

IECM Spring Conference
2024



When Two Worlds Meet

The Intersection of Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health and Child Welfare

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Systems don't change, people change and then people change the systems.

— Unknown

Ally & David Hooper | IECM Spring Conference 2024, 4/17/24

Our Time Together

- 1 Why IECMH matters for CW
The stakes — data, sustainability, resilience
- 2 IECMH foundations
Definitions, brain development, the relationship IS the intervention
- 3 IECMH through a CW lens
Where these worlds collide + multiple lenses + parallel process
- 4 Practice takeaways & closing
2-3 things to try, resources, closing/reflection

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Module 2

Why IECMH Matters for Child Welfare

The data — and what it means for every child on your caseload

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Opening Reflection

What does IECMH mean to you as a professional in child welfare?

Share with a neighbor


IECMH = Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health • Not infant mental illness — healthy social and emotional development

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The youngest children in child welfare systems

<p>Every 7 min</p> <p><small>an infant is removed from their safety somewhere in the United States (2016 to 2018)</small></p>	<p>31%</p> <p><small>of children under foster care birth to age 3 — the most critical window for brain development</small></p>
<p>3-4x</p> <p><small>more likely — CW involved young children have a mental health condition in years and in foster care</small></p>	<p>51%</p> <p><small>of children 0-5 in CW have 4+ ACEs; 60% of 12-18 month-olds show clinically significant ARI levels at investigation</small></p>

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The youngest are the most vulnerable AND the most resilient.

Center on the Developing Child

Vulnerable: The brain is developing at its fastest rate. Stress and trauma literally shape its architecture.

Resilient: Because the brain is developing so rapidly, intervention at this stage has the greatest potential impact.

Richard D. Cook-Deegan | 2008 | Harvard Medical School, 2008 | 10/17

Reframing: from child welfare to child well-being

Zero to Three believes that nurturing every child's potential is a collective responsibility. Using a network of formal and informal support systems, communities can help protect families from the impact of trauma and stress, preventing crises before they arise.

Strengthen families	Transform systems	Prevent removal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent peer support Developmental resources for young parents Perinatal AOD coordination Home visiting access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map IECMH + CW service flows Auto-eligibility for IECMH services upon CW involvement Co-located services to streamline access Medical reimbursement for IECMH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Therapeutic nurseries Infant-Toddler Court Teams Cross-system collaboration Family reunification supports

Source: Zero to Three 2017. See program: centerfortheearlychildhoodinstitute.org

Richard D. Cook-Deegan | 2008 | Harvard Medical School, 2008 | 10/17


Module 2

IECMH Foundations


Definition - Brain development - The relationship IS the intervention

Richard D. Cook-Deegan | 2008 | Harvard Medical School, 2008 | 10/17


Infant and early childhood mental health is the developing capacity of the child from birth to age five to:



Experience, regulate & express emotions



Form close & secure interpersonal relationships



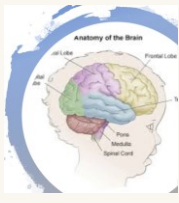
Explore the environment and learn

All in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children.

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The circuits that are involved in the regulation of emotion are highly interactive with those that are associated with 'executive functions' (such as planning, judgment and decision-making), which are intimately involved in the development of problem-solving skills during the preschool years.



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What is developing...

0-12 months

- Attachment relationships and dyadic strategies to maintain them.
- Gradually gain control over motor skills—learning to move with purpose and intention.
- A beginning ability to regulate arousal and affect.

1-3 years

- Balancing attachment with exploration, with increasing movement toward autonomy and individuation.
- Internalization of parental values and standards.
- The ability to symbolize, through mental representation, play and communication

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What is developing...

Preschoolers

- Learning about structure and rules, although they are still magical in their thinking.
- Learn through play. It is their way to master reality. To practice what could happen or is happening.
- Practice being powerful, to understand their world and feel a sense of control (think superheroes)

Preschoolers

- Sense of self:
 - Self-esteem
 - Gender differences: notice culturally based roles
 - Sexual curiosity about body parts
- Organizing relationships with others
 - Peers becoming more important
 - Negotiating in play scenarios
 - Increasing empathy—concern for others

Richard G. Barron | www.rgbaron.com | 2016-2017

Why brain development and relationships are inseparable

Brain development

- Developing rapidly — experience shapes architecture
- Bottom-up: each stage builds on the last
- Stress derails healthy brain development
- Timing really matters — early intervention has the greatest impact

The relationship IS the intervention

- Quality of early relationships is the most reliable predictor of developmental outcomes
- Regulation is learned in relationship — not through discipline
- "There is no such thing as an infant" — a child always exists in relationship (Winnicott)
- Children need a co-regulating partner before they can self-regulate

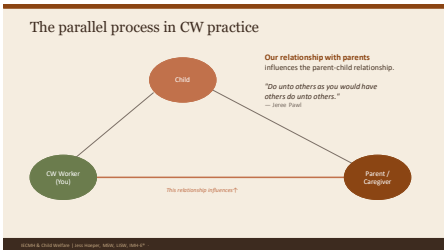
Richard G. Barron | www.rgbaron.com | 2016-2017

Module 3

IECMH Through a Child Welfare Lens

Where these worlds collide — and what it means for practice

Richard G. Barron | www.rgbaron.com | 2016-2017



- ### Professional Dangerousness
- Children can become invisible
 - We act as the expert of the child or the family
 - Judge by behavior without considering intention
 - Making perspective-taking reciprocal instead of professional obligation
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Four lenses for seeing young children in CW

Developmental How old is this child developmentally? How old do they seem when they're upset?	Attachment What does this child expect from relationships? What is their internal working model?
Stress & Trauma What happened to this child? (Note: What is wrong with this child?)	Social & Cultural What are the cultural expectations for this child? What is this family's story?

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Putting the lenses to work

You arrive for a home visit. Maya is 18 months old. She was found alone for several hours while her mother, who struggles with substance use, was unresponsive. Maya is quiet, doesn't make eye contact, and does not reach for her mother when her mother enters the room.

Developmental lens: What should we expect of an 18-month-old's emotional responses? Is this typical?

Attachment lens: What is Maya learning about relationships? What does she expect from her caregiver?

Stress & Trauma lens: What has happened to Maya? How has her brain adapted to keep her safe?

Richard G. Cook-Greuter | 1001-100299, 10010, 10011, 10012

Developmental Milestones.....

What we see and notice

Do we notice?.....

Social and emotional development is less visible than some other developmental accomplishments.

Physical Development

When did your child take their first steps?
Write their name?
Use words?
Use the potty?

Social/Emotional Development

When did your child first show empathy?
Follow directions?
Share with another child?
"No!" for a mistake?
Engage in dramatic play?

Richard G. Cook-Greuter | 1001-100299, 10010, 10011, 10012

Module 4

Practice Takeaways & Closing

1-2 things to try, resources, and what you'll carry forward

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What IECMH asks of us in practice

How you are is as important as what you do
Your presence, tone, and affect are the intervention — not just your checklist.

The parent is the expert on their child
We are the partner, not the expert. Ask: "What works for you with him?"

Assume meaning under the behavior
A no-show after an emotional visit may be a test of "will you stick with me?"

Becoming an organizing partner
Organizing relationships ("you can expect help here"), routines, and language.

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Infant Mental Health informs us across the lifespan

1. We all started out as babies!
2. Development is built on a foundation of the developmental steps that preceded the current one;
3. Our past experiences and histories come with us into our current relationships;
4. IECMH is a "way of being and thinking" that holds in mind "what happened to us when we were infants impacts who we are now".

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Before You Leave...

What is one thing you will carry into your work?

Take a moment. Write it down.

Something I learned

Something I'll try

Something I'll share

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Never, ever underestimate the importance of how you are and what you do for children and their families in the everyday moments you spend with them.

You are planting seeds that have the potential to change the world in ways you may never see.

Thank you
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