

# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

**Beyond the Baby Blues Conference**

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# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

- The development of intelligence, emotions, and social skills is highly inter-related, particularly in the context of enhancing children's readiness to succeed in school
- Healthy early development depends on nurturing and dependable relationships



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

- Significant parent mental health problems (part. maternal depression), substance abuse, and family violence impose heavy developmental burdens on young children
- Culture influences all aspects of early development through child-rearing beliefs and practices



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

Infants of clinically depressed mothers often withdraw from daily activities and avoid interactions jeopardizing language, physical, intellectual and emotional development.



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

Older children of mothers depressed during infancy often exhibit poor self control, aggression, poor peer relationships, and difficulty in school increased potential for participation in special education, grade retention and school dropout.



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

Infant mental health (IMH) is the capacity of infants and toddlers to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships and explore the environment and learn.



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

- IMH is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.
- IMH also refers to the mental wellness of the caregiver relationship between caregiver and child.



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

- Healthy mothers develop maternal sensitivity and responsiveness. They are able to guide the parent-child interactions.
- Some mothers who are depressed are not able to fully participate in these interactions with their newborn.



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

Increased maternal depression awareness in health care, early care and education, and family support systems is needed to:

- Increase public awareness
- Decrease stigmatization
- Improve access to care



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

- ❑ Increase workforce capacity to address the needs of new mothers and their infants
- ❑ Generate and place materials in familiar and frequented settings to increase community knowledge



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

Assure early identification in health care settings by addressing barriers to screening, assessment and referral:

- ❑ Perinatal doctor visits - screening opportunity
- ❑ Health practitioners can help identify early risk factors and facilitate intervention
- ❑ Postpartum home visits; early identification of maternal well-being, support systems and mother-child issues
- ❑ Primary care practice: multi-disciplinary approach



Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health  
Provide a comprehensive network of  
community Perinatal services and service  
providers supports healthy mental health  
in the pregnant and postpartum family:

- Strong family and community support
- Access to available social supports
- Staff with expertise in infant and early  
childhood mental health



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

## Evidence based interventions that improve mother-child relationship:

- Promote maternal mental health during pregnancy
- Reach mothers who may be at high risk
- Acknowledge and accommodate cultural differences of families
- Explore community resources: doulas, parteras, comadres, value of extended families, traditional health beliefs and practices



# Supporting Maternal and Infant Mental Health

Make available community supports that address: isolation, lack of access to culturally relevant experiences, staff's lack of training to affirm new mothers and help them cope with long-held expectations of pregnancy, motherhood and raising children in a new culture (for immigrant families)



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Culture matters, because it impacts:

- ❑ Attitudes and beliefs about mental health
- ❑ Expression of symptoms
- ❑ Coping strategies
- ❑ Help-seeking behaviors
- ❑ Utilization of services
- ❑ Appropriateness of services and supports



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## Cultural beliefs/expectations:

- ❑ African-American and being always a “strong woman,”
- ❑ Somali and wish for back home/40 days in bed;
- ❑ Hispanic: valuing privacy, stigma of asking for help;
- ❑ Cambodian: hide difficulties, keep it inside



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