

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health: An Overview

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Texas Children's Mental Health Forum
February 17, 2009 Austin, Texas

Do Young Children Have Mental Health Problems?

If so, what are they?
Can we identify problems and treat
young children the same way we do
with older children?

A Continuum of Beliefs

- Individual bias influences beliefs about young children's mental health.

Problems are environmental/ developmental.



- *May be less inclined to diagnose ("label").*
- *May view clinical symptoms as normal developmental perturbations.*

Psychiatric problems are underestimated.



- *May be more comfortable with diagnostic labels to ID problems and guide treatment.*
- *May believe in nature over nurture.*

A Comprehensive and Balanced Understanding

- Development in context.
 - Genetic expression may be shaped by the environment.
 - Problems in development or environment (e.g. relationship problems) may become individual problems/pathology.
- The caregiving environment is an integral part of young children's development (across domains), social-emotional well-being, and mental health issues.
- Regardless of whether the "symptom" is intrinsic, along the developmentally normative continuum, or clinically significant, the caregiving environment both affects and is affected by the challenge.

The Caregiving Environment

- Young children are uniquely dependent on their caregivers.
 - Developmental limitations and vulnerability.
- Young children's social, emotional, and regulatory behavior is shaped by their caregiving environment.

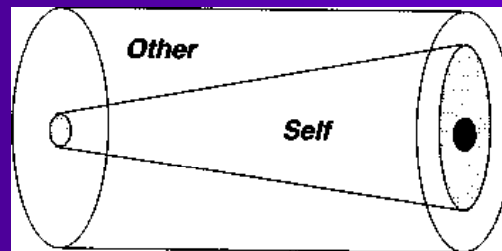
The Caregiving Environment

- In the early years, the primary relationship(s) sets the stage for future social-emotional behavior and future relationship behavior.
 - Children learn patterns of interactive behavior through repeated interactions with primary caregivers over time.
 - Children learn how to express and regulate their emotions through their interactions with primary caregivers.

See Lieberman, 2004

The Relationship Context

- Emotional and behavioral regulation is dyadic for infants and young children.



Changing balance between other-regulation and self-regulation as a child develops into an adult. (From Sameroff, 2004, p. 12)

The Caregiving Environment

- Mental health risk factors in the first 5 years of life operate between the child and her/his environment: family, neighborhood, community, & larger society (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993).
 - Example: Poverty.
 - Example: Maternal depression.

Video Illustrations

The Caregiving Environment: Attachment

- Research Classifications.
(Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main & Solomon, 1990)
- "Attachment security" = the state of being secure or untroubled about the availability of the attachment figure. *(Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978)*
- **Attachment security** in infancy is considered to be a **protective factor** for later mental health.
 - Successful organization of attachment relationship(s) in infancy should predispose child to success in future developmental tasks (e.g., autonomy, social competence). *(Sroufe, 1979, 1999)*
- **Attachment insecurity** in infancy is considered to be a **risk factor** for the development of psychopathology.
 - Disorganized attachment.

The Caregiving Environment: Attachment

- Attachment security has been linked with numerous positive outcomes when measured concurrently and over time. Examples include:
 - **Greater resilience.** *Sroufe, 1983; Arend, Gove, & Sroufe, 1979; Pianta, Egelund, & Sroufe, 1990; Sroufe et al., 1990; Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993*
 - **More positive affect.** *Bates, Maslin, & Frankel, 1985; Frankel & Bates, 1990; Matas, Arend & Sroufe, 1978; Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989; Sroufe, 1983; Sroufe et al., 1983; Sroufe & Egeland, 1991; Sroufe, Schork, Motti, Lawronski & LaFreniere, 1984*
 - **Less aggression.** *Bates, Maslin, & Frankel, 1985; Frankel & Bates, 1990; Matas, Arend & Sroufe, 1978*
 - **More social competence.** *LaFreniere & Sroufe, 1985; Sroufe, 1983; Troy & Sroufe, 1987; Vandell, Owen, Wilson, & Henderson, 1988; Waters et al., 1979; Elicker, Englund, & Sroufe, 1992; Grossman & Grossman, 1991; Weinfield et al., 1999*

The Caregiving Environment: Attachment

- Attachment insecurity (including disorganization) has been linked with negative outcomes over time, even into adolescence. Examples include:
 - **More negative affect.** *Sroufe, 1983; Sroufe et al., 1984.*
 - **More aggression/other behavior problems.** *Lyons-Ruth, Easterbrooks, & Cibelli, 1997; Hann, Castino, Jarosinski & Britton, 1991; Jacobvitz & Hazen, 1999; Lyons-Ruth, Alpern & Repacholit, 1993; Speltz, Greenberg, & DeKlyen, 1990; Greenberg, Speltz, DeKlyen, & Endriga, 1991.*
 - **Less social competence.** *Elicker et al., 1992; Eglund, Levy & Hyson, 1997; Shulman, Elicker & Sroufe, 1994; Sroufe, Bennet, Eglund, Urban, & Shulman, 1993; Weinfield, Ogawa, & Sroufe, 1997; Moss, Parent, Gosselin, Rousseau, & St. Laurent, 1996; Wartner et al., 1994*
 - **Poorer emotional health/Psychopathology.** *Carlson, 1988; Ogawa, Sroufe, Weinfield, Carlson, & Egeland, 1997; Lyons-Ruth, Easterbrooks, & Cibelli, 1997; Heller et al., 2006; Hinshaw-Fuselier et al., 1999; Moss, Rousseau, Parent, St. Laurent & Saintong, 1998; Hubbs-Tait, Osofsky, Hann & Culp, 1994; Elicker et al., 1992; Carlson, 1998.*
 - **Poorer academic performance.** *Moss, Rousseau et al., 1998*

Summary

- Clinical and developmental literature indicate the presence of relational and individual pathology in early childhood.
- Early relationships shape current and future behavior.
- Clear indications for supporting healthy relationships and providing mental health intervention in early childhood.

Guidelines for Assessment, Diagnosis, & Treatment

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Practice Parameters for Assessment of Children Birth-36 Months (1997).
 - "...infants and toddlers must be understood, evaluated, and treated within the context of the family." (p.21S)
 - Perspective must be developmental, relational, and multidimensional.
- Diagnostic Classification: 0-3R (*Zero To Three, 2005*)
 - Developmentally sensitive criteria.
 - Includes relationship ratings and disorders.
- Research Diagnostic Criteria: Preschool Age (*Task Force on Research Diagnostic Criteria: Infancy and Preschool, 2003*)
 - Developmentally sensitive modifications to DSM disorders.

Guidelines for Assessment, Diagnosis, & Treatment

- Handbook of Infant Mental Health, 3rd Ed. (*Zeanah, in press*)
- Handbook of Preschool Mental Health (*Luby, 2006*)
- Additional literature:
 - Developmental;
 - Clinical.
- Specific programs....