



Minnesota Infant Mental Health Project

**CEED—
Center for Early
Education and
Development**
University of Minnesota
Room 215 Pattee Hall
150 Pillsbury Drive S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0223
Tel. 612.625.2898
Fax. 612.625.6619



What is Infant Mental Health?

Infant Mental Health is the optimal growth and social-emotional, behavioral and cognitive development of the infant in the context of the unfolding relationship between infant and parent (Minnesota Infant Mental Health Services Feasibility Study, 1998).

"In its simplest terms it's about relationships—promoting and supporting nurturing relationships for all infants. It's about having the first relationship be a solid base for the next one and all the ones in the future. It's about learning to trust that our physical and emotional needs will be met. And it's about being able to use those trusting relationships to become healthy, productive adults. After all, it's because of healthy relationships that we desire to please our parents and become socialized beings. It's because of relationships that we care about our neighbors. So Infant Mental Health is about prevention and early intervention in assuming positive growth and development" (Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, 1993).

Why is it so Important?

New research on the developing brain suggests the importance of early experience not just for cognitive development, but for emotional development as well. During this period, brain development occurs at a rapid pace and is shaped by infants' experiences and early relationships.

"Emotional growth, patterns of attachment and increasing competency in the ability to form relationships, and the emergence of self-confidence are as crucial to overall development as are physical growth, cognitive or motor skills. The physical, mental and emotional health of the very young child provides the foundation for all further development" (Jane Knitzer, National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia School of Public Health, 1998).

Because infants are so dependent on their parents or primary caregivers, whatever affects the adult has an effect on the child. Families without financial and social supports are at greater risk for negative outcomes. If an adult is experiencing a life situation that prevents them from parenting well, such as depression, poverty, family or community violence, homelessness, chemical dependency, or social isolation, there can be a profound impact on the well being of the child. Similarly, if there are attachment or relationship issues between the infant and their caregiver such as failure to respond to the baby's needs in a nurturing manner, the child's development can be compromised.

What are Infant Mental Health services?

Since the very young child's development occurs within the context of their family and other primary relationships, Infant Mental Health services are provided within the context of these relationships. Infant Mental Health services are provided in a collaborative manner with the parents, establishing a trusting relationship by listening and learning from each other as they all seek to provide what is best for the child (Minnesota Infant Mental Health Services Feasibility Study, 1998). The goal of Infant Mental Health services is to strengthen the relationships between the parent and child. An Infant Mental Health service provider works to draw the child and parent together by being a support to the parent and providing a voice for the child.

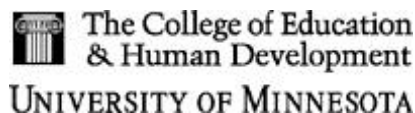
Infant Mental Health services are multidimensional and include providing emotional support for the parent and child; access to concrete resources such as food, clothing, transportation and housing; and developmental guidance and advocacy in order to allow the parent to understand their child's needs and development. The services may range from assisting the family in meeting their basic needs for adequate and safe housing, food and health care to assisting the family in identifying a network of social supports within their neighborhood and community to providing a continuum of ongoing screening, assessment, intervention and case management services in order to address a range of developmental, mental health and environmental needs to the provision of intensive support and interventions for very young children and their families experiencing more serious developmental and psychosocial vulnerabilities (Minnesota Infant Mental Health Services Feasibility Study, 1998).

How can I find out more information about Infant Mental Health in Minnesota?

Minnesota Infant Mental Health Project

The Minnesota Infant Mental Health Project is a cross-agency initiative funded by the Minnesota Department of Health; Human Services; and Children, Families, and Learning that seeks to establish and support a statewide framework of mental health services for infants, young children, and their families by enhancing existing programs and resources.

Contact the Minnesota Infant Mental Health Project at:



CEED—Center for Early Education and Development

Web site: <http://education.umn.edu/ceed/projects/infantmentalhealth>

Christopher Watson

215 Pattee Hall

150 Pillsbury Drive S.E.

Minneapolis, MN 55455-0223

612-625-2898