EARLY EXPERIENCES MATTER!

Why infant mental health is everyone’s business when building a culture of health in NJ
“Normally I begin by asking about a patient’s childhood...”
What is infant mental health?

- Infant Mental Health is an interdisciplinary field concerned with the optimal physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of the human infant/toddler/young child within the context of his/her family.
Why does infant mental health matter?

1. The first five years are the most sensitive period of brain, relational and systems development
2. An understanding of the first five years informs the rest of child, adolescent and adult development
3. Early promotion and prevention reduces need for long-term intervention in the later years
4. The health of the families of young children determines the health of our society
Infant mental health is everyone’s business
Universal promotion in New Jersey

- Think Babies Coalition
- Evidence-based home visiting
- New Jersey Council for Young Children
- Central Intake Units
- County Councils for Young Children
- Grow NJ KIDS Quality Rating and Improvement System
- Keeping Babies and Children in Mind
- Pyramid Model for Supporting the Social/Emotional Competency of Infants and Young Children
- NJ-AIMH Competency Guidelines and Endorsement System
Keeping Babies and Children in Mind: Professional Formation Series in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

• A series of free trainings for professionals who work with infants, toddlers, young children and their families (pregnancy through age eight), initially in the 10 counties most affected by Superstorm Sandy, now statewide.

• Staff from all sectors of public and private infant/child/school and family programs are invited to attend, including pediatricians, home visiting, childcare centers, Early Head Start/Head Start, Early Intervention, family child care providers, preschools, Family Outreach Program, Parent Linking Program, Project TEACH, Family Success Centers, elementary schools, and child welfare offices.
Pyramid Model for Supporting Social/Emotional Competency in Infants and Young Children

- Uses systems-thinking and implementation science to promote evidence-based practices in homes and classrooms that build skills for supporting nurturing and responsive caregiving, create learning environments, provide targeted social-emotional skills, and support children with challenging behavior, from birth through age 8.

- Currently implemented in selected Department of Education publicly funded districts with preschool classrooms, Early Head Start and Head Start, Early Intervention, and 8 privately funded community child care programs
NJ-AIMH Competency and Endorsement System (www.nj-aimh.org)

- A multidisciplinary professional system of recognition of awareness of knowledge, skills and dispositions that support relational, culturally competent, reflective infant mental health practice

- NJ joins 29 other states and 2 countries in the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health
Kaitlin Mulcahy, LPC, IMHM ®
Gerard Costa, Ph.D., IMHM ®

The Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health
at Montclair State University
1 Normal Ave.
Montclair, NJ 07043
973-655-6685
caecmh@montclair.edu