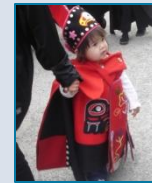


# Support For The Littlest Alaskans

1

## INTRODUCTION TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH



# Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

2

Infant mental health as we know and talk about it today is a cross-section of many disciplines – a body of knowledge that has come together to inform us about the growth and development of young children.

Biology, physiology, child development, education, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, medicine, research – tons of anecdotal history from professionals and families.

We have moved far passed the notion that babies are born as blank slates/incapable/ unaware.



# Definition of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

3

“The young child’s capacity to experience, regulate, and express emotions, form close and secure relationships. And explore the environment and learn.”

“All of these capacities will best be accomplished within the caregiving environment that includes family, community, and cultural expectations for young children. Developing these capacities is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.” Zero to Three, 2001



## The Story of the O's

by Chandra Ghosh Ippen, Ph.D.

Illustrations by Erich Ippen



Free download available at [Piploproductions.com](http://Piploproductions.com).

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# Foundational Concepts

5

- Focus on Strengths in infants and families
- A relational framework for assessment and intervention

“There is no such thing as a baby,...If you set out to describe a baby, you will find that you are describing a baby and someone.” (Winnicott 1947)

- A prevention orientation



# Parallel Process of Attunement

6

Supervision helps us to learn to hold/attune to ourselves

So we can attune to parents

So the parent can hold/contain herself/himself,  
And then attune to the baby

And the baby can internalize the attunement /holding



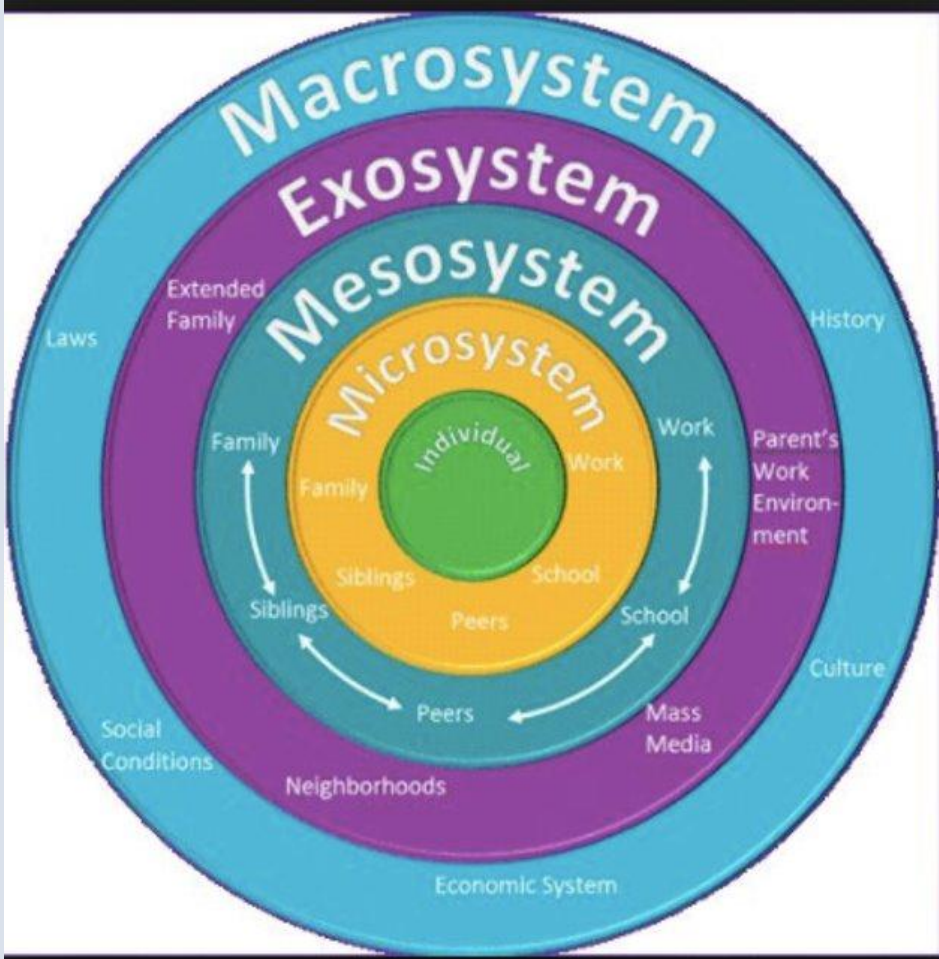
# Core Beliefs about Infant Mental Health

7

- Optimal Growth and development occur within nurturing relationships
- The birth and care of a baby offers a family the possibility of new relationships, growth and change
- What happens in the early years affects the course of development across the life span
- Early developing attachment relationships may be distorted or disturbed by parental histories of unresolved losses and traumatic life events
- The therapeutic presence of an Infant Mental Health Specialist may reduce risk of relationship failure and off hopefulness of warm and nurturing parental responses



# Core Beliefs about Infant Mental Health

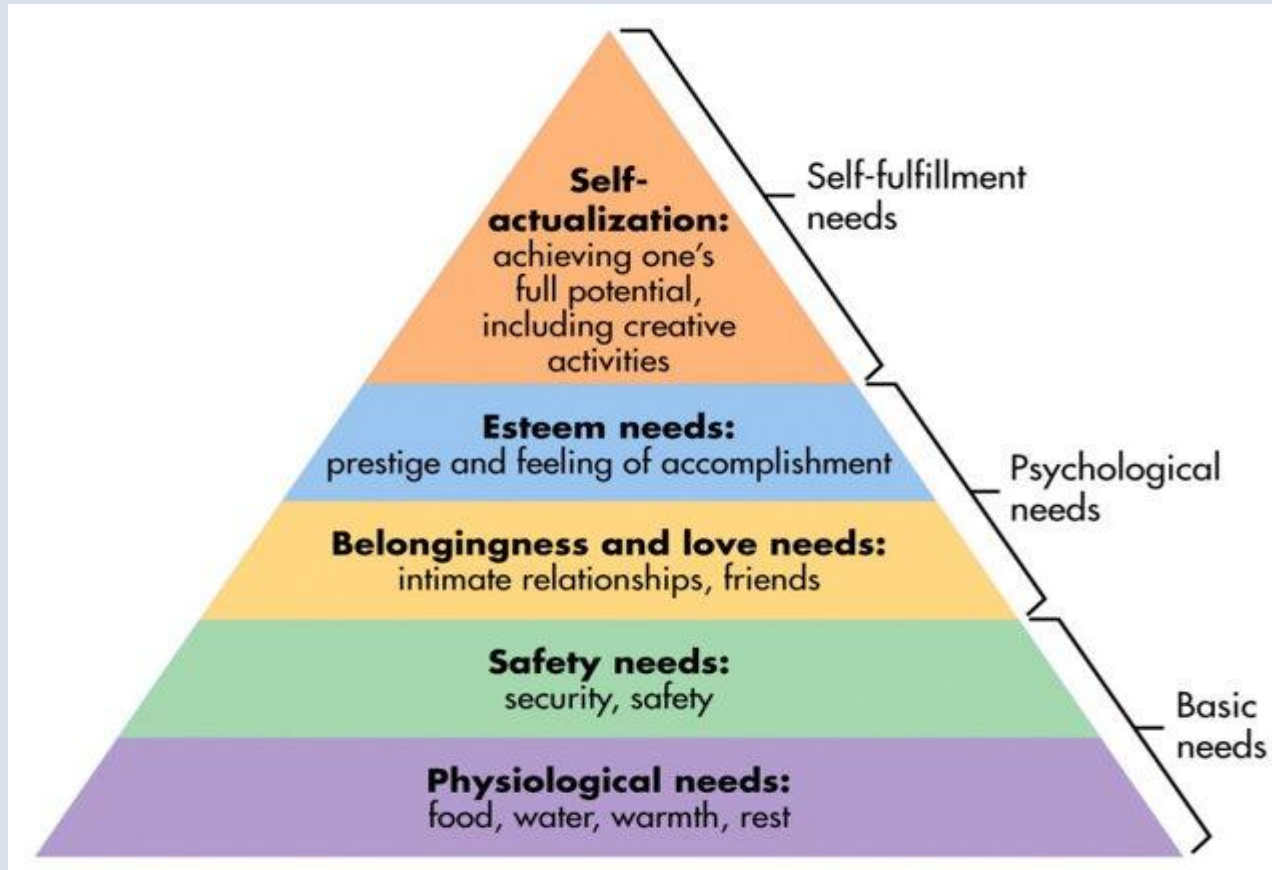




# Role of Infant Mental Health Providers

9

- Concrete Assistance



# Role of Infant Mental Health Providers

10

- Developmental Guidance – this includes using the expertise other disciplines
- Emotional Support – attuned consistent presence, support and help for the parent focusing on relationship



# Role of Infant Mental Health Providers

11



Jerry Wirtley  
13 December 2018

It occurred to Pooh and Piglet that they hadn't heard from Eeyore for several days, so they put on their hats and coats and trotted across the Hundred Acre Wood to Eeyore's stick house. Inside the house was Eeyore.

"Hello Eeyore," said Pooh.

"Hello Pooh. Hello Piglet," said Eeyore, in a Glum Sounding Voice.

"We just thought we'd check in on you," said Piglet, "because we hadn't heard from you, and so we wanted to know if you were okay."

Eeyore was silent for a moment. "Am I okay?" he asked, eventually. "Well, I don't know, to be honest. Are any of us really okay? That's what I ask myself. All I can tell you, Pooh and Piglet, is that right now I feel really rather Sad, and Alone, and Not Much Fun To Be Around At All. Which is why I haven't bothered you. Because you wouldn't want to waste your time hanging out with someone who is Sad, and Alone, and Not Much Fun To Be Around At All, would you now?"

Pooh looked and Piglet, and Piglet looked at Pooh, and they both sat down, one on either side of Eeyore in his stick house.

Eeyore looked at them in surprise. "What are you doing?"

"We're sitting here with you," said Pooh, "because we are your friends. And true friends don't care if someone is feeling Sad, or Alone, or Not Much Fun To Be Around At All. True friends are there for you anyway. And so here we are."

"Oh," said Eeyore. "Oh." And the three of them sat there in silence, and while Pooh and Piglet said nothing at all; somehow, almost imperceptibly, Eeyore started to feel a very tiny little bit better.

Because Pooh and Piglet were There. No more; no less.



# Role of Infant Mental Health Providers

12

- Early relationship Assessment and support
  - What both bring to the relationship
  - Look together at relationships past and present and how they impact the care of the infant
  - Help parent to see the intersection and draw their own conclusion
- Infant and Parent psychotherapy
  - exploration of feelings evoked
  - explorations of parental representations of who the infant is to them
  - Opportunities to process feelings in a safe environment/relationship
- Advocacy



# Relationships are the Foundation of all development

13

Motor development, Language unfolds, cognition and understanding of the world as the child is safe to explore

- Trust in Caregivers and the World – Secure Base
- Sense of safety and confidence to Explore the World
- Self-regulation and the management of impulses and emotions
- Formation of Identity, sense of self-worth and confidence
- Development of Sense of self
- Development of empathy, compassion and conscience



# Trauma and Disruption

14

When problems arise – it can affect every part of development.

Often what looks like “behavior” is early signal for mental health concerns:

- Aggression
- Irritability
- Tantruming
- Highly Active/inactive or passive

When there is disruption in the family or for the caregiver young children can't rely on the very person they are supposed to trust and depend on most.



# Intervention

15

“The first three years of life are a magical time for intervention for families and children. Research shows us that efforts and interventions during this period of life have a lasting effect. Nine years later when we revisit families who have participated in early intervention we see continued healthier relationship with each other and healthier relationships with self. Creating safety and an atmosphere of being loved creates and changes a child’s sense of self. A healthy sense of self is then expressed in relationships – it is a feedback loop. Relationships become the means to individual health and well-being.” Dr. Alicia Lieberman, Director of the Child Trauma Research Project (2016)



# Skills / Ways of Being

16

- Consultative Stance
- Avoiding the Position of Expert
- Wondering Instead of Knowing
- Understanding Another's Subjective experience
- Considering all levels of influence
- Centrality of relationships
- Parallel process as an organizing principle
- Patience





# Important Foundations in IECMH

17

## Diversity Informed Tenets

<https://diversityinformedtenets.org/the-tenets/overview/>

## IECMH Competencies



# AK - AIMH

18

## Mission

To promote the social emotional well-being of young children and their families throughout the State of Alaska.

## Core Values

Family | Meaningful Impact | Relationships | Growth | Culture

## Core Activities

Educate Advocate Collaborate



# AK - AIMH

19

AK-AIMH is a non-profit state wide organization and network of parents, multidisciplinary professionals and caring individuals developed to support the emotional health and well being of infants, young children and their families. We are devoted to strengthening relationships between infants, parents and caregivers. The caregiver-infant relationship is central to the healthy development of young children, and we are committed to the view that these relationships are influenced by the parent's or caregiver's actions and experiences, the infant's characteristics and responses and the surrounding environment. Holding Hope



# AK - AIMH

20

## Questions?



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# For More Information

21



Alaska Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health  
*AK-AIMH promotes social emotional well-being of young children and their families in Alaska*

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