Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH): Promoting resilience across a lifetime
August, 2019

Dorinda Silver Williams, PhD, LICSW
Georgetown University, Center for Child and Human Development
dw831@Georgetown.edu

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)

What does that mean?
Why the stakes are so high

• Extraordinary development
  • Foundational
  • Comprehensive
  • Rapid

Early development across multiple domains
Brain connections and plasticity

SYNAPTIC DENSITY: Synapses are created with astonishing speed in the first three years of life. For the rest of the first decade, children’s brains have twice as many synapses as adults’ brains. Drawings supplied by H.T. Chugani.

The power of relationships
“There is no such thing as a baby.”

Winnicott, 1964, p. 88

...if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone
Early relationships

Attachment

Developing a relational template

Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1988

Secure attachment

– Secure base

– Contingent on parent’s physical and emotional availability

– Secure base

– Internal working model

Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1988
Slade, Greven, Segrin, Benbach, Levy, & Lecken, 2005

Other styles of attachment

- Anxious attachment
- Avoidant attachment
- Disorganized attachment

Ainsworth, 1978;
Main & Solomon, as cited in Posada, Waters, Crowell, & Lay, 1995
Reflective functioning

Reflective functioning
Reflective functioning

Intergenerational resilience

Secure attachment

Reflective functioning

Secure attachment

Reflective functioning

Our to-do list for parents

- Be emotionally present
- Be sensitive and attuned
- Respond contingently
- Foster routines and predictability
- Co-regulate
- Experience joyful interactions

Slade, Grienenberger, Bernbach, Levy, & Locker, 2005
What parents/caregivers might be, or have been, experiencing

• Social injustice
• Poverty
• Domestic violence
• Community violence
• Mental health challenges
• Developmental and/or complex trauma
• Limited social support

Relationships reverberate

Creating a safe, trusting, and nurturing relationship with parents can help parents create a safe, trusting, and nurturing relationships with their young children.
Our to-do list for home visitors

- Be emotionally present
- Be sensitive and attuned
- Respond contingently
- Foster routines and predictability
- Co-regulate
- Experience joyful interactions

Relationships reverberate

Creating a safe, trusting, and nurturing relationship with home visitors can help home visitors to create a safe, trusting, and nurturing relationship with parents, which can help parents create a safe, trusting, and nurturing relationship with their young children.
Thank you for all that you do on behalf of children and families

References


