

What is an Infant Mental Health Specialist?

And how do you become one!

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2006



Why care about the mental health of infants?

- What happens in the first months and years of life matters a lot
- Society is changing in ways which impact our youngest members
- We can now identify and intervene in situations that compromise the healthy development of infants and young children



The first years are important:

Children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn

- Development from birth to 5 years lays the foundations on which later competencies builds
- Development of cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional skills are inextricably linked in infancy
- Striking disparities between what children **know** and **can do** are evident well before kindergarten
- Early child development can be seriously compromised by social, regulatory and emotional impairments



Infant Mental Health

“All children benefit from a sustained primary relationship that is nurturing, supportive, and protective. Early relationships and events occurring in the early years are significant to development throughout the lifespan. ***Negative life events*** and ***unresolved relationship losses*** can interfere with parental sensitivity, undermining the developing attachment relationship.”

Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, 2000



Infant Well-Being

“State of emotional and social competence in young children who are developing appropriately within the interrelated contexts of biology, relationships and culture”

Zeanah & Zeanah, 2001



When development goes awry

- Some children are born with physical and/or genetic deficiencies that interfere with brain development
- Specific threats to development can originate from within the child's environment.
- Children's early development depends on the health and well-being of their parents



Definition of Infant Mental Health Practice

“Infant mental health clinicians work to enhance the development of very young children and alleviate their suffering”

Charles Zeanah, M.D., & Paula Doyle Zeanah, Ph.D. [Zero to Three Bulletin](#)

Who is an “Infant”?



Infant mental health practice focuses on:

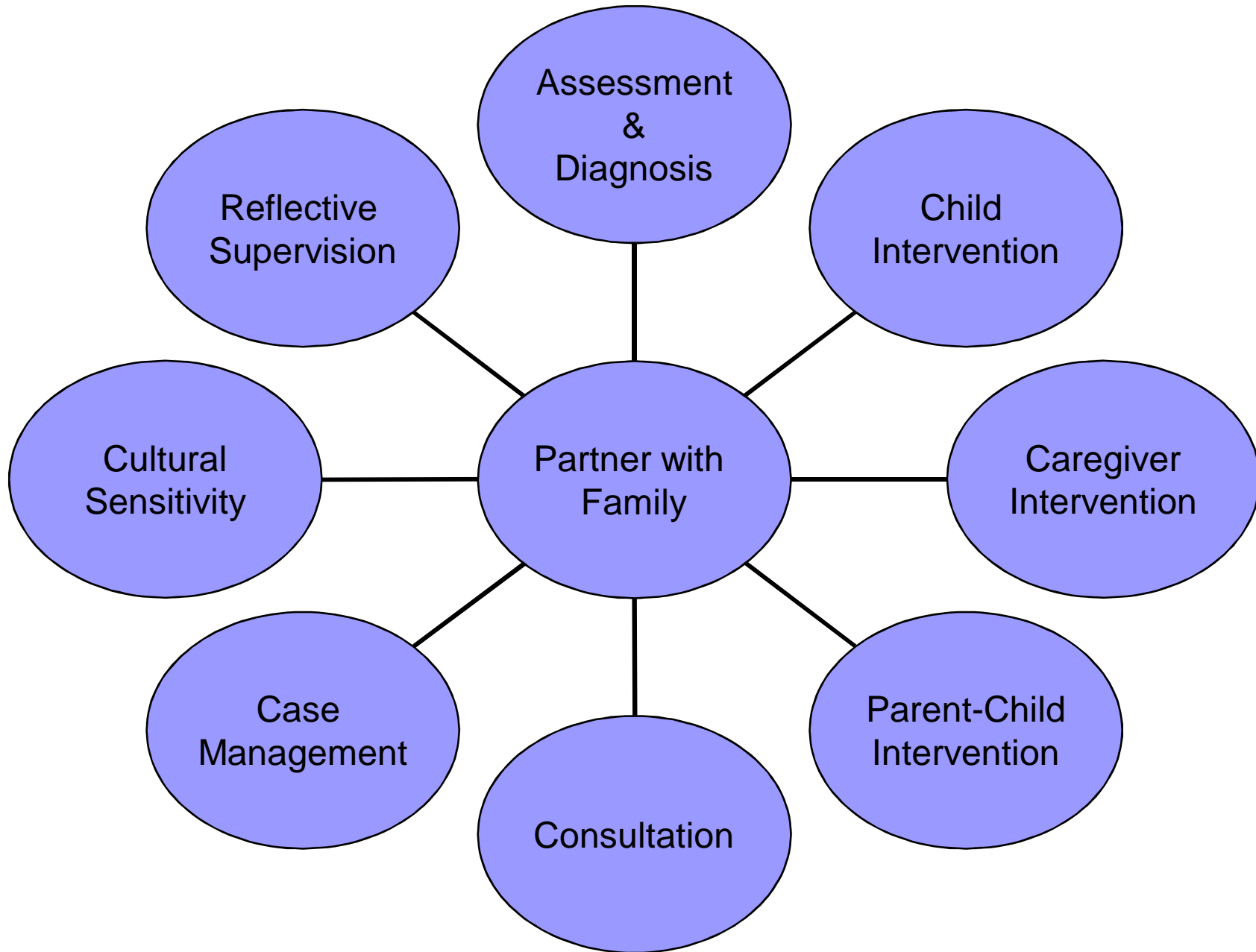
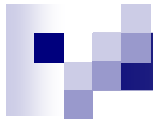
- ❖ Importance of multiple interrelated contexts within which the infant develops
- ❖ The process and content of infant development
- ❖ Risk **and** protective factors as they impact developmental trajectories
- ❖ Infant psychopathology
- ❖ Social competence and resilience

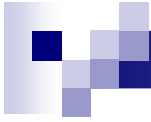


Infant Mental Health Specialists

- Licensed mental health specialists working with infants, young children, and their families
- Provide services to families with young children or primary caregivers diagnosed with emotional disorders, severe mental health problems, or have experienced abuse, neglect, or violence
- Support and treatment for families, caregivers and young children with more intensive emotional and behavioral needs

*Harambe Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative
University of Colorado at Denver, 2003*





Evaluation

❖ Medical/Developmental

❖ Cognitive

Speech

Motor

Sensory

❖ Psychological

Emotional

Peer

Moral

Attachment

❖ Context

Assessment and Diagnosis

Diagnosis

DC0-3R Process



Child Interventions

- ❖ Play therapy
- ❖ Cognitive Behavioral Interventions
- ❖ Sibling Interventions
- ❖ Social Skills Training
- ❖ Attentional Training

Child Interventions



Caregiver Interventions

- ❖ Identification of mental disorders, psychological conditions, personality disorders & problems
- ❖ Identification of substance abuse, domestic violence, history of trauma
- ❖ Providing treatment or referring for treatment and collaborating with providers
- ❖ Learns about the parent's thoughts and feelings related to the presence and care of the young child and changing responsibilities of parenthood
- ❖ Allows core relational conflicts and emotions to be expressed by the parent; holding, containing, and talking about them as the parent is able

Caregiver Interventions



Caregiver Interventions

- ❖ Psycho-education and Parenting Programs

 - Parents as Teachers

 - Parent Effectiveness Training

- ❖ Parent Support Groups

 - Specific caregiver support groups

 - NAMI

- ❖ Parent to Parent Programs

 - PIR

 - Early Head Start

Caregiver Interventions



Parent-child Interventions

- ❖ Dyadic Therapy

- ❖ “Ghosts in the Nursery”

- ❖ Watch, Wait & Wonder

- ❖ Theraplay

- ❖ STEEP

- ❖ MIM

Parent-child Interventions

- ❖ Dyadic Therapy Groups

- ❖ Postpartum Depression Group

- ❖ Attachment/Conduct Disorder



Consultation

❖ Mental Health consultation in early childhood settings is a *problem-solving* and *capacity-building* intervention implemented within a *collaborative relationship* between a professional consultant with mental health expertise and...individuals with other areas of expertise.....

Consultation

❖ The goal of early childhood mental health consultation is to build the capacity of staff, families, programs and systems to prevent, identify, treat, and reduce the impact of mental health problems among children from birth to age six and their families

(Cohen and Kaufman, 2000)



Consultation

- ❖ Child-care settings
- ❖ Educational settings
- ❖ Medical settings
- ❖ Foster care settings
- ❖ Legal settings

Consultation



Case Management

❖ Child Welfare

❖ Medical Home

❖ Educational Settings

❖ Foster care or Family

❖ Legal settings

Case Management



Cultural Sensitivity





Reflective Supervision

❖ Why?

- ❖ Infant mental health work is evocative & challenging
- ❖ Sense of urgency, chaos or vulnerability
- ❖ Attending to your own feelings
- ❖ Tolerating and reflecting on these feelings
- ❖ “Parallel Process”: Parents relationships with providers often parallel their relationships with their children; the actuality of stark repetitions can be startling

S. Seligman, “Clinical Interviews with Families of Infants” 2002



Reflective Supervision

❖ How?

- ❖ Individual reflective supervision
- ❖ Peer supervision
- ❖ Consultative supervision

Reflective Supervision