



## Why Infant Social and Emotional Development Matters


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### Today:

- Introductions
- What is Infant Mental Health?
- Why care?
- How do we know when an infant or young child is at risk emotionally?
- What can we do to support healthy social-emotional development?




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### Who are we?

Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health

[www.wiamh.org](http://www.wiamh.org)  
133 South Butler Street, Ste 340  
Madison, WI 53703  
608-442-0360

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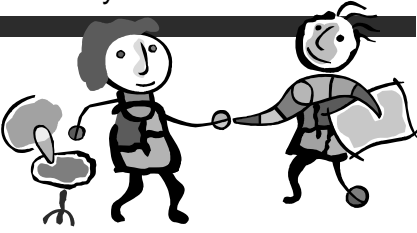

### Our Vision:

For every infant and young child in Wisconsin to have his or her social and emotional developmental needs met within the context of their family, community and culture.




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### Who are you?

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### Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

- What is it?
- What does it look like?
- Why is it important?

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## What Infant Mental Health is NOT:



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- Infant Mental Health is a multi-disciplinary field
- It crosses all systems

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## System of Care

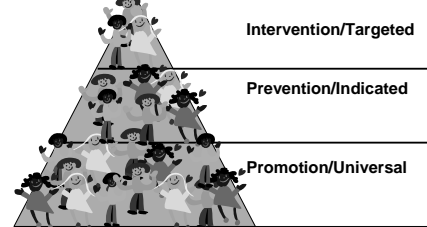
- A continuum of comprehensive services focused on:
  - Promotion
  - Prevention/Early Intervention
  - Treatment

Adopted from Roxane Kaufmann

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## Promoting well-being: a Public Health approach to Mental Health

### Levels and Types of Support



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## Infant Mental Health

- "The developing capacity of the child from birth to five to:
  - Experience, regulate, and express emotion
  - Form close and secure interpersonal relationships
  - Explore the environment and learn

all in the context of family, community and cultural expectations for young children"

Adapted from a working definition developed by Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families—Infant Mental Health Task Force

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## Infant Mental Health (IMH)

- IMH is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development
- IMH lays the foundation for future success
- IMH involves the development of trust, self confidence, motivation, persistence, and self control

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## Infant Mental Health

- Develops through relationships with parents and other caregivers.
  - IMH is fostered through nurturing and supportive relationships.
  - Teaches the child that she/he has an impact on her/his environment.

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## What the baby learns about self from interaction with adults

- I am listened to or not
- What I choose to do is valued or it isn't
- How I express my emotions is accepted or it isn't
- I am allowed to explore or I am not
- Mostly my needs are met or they are not

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## Why Care?

- Healthy social and emotional development is a protective factor against child abuse and neglect
- Social and emotional development linked to success in school and beyond
- Social and emotional development is firmly tied to all other areas of development

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## Infant Mental Health Problems



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## Possible Signs: birth to age 3

- Poor weight gain or growth ("failure to thrive")
- Delayed developmental milestones
  - Motor
  - Communication (Speech and Language)

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## Behaviors that warrant concern Infants and toddlers (birth to three)

- Chronic feeding or sleep difficulties
- Inconsolable "fussiness" or irritability
- Incessant crying with little ability to be consoled
- Inability to adapt to new situation
- Flat affect

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### Behaviors that warrant concern Infants and toddlers (birth to three)

- Inability to establish relationship with other children and adults
- Easily startled or alarmed by routine events
- Excessive hitting, biting, and pushing of other children

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### Behaviors that warrant concern Preschoolers (three to five)

- Throws wild, despairing tantrums
- Displays repeated aggressive or impulsive behavior
- Hyper-vigilant
- Hyper-compliant

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### Behaviors that warrant concern Preschoolers (three to five)

- Inability to play with others
- Little or no communication
- Extremely withdrawn; little or no interest in social interaction
- Lack of appropriate fear responses
- Self-stimulation

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### Possible Signs

- Parent-Infant/child Interactions and Relationships
  - Lack of reciprocity
  - Parent attributes malignant motives to child's behavior
  - Disinterest or ambivalence toward child
  - Serious lack of understanding of child development
  - Lack of emotional availability or inappropriate emotional tone

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### Useful Resource

- <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/EarlyID/index.htm>

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### How can we help?

- Cultivate good relationships with parents/primary caregivers
  - Ask questions/wonder
  - Listen actively
  - Empathize
  - Point out the strengths



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## It is all about relationships

- Parallel process
  - Organizations/Directors → staff
  - Staff: child care teacher → parent
  - Parent → child

**“Do unto others as you would have others to unto others.”**

J. Pawl



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## Useful Resource:



<http://www.talaris.org>



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## Getting in tune with the baby

- What's my baby telling me?
  - Facial expressions
  - Sounds
  - Body language
- Responding



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## Definition of Responsiveness

- Contingent
- Appropriate
- Prompt

Bornstein, M & Bornstein, H (1995)



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## Engagement Cues

- Signals of an infant's readiness for interaction
- Cues:
  - Babbling
  - Mutual Gaze
  - Mutual Smiling
  - Turning Head to Caregiver
  - Smooth Cyclic Movements



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## Disengagement Cues

- Signals of an infant's need for a break in the interaction
- Potent cues:
  - Back arching
  - Crying
  - Maximal Lateral Gaze Aversion
  - Tray pounding



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## Disengagement Cues

- Potent cues
  - Whining
  - Pushing/Pulling away
  - Lateral Head Shake
  - Fussing
  - Spitting
  - Pale/Red skin
  - Withdraw from alert to sleep state

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## What the baby learns about self from interaction with adults

- I am listened to or not
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## Principles for supporting a secure attachment

Adopted from Sarah Landy's  
Pathways to Competence

- Comfort children when they are hurt, ill, upset, frightened or lonely
  - Be prompt, responsive, available, sensitive
- Show positive feelings toward the child and express genuine love and joy
  - Spend time doing mutually enjoyable, warm & intimate activities (reading a story, playing a game)
  - Tune into the child, let him/her take the lead
- Give children the sense of trust in the world and the people in it
  - Find balance between encouraging exploration (fostering independence) & ensuring that children are safe (being protective)

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## Principles for supporting a secure attachment

Adopted from Sarah Landy's  
Pathways to Competence

- Accept the child's feelings such as anger, jealousy, sadness, and fear
  - Remember, all feelings are valid!
- Create and keep alive good, warm, and joyful memories.
  - Establish predictable traditions
  - Let children know where you are going and when you will be back
  - Provide objects to give security and keep memories of you/parent
  - Let child know their parents are thinking about them
- Be as predictable and consistent as possible in reacting to a child's behavior
  - Give children clear sense of rules
  - Establish routines

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## Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning



- CSEFEL- National center focused on improving the social and emotional outcomes of young children
- <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/>

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## Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)



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“Every child needs one person who is crazy about him.”

Urie Bronfenbrenner



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“If a child doesn't know how to read, we *teach*.

If a child doesn't know how to swim, we *teach*.

If a child doesn't know how to drive, we *teach*.

If a child doesn't know how to behave, we....

.....*punish?*

.....*teach?*

Why can't we finish the last sentence as automatically as we do the others?”

Tom Herner (NASDE President ) *Counterpoint 1998*

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## Promoting Children's Success

Focus on teaching children what  
To Do!

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## Our Common Goal

Children

- who can enjoy rich relationships
- who are healthy and trusting
- who feel good about themselves and what they do
- who are able to confidently express their feelings and needs

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## Our Common Goal

Children

- who are able to control their impulses and behavior
- who are able to empathize and care about others
- who can be free to learn and creatively express themselves



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## Major Messages

- The most important thing we can do is build positive relationships with children and families.
- Promoting social emotional development requires attention and effort. It requires a comprehensive approach that includes building relationships, evaluating our own behaviors, and TEACHING.
- To help children optimize social and emotional development, professionals should focus on supporting families (and other primary caregivers) in building healthy relationships.

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## Resources

- Talaris
  - <http://www.talaris.org>
- CSEFEL
  - <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/>
- Zero to Three
  - [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

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## Early Relationships Matter!



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