



It All Matters for the Babies: Infant Mental Health

Jodee S. Crace, M.A.

Thursday, June 15, 2017 at 10:00 AM to Noon

Western Regional EI Conference

Scottsdale, AZ

My Background

- Parents and siblings hearing; Deaf to hereditary gene (uncle Deaf)
- ASL-English education at Indiana School for the Deaf
- MA in School Guidance Counseling at Gallaudet University
- Early Deaf Education 15+ years
- Deaf Mentor National Trainer with SKI-HI
- SKI-HI Parent Advisor State (Indiana) Trainer
- JCIH member since 2013
- ASDC President Emeritus
- Live in Indiana (4 adult sons and a husband)

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What lured me to this EI field:

- Providing direct services and observing/
recognizing: parenting stress, acceptance of
being deaf, and linguistic competency
- Initial personal experience as a mom of blind (with
cancer) son
- Counseling work 30+ years
- Society's barriers (attitudinal, communication,
physical)



Me at 8 Months Old 1961

**Do you worry?
Do you wonder?
Do you hope?
Do you have support?
Do you like your
day-to-day living?**

People have an
innate need to feel
supported, valued
and seen (heard).
*Even babies and
children.*

Now, the babies...

- The birth and care of a baby offer a family the possibility for new relationship experiences, hopefulness and change.
- All families have capacities to nurture their babies with love and affection.
- Some primary caregivers might need more support in early relationship development (due to past experiences)
- Infant mental health is 'talked about' daily in news, studies, and presentations.
- The parent is the baby's **FIRST RELATIONSHIP**. How the baby 'sees' the world is dependent on the parent's genuine care.

It Matters!

Nurturing Relationship...

- supports early brain development
- helps a baby feel safe and secure
- teaches a baby to communicate early
- helps baby/toddler express feelings and manage behaviors
- helps toddlers to learn and think
- promotes social and emotional competence across the life span

This slide borrowed from Deborah J. Weatherston, Ph.D.
Executive Director, AIMH - Michigan. 8/14/2010.
Promoting First Relationship. Right from the Start.



- “The child learns to love through his first human partners, his parents. We can look upon this miraculous occurrence as a gift of love to the baby. We should regard it as a right, a birthright for every child.”

- Selma Fraiberg, 1980. Clinical Studies in Infant Mental Health

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Babies Know.

Their brain development: early experiences affect architecture of developing brain.

1. Growing an Emotional Brain (National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children video - 15 mins)

Babies brains can feel overwhelmed with sensations and feelings. Babies brain development is affected by how grown ups interact with them and influences how they learn to deal with emotions. This film explores the neurobiology of babyhood.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzn9OuBqKYs>

2. Still Face Experiment (Dr. Edward Tronick - UMass, Boston - 2:48 mins)

Using the "Still Face" Experiment, in which a mother denies her baby attention for a short period of time, Tronick describes how prolonged lack of attention can move an infant from good socialization, to periods of bad but repairable socialization. In "ugly" situations the child does not receive any chance to return to the good, and may become stuck.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>

3. Dads Try The Still Face Experiment (Picture Alternatives 4:28 mins)

For the first time ever, Project ABC and The Children's Institute Inc., of Los Angeles, replicated and filmed the experiment with fathers (rather than mothers) and their babies. Dr. Richard Cohen, director of Project ABC at the Children's Institute, offers an insightful explanation of what's going on, and why babies need positive interaction.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6czxW4R9w2g>

Your Observation Notes

Discussion...reflection...strategies...outcomes

Self Awareness Check-In

credit: SKI-HI DMP Training

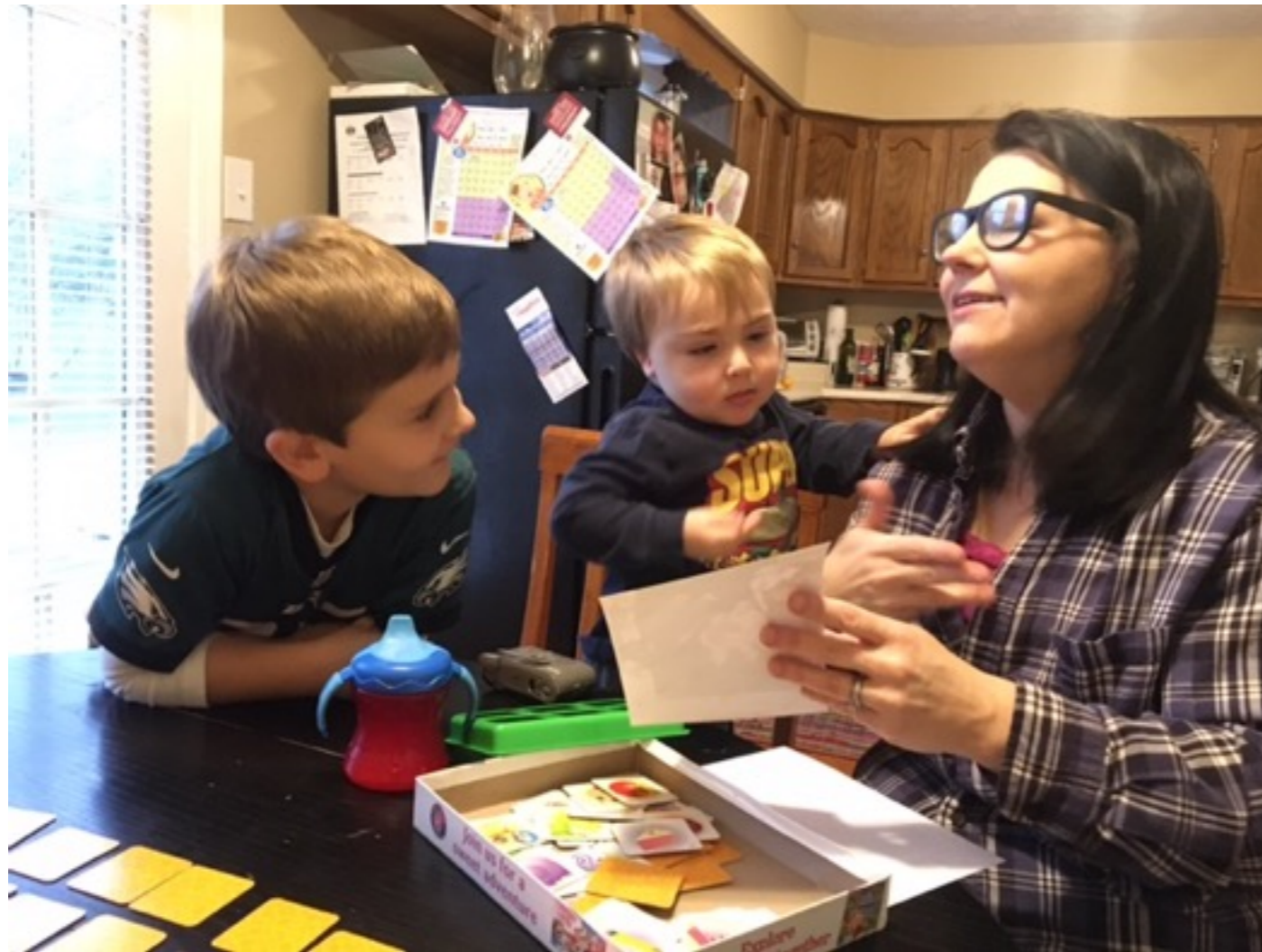
- Why do I want to help?
- Will what I know help this family/provider?
- Will what I do not know hurt this family/provider?
- Do I know the limits of my helpfulness and can I accept those limits?
- How are my needs being met by my choice of this profession?
- What are my professional biases and personal values and do I impose these on others who do not share them?
- Can I tolerate a substandard environment?
- Do I assume too much responsibility for the families/providers I serve?
- Do I empower/enable families/providers or create dependency which prevents them from using their own support systems?
- Do I expect too much from families/providers?
- What are your roles? Your values? Your beliefs? Your skills as a relationship-based provider? Your support system? Challenges?

Well-being depends on: healthy and nurturing parenting skills.

Relationship: attunement, devotion, attention, touching, direct communication, responding, bonding, perceiving, recognizing, and acknowledging.

- **Lifelong skills** (essential - mental, emotional, social): love, survival, resilience, adaptation, identity, balances, follows expected child development stages, and challenges.
- Key: baby's developing sense of self is dependent on the sensitive responsiveness of the parent.

One of my Deaf Mentoring family.



Genuine care.

Searching for
resources.

Making
decisions.

Want to do the
right thing.

People are internally compelled to respond to situations in ways that will support or be consistent with their beliefs.

Healthy society = healthy parents = healthy children = healthy society

Basic definition

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mental%20health>

- the condition of being sound mentally and emotionally that is characterized by the absence of mental illness and by adequate adjustment especially as reflected in feeling comfortable about oneself, positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet the demands of daily life. Also, the general condition of one's mental and emotional state

Another basic definition

<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/basics.htm>

- Mental health is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” It is estimated (as of 2013 article) that only about 17% of U.S adults are considered to be in a state of optimal mental health. There is emerging evidence that positive mental health is associated with improved health outcomes.

We all have an innate need to thrive.

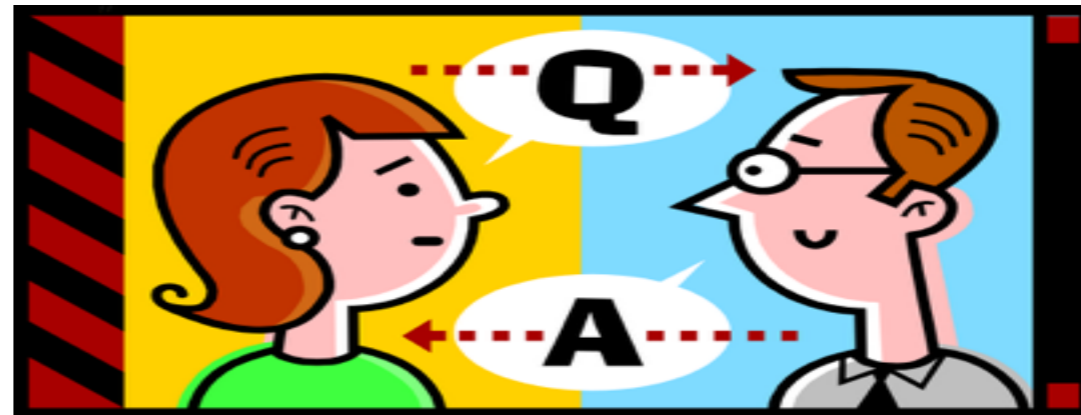
Maslow's Theory

- **Self Actualization:** confident, can articulate with love/compassion, carries forth with dignity and be a change agent.
- **Self Esteem & Self Respect:** executive function skills are more consistent, able to communicate unique ideas and not waver, open to feedback and is trusted
- **Love/Belonging & Social Acceptance:** feeling connected to self/others, able to seek/receive support, essential skills emerging and crafted, may waver and questions self
- **Safety & Security:** environment conducive to learning, safe boundaries, seeks advices/support, thinks/reflects/questions self
- **Survival (Basic Needs/Physiological):** daily routines/experiences within caring and supportive people, feels 'heard', 'seen', 'cared for', and 'acknowledged'. Feels respected.

Galinsky's Mind in the Making

Galinsky, E. 2010. Mind in the Making.
The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

- Focus,
- Self control,
- Perspective taking,
- COMMUNICATING,
- CRITICAL THINKING,
- Taking on challenges, and
- Self-directed engaged learning.



Pondering and Perceiving



Oldest son, RJ (age 5 mos.)

“**Perspective taking** goes far beyond empathy; it involves figuring out what others think and feel. Forms the basis for children’s understanding of their parents, teachers, and friends intentions. Children who can take others’ perspectives are also much **less** likely to get involved in conflicts.”

Galinsky, E. 2010. Mind in the Making. The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs.

What Do Families Have In Common?

- *Discovery of Having a Deaf Child Unexpected*
- *Impact of Having a Deaf Child Unknown*
- *Opportunities and Potential Unknown*
- *Education and Communication Unknown*
- *Resources Unknown*
- *Struggle with Communication & Technology*
- *Without Support ---Experience Stress*

(Sass-Lehrer, 2008)



Twin Craces

Babies' Mental Health Matters

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-melmed/babies-mental-health-matters_b_7213290.html

The emotional lives of infants and young children are shaped by early experiences and these experiences may continue to exert an influence into adulthood.

What are the examples of early experiences?

For many families difficult life experiences lead to ongoing struggles with development, relationships, and behavior.

What are the examples of the challenges?

Nurturing emotional relationships are the most crucial primary foundation for both intellectual and social growth.

T. Berry Brazelton & S. Greenspan (2000)

There has been an abundance of studies and articles on language acquisition and very limited discussion on infant mental health.
Now is the time to talk about this.

- The foremost skill a parent has is '**building a relationship**' with the newborn, a real person.
- Healthy self concept and then arriving to self actualization is a result of right (and respectful, engaging) language acquisition/strategies, positive and authentic development and holistic (positive whole child) experiences.
- However, people are internally compelled to respond to situations in ways that will support or be consistent with their beliefs.

The caregivers' mediation greatly influences the infant's sense of wonder and avidity for exploration. Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (pg. 103)

Research on children with biological conditions suggests that secure attachment and responsive caregiving, overtime, have more impact on developmental outcome than the particular biological defect.

Sameroff and Chandler (1975), Lyons-Ruth et al. (2003)



Of course, one also needs
to wonder how to react,
identify own expectations,
make choice(s) to rise up,
accept the vulnerability and
be willing to embrace help.

**As parents,
we have to be:**

~keenly aware of
our feelings and
thoughts

~knowledgeable

~attentive

~compassionate

Self-Reflective Practice

- 1:1 with a trained mentor (it is an opportunity for leadership to use the strategies of reflection to foster growth, reinforce strengths, and encourage resilience)
- Reflective Practice Group (i.e.: weekly sessions)

This allows us to understand how our own experiences and beliefs influence our work.

It sharpens our observation and communication skills with children and families as well as with peers and community partners.

It improves our skills in building mutually respectful partnership with families.

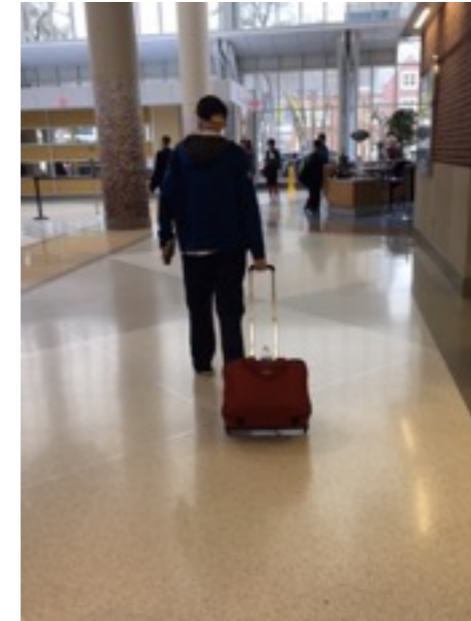
What can you as a provider do to support IMH?

- be aware of own feelings and past experiences
- be willing to acknowledge conflicts and work through them
- be attuned (and a skilled observer) to parents' and babies' feelings - be 'with them' at their stages
- educate (or provide resources) on mental health with parents
- share strategies on bonding, attending, responding, touching, and loving
- ask open-ended questions
- offer/suggest specific ways to get better (for self and others)
- consider self-reflective practice

Resources

- ncpfce@childrens.harvard.edu
- <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>
- <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/parent-child-relationships.pdf>
- <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/cde/brain-dev/nycuearlybraindev.htm>
- Visual Language and Visual Learning. Science of Learning Center. (2016, April). Raising the Whole Child: Addressing Social-Emotional Development in Deaf Children. (Research Brief No. 11). Washington, DC: Linda Risser Lytle & Gina A. Oliva. vl2@gallaudet.edu
- ZERO TO THREE <http://www.zerotothree.org>

Let's Go!



Colton: going home from his final cancer treatment.
December 2016

- ONWARD!
- All families deserve high quality and coordinated support.
- We honor family's journey. Some need more time. Some need more encouragement. Some are ready!
- We need to be open-minded, flexible, thoughtful, and supportive in planning and doing outcomes. We keep in mind the essential results and gently encourage people to acknowledge these.
- We utilize essential human relationship skills. **We care. We are human. We have our worries, hopes, challenges, and successes.**
- Adapt. Resilience. Acceptance. Celebrate!