents in using those skills to meet material needs
- Encourages parent to problem solve infant/toddler needs through observation
- Supports parents in learning problem-solving processes to manage interpersonal relationships
Intervention Strategies & Tasks

Developing Social Support

■ Understanding the reciprocal obligations involved in relationships
■ Understand the need for connections with others
■ Resolving conflict with and encouraging support from significant family members
■ Identify community services available for assistance
■ Identify possible friends, community groups and services – Playgroups, Parent Meetings, Policy Council, Parent Committees, Parent Involvement, Churches, Community Groups, etc
■ Use of anticipatory role-play to rehearse use of informal supports and community services

Intervention Strategies & Tasks

Developmental Guidance

■ Provides information about infant/toddler growth and development
■ Uses on-going assessment and screening to show infant/toddler capacities and next stages of development
■ Utilizes inquiry with parents to share developmental information
■ Uses anticipatory developmental guidance specific to each child
■ Shares written materials when appropriate
■ Encourages parents to interact positively with infant/toddler
■ Observes and provides feedback
■ Encourages parental observation
■ Communicates through the infant/toddler
■ Supports parent-child interaction (sometimes by guiding that interaction)
■ Encourages the parent to speak to infant/toddler
■ Encourages games and play activities (peek-a-boo, patty cake, finger plays, etc.)
■ Provides toys and books when appropriate

Knowledge Areas and Skills of Infant Mental Health Home Visitors

■ Ability to maintain appropriate professional boundaries
■ Knowledge of community resources and procedures for accessing resources
■ Ability to follow program policies and procedures regarding confidentiality and disclosure or privileged information
■ Ability to communicate effectively with and on behalf of parents, infants, and toddlers
■ Ability to collaborate effectively with other community professionals
■ Writing and computer skills to record service information accurately according to program guidelines
Knowledge Areas and Skills of Infant Mental Health Home Visitors

- Ability to establish trusting relationships with parents of varying economic, cultural, and functional levels
- Ability to tolerate strong emotions and facilitate difficult conversations
- Ability to identify the difference between an "ordinary crisis" and an "emergency"
- Observation and assessment skills
- Knowledge of infant/toddler development
- Knowledge of child care practices
- Knowledge of family dynamics

Knowledge Areas and Skills of Infant Mental Health Home Visitors

- Early brain development and implications for parenting
- Attachment theory and early relationship development
- Effects of separation and loss on infants, toddlers, and families
- Disorders of infancy and toddlerhood
- Family development and early parenthood (including pregnancy)
- Characteristics and needs of chronically stressed families

Knowledge Areas and Skills of Infant Mental Health Home Visitors

- Special issues related to emotional health
  - Prematurity
  - Failure to thrive
  - Birth of a baby with special needs
  - Death of a baby or sibling
  - Adolescent parenthood
  - Adjustment to pregnancy and parenthood
  - Maternal depression
  - Grief and loss
  - Substance abuse and its impact on relationships
  - Domestic violence and its impact on relationships
  - Child abuse and neglect
  - Foster care
Knowledge Areas and Skills of Infant Mental Health Home Visitors
- Working with infant/toddler and parent together
- Observing development within a relationship context and assessing both strengths and risks
- Offering developmental guidance to a parent that is specific to the child
- Creating opportunities for parent-child interaction and playful exchange
- Identifying and enhancing capacities in both parent and child
- Wondering about the infant/toddler’s experiences as well as the parent’s feelings in the presence of the child

Knowledge Areas and Skills of Infant Mental Health Home Visitors
- Inviting parents to talk, listening to what they say, and clarifying their meaning
- Following the infant/toddler and parent’s lead
- Responding with empathy
- Identifying, treating, and/or collaborating with other professionals as needed in treating disorders of infancy, delays and disabilities, parental mental illness and family functioning
- Using videotape as an intervention tool

Infant Mental Health Training Needs
Self-Assessment: What do I need to support my ability to promote Infant Mental Health within the families I serve?
Thoughts, Ideas, Questions?