Infant Mental Health Awareness Week
7-12 June 2020
#IMHAW20

Why is infant mental health so important?

- Babies' cognitive, social and emotional development is influenced by their experiences of the world.
- Babies who receive appropriate comfort and care from their parents or primary care-givers feel safe to explore the world around them.
- Parents or primary carers who play with, sing to and read to their babies provide stimulation that helps the child learn and develop.
- Good early relationships also enable children to start school best equipped to make friends and learn.

What is the impact of trauma on young brains?

Early traumatic experiences are associated with a range of poor outcomes that can last into adulthood and beyond. These can include emotional problems, behaviour issues, developmental delays, and physical health problems.

All children will experience some stress. Toxic stress, however, refers to prolonged high levels of adversity that occur in the absence of relationships that can protect the child and buffer the impacts of this stress.

Toxic stress might result from exposure to violence, physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, parental mental illness, parental substance abuse, or family hardship (e.g., poverty).

Babies can also experience adversity in the womb. For example, where domestic violence is occurring, research shows babies' stress regulation systems adapt, leaving them more responsive to threat but also more irritable and difficult to settle once they are born.

Further information

The West Australian Branch of the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health offers regular seminars, training and networking opportunities. These are listed at [www.aaimh.org.au/branches/wa](http://www.aaimh.org.au/branches/wa)

The free Bright Tomorrows app provides tools and tips for parents and carers to give children the best start to life. It is available at [www.brighttomorrows.org.au](http://www.brighttomorrows.org.au)

References
