



**Institute of
Infant and
Early Childhood
Mental Health**



Tulane University Health Sciences Center

Research



Researchers have long pursued questions related to the importance of the early years in human development. As the impact of early experience on current and later behavior, biology, and brain function becomes clearer, pressing questions emerge. Is it possible to identify children at risk for later problems? Are there identifiable periods that are more critical to provide intervention than others, or is sooner always better than later? How much recovery is possible from early adversity and traumatic experiences? How can assessments be designed to capture interpersonal experiences of infants and parents? Based on accurate assessments, which interventions effectively enhance the development of at risk young children? Should our intervention efforts be focused primarily on the young child, the family of the young child, or the cultural and societal institutions and systems that envelop the young child and family? Do young children really suffer from definable psychiatric disorders, or are they better conceptualized as being at risk for disorders that emerge later?

These are some of the questions being investigated by Tulane researchers at the Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. This research is being conducted locally and internationally with the goals of clarifying and refining clinical approaches to helping young children develop to their full potential.

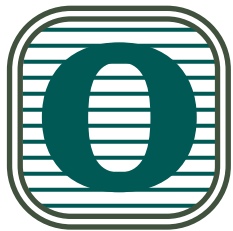


Training

Professional development is an important endeavor at the Institute. The Harris Training Program in Infant Mental Health seeks to enhance professionals' expertise in providing services to children from birth to five years of age. Trainees learn a relationship-based, family focused approach to infant mental health that includes didactic instruction, clinical field experiences,

“Knowledge about infant development and psychopathology is vital to determining the kind of world we want for infants and their families.”

**Charles H. Zeanah, Jr., M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry and
Pediatrics, Tulane University
School of Medicine**



Over the last 25 years, social and emotional development in infancy has captured the interest and concern of health professionals, mental health clinicians, and researchers of infant and child development. Development proceeds rapidly during the first months and years of life, and the infant's early experiences form the foundation for later social and emotional functioning. Infants represent hope for the future but too often they are vulnerable and at risk. The probability of social, behavioral, and emotional problems in infancy and early childhood are increased by intrinsic vulnerabilities, as well as by poverty, community and family violence, psychiatric symptomatology in parents, early parenthood, social isolation, and maltreatment.

The most important influence on the young child's social and emotional development is his relationship with his primary caregiver. It is this unique relationship that provides the avenue for fostering the infant's growth and development. Providing guidance that is individually tailored and personally relevant to the parent and the baby's unique relationship is a basic premise of infant and early childhood mental health practice today.

Policy

consultation, and supervision.

Trainees have opportunities to learn about normal and abnormal infant and child development, developmental psychopathology, and multiple risk factors and challenges to healthy development. They also may acquire skills in assessment and treatment of psychosocial and psychological difficulties of infants and their caregivers. They learn how to identify strengths in the infant-caregiver dyad upon which to build further competencies. They may gain experience in a variety of treatment modalities and techniques, including play therapy, interaction guidance, parent-child psychotherapy, and other forms of individual and dyadic work. They may choose to have direct experience with service delivery to families who present with a variety of problems and concerns including clinic-based and home-based treatments.

Trainees suitable for this program are graduates of masters or doctoral programs in counseling, marital and family therapy, nursing, medicine (including pediatricians and family practitioners), psychiatry, psychology, social work and public health.

For professionals interested in learning specific techniques (such as NCAST, Crowell Procedure, Working Model of the Child Interview), trainings are available upon request.

Broad issues addressed at the policy level can facilitate change and improve the care offered to children and families. A large gap exists between the science of early childhood development and current policy and practice. Knowledge gained from research should be used to inform and influence policy to enhance social competence in young children. Thus, an ongoing dialogue is necessary between policymakers and leaders of all systems that impact children: juvenile justice, child protection, health care, education, and other entities that are concerned with early childhood development.

Institute faculty work as consultants to apply sound research-based evidence to enhance collaboration among systems to inform decision-makers regarding critical issues in prevention and intervention.

Faculty

The Institute's multidisciplinary faculty has expertise in working with infants and young children and families. In addition to this shared focus, they offer different perspectives on development and developmental psychopathology and other critical issues in early childhood mental health. The faculty



“We would all like to think that very young children are not affected by traumatic experiences. Sadly, there is overwhelming evidence that they are. The question remains—how can we best help them recover?”

**Michael Scheeringa, M.D., M.P.H.
Assistant Professor of
Psychiatry and Pediatrics,
Tulane University School
of Medicine**



is based at Tulane University Health Sciences Center and includes child psychiatrists, clinical and developmental psychologists, clinical social workers, pediatricians, and nurses.



MISSION

The Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health is dedicated to the discovery, dissemination and application of knowledge to promote social and emotional competence in young children locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

GOALS

- 1) To enhance the responsiveness of systems of care to the mental health needs of young children and their families.
- 2) To increase the number of trained infant and early childhood mental health providers.
- 3) To advance the knowledge base of infant and early childhood mental health through empirical research.
- 4) To inform and influence early childhood policy through the application of established research findings.

“There is an urgent need for professional development in the field of Infant Mental Health. There are too few skilled professionals to meet the needs of at risk children and their families.”

Julie Larrieu, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of
Psychiatry and Pediatrics,
Tulane University School
of Medicine



“The scientific evidence on the significant developmental impacts of early experiences, caregiving relationships, and environmental threats is incontrovertible. Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain’s evolving circuitry to the child’s capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning early in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early childhood years. The science of early development is also clear about the specific importance of parenting and of regular caregiving relationships more generally” (p. 6).

Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood
The National Research Council of the Institute of Medicine

**INSTITUTE OF
INFANT AND
EARLY CHILDHOOD
MENTAL HEALTH**

For more information

INSTITUTE OF INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Tulane University School of Medicine

Department of Psychiatry and Neurology

Tidewater Building, TB-52

1440 Canal Street

New Orleans, Louisiana 70112-2715

Contact: Geoffrey Nagle (504) 988-8241 Facsimile: (504) 587-4264

E-mail: gnagle@tulane.edu Web site: www.infantinstitute.org