

# IMH Core Concepts 2: Attachment

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# Introductions

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- What brought you to this work with infants and families?
- What do you think about when you hear “attachment”?
- What do you hope to gain from this training?

# Infant Mental Health: Why Me?.....

## It's Everybody's Business!

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- Understanding IMH principles is crucial
  - to guide ALL work that involves infants' optimal development and social/emotional well being
  - at ALL levels of focus: Promotion, Prevention, Intervention
- IMH principles apply for work in early care & education, home visiting, early intervention, health care (pediatrics, nursing, psychiatry), behavioral health care, child welfare/foster care/courts, etc.—whenever a baby is involved.

# Infant Mental Health: Celebrating babies and those who care for them!

The developing capacity of the child 0-5 years of age:

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



# Infant Mental Health Perspective: Keeping the Baby in Mind

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- The birth of a baby offers the hopefulness of a new relationship, growth and change
- A baby always has something to say
- A baby remembers the earliest relationship experiences

# Infant Mental Health Perspective: Keeping the Family in Mind

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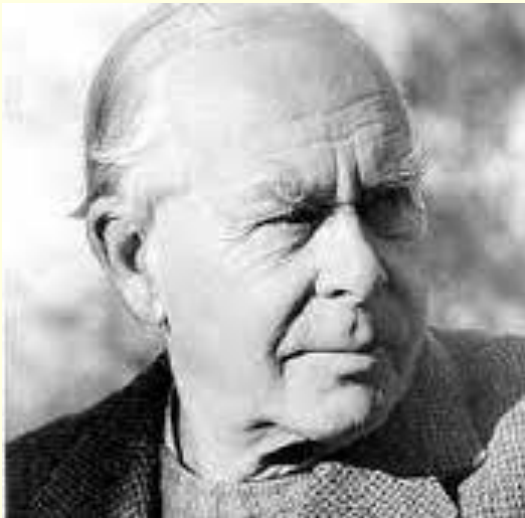
## Normative Transition to Parenthood...

- is a time of unrivaled demands and challenges
- typically involves heightened family and family-of-origin issues related to becoming a parent
- requires adjustments in sleep schedules, employment, and role allocation
- is different each time...
  - who is this particular infant (unique style, needs, strengths, and vulnerabilities?)
  - how does this infant “fit” into our family?

# Theory: John Bowlby

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- Ethological Perspective
- Survival of the species: human newborns and adults are biologically wired for attachment



# A Good Cry for Survival (NYT 9.5.17)



S. Dickstein (2017)



# Attachment Serve and Return Behaviors

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- Infant attachment behaviors are activated when the infant is stressed or distressed
  - Signaling Needs (e.g., Crying, Reaching)
  - Proximity seeking and Maintaining contact
- Caregiver Sensitivity and Responsiveness
  - Recognizing infant signals and needs
  - Accurately reading/interpreting cues
  - Contingent responsiveness
  - Consistent and predictable responsiveness

# Attachment System

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- Balance Attachment and Exploratory Systems
  - Secure base from which to explore
  - Safe haven to which to return when stressed or distressed
- Attachment Implications
  - Sense of Self as Worthy of Love
  - Sense of Others as Trustworthy

# Theory: Mary Ainsworth

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- Power of Observation
- Strange Situation
  - Research Protocol  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsewNrHUHU>
  - Attachment Classification
    - Secure (B)-70%
    - Insecure-Avoidant (A)
    - Insecure-Resistant (C)
  - Disorganized



# Experience of Secure infants...

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- Learn they can trust what they feel
- Have confidence that the environment is predictable and responsive to their needs
- Rely on particular caregivers to be there when they need them
- Expect success in social interactions with others now and over the lifespan (peers, romantic partners)

# Experience of Insecure infants...

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- Have trouble regulating affect especially during stressful situations
- Exhibit poor self-control
- Do not seek out or rely on others for comfort
- May display excessive anxiety
- Are not certain about their own feelings and cannot trust others to help them sort out affective situations

# Experience matters

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- “Serve and Return” Experiences Shape the Architecture of the Developing Brain
- Repeated back-and-forth well-coordinated transactional dance promotes:
  - Infant’s experience of being an important agent in the relationship
  - Infant’s capacity for affect regulation and self-control
  - Infant’s trust/anticipation of caregiver’s responses

And:

- Parent’s experience of being an effective agent in the relationship
- Parent’s perceptions of the infant as predictable or knowable
- Parent’s sense of self-esteem and parenting efficacy

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- Tronick video

# Theory: Mary Main

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- Adult Attachment
- Intergenerational meaning-making (narrative based)
- Ghosts in the Nursery (S. Fraiberg); Angels, too!
- Adult Attachment Research (AAI)
  - Autonomous (F)-55%
  - Insecure-Dismissive (D)
  - Insecure-Preoccupied (E)
  - Unresolved with respect to loss/grief







Vignette

Sara is three weeks old. Her mother and father just moved to a new town for dad's new job. They have no families or friends in the area. Dad works long hours and was only able to take a few days off after the baby was born. Mom is by herself all day with Sara. Mom begins to show signs of depression - she's weepy and listless, and has been spending extended periods of sitting on the couch staring at the TV or out the window. Sara, lying in her crib, is feeling hungry. Her tummy rumbles. She begins to cry. Mom is sitting on the couch with the TV on. She hears Sara's cries from the other room. Mom sighs and turns up the TV to block out Sara's cries. Mom begins to cry too. After about 15 minutes, Mom gets up to feed Sara. She brings the baby to the couch to feed her a bottle. Mom looks at Sara's face. When the baby does not look back at her, Mom sighs again, her body slumps a little, and she looks at the TV for the rest of the feeding.

(Zero to Three Mental Health Task Force/ EHS)

# Attachment in Action

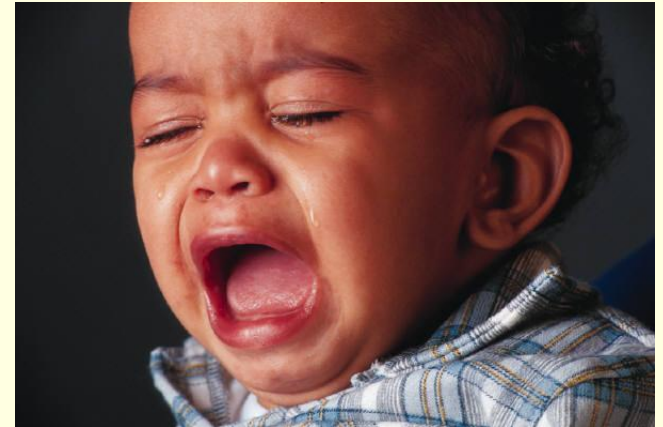
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- How can we understand this relationship from an attachment perspective?
- What attachment behaviors does Sara show?
- What might we wonder about her mom?
- What do we notice about this dyad's “serve and return” pattern?

# Attachment Disruptions

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- Infants/toddlers are acutely aware of relationship disruptions – shown in their bodies, behavior and brain development
- Disruptions in attachment may contribute to disturbances in other developmental areas (e.g., affect regulation) that may be linked with psychopathology and relationship problems later on



# Hope in the Context of Despair

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- Infant mental health specialists work with the dyad to “watch, wonder, and wait” ....for moments of connection and repair
- Attachment security may protect the child from adverse outcomes (e.g., related to environmental risk)

# “CRASH”

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- 2004 movie written and directed by Paul Haggis
- "Crash" tells interlocking stories of whites, blacks, Latinos, Koreans, Iranians, cops and criminals, the rich and the poor, the powerful and powerless, all defined in one way or another by racism. All are victims of it, and all are guilty of it. Sometimes, yes, they rise above it, although it is never that simple. Their negative impulses may be instinctive, their positive impulses may be dangerous, and who knows what the other person is thinking? (R. Ebert)
- “We crash into each other so we can feel something”

# Onward Reflection within the Context of a Trusting Relationship...

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- Regularly examine your own thoughts, feelings, strengths, growth areas.
- Explore your own experiences and vulnerabilities, as well as those of the infants, young children and families you work with
- Allow your feelings to inform the relationship work you do
- Remain open, curious and emotionally available to families, to your supervisor, to your peers and to yourself

# Relationships are a Hallmark of IMH Work

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- Relationship is at the heart of our work. We tell our stories to be known, and to come to know the other. Each person brings something to the other...parent and baby, provider and parent, supervisor and provider. (D. Weatherston)
- Story-telling leads to a place of possibility. A place of “we could....” The possibility of something new is the thought that develops out of the space (or silence) between people as stories are told—when they pause to consider that something might be different (M. Warren)



Thank you for your attention

Thank you for your contributions

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The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. (Remen, 1996)