

Life chances: the importance of earliest relationships

Many of the UK's most prominent parenting and children's organisations have joined together with the charity Parent Infant Partnership (PIP) UK to launch the UK's first national Infant Mental Health Awareness Week from 6th-10th June 2016.

A new campaign '**Building Babies Minds**' will be launched this week which seeks to highlight the importance of laying the foundation of the mind for good mental health in infancy.

Events will be taking place across the country to raise awareness of Infant Mental Health and its relevance to life chances for every child. As a society we can and should do much more to support parents in their all-important job of getting their babies started on the path to good mental health, which begins for everyone in infancy.

From birth to age 18 months, it has been calculated that connections in the brain are created at around a rate of a million per second. The earliest experiences shape a baby's brain development, and have a significant impact on that baby's mental and emotional health.

"New scientific advances are showing the crucial importance of (these) foundation years as a springboard for neuro-cognitive development, life-long health and well-being and socioeconomic success."

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Harvard University

It also makes strong sense to invest in the first 1001 days: conception to age 2 from an economic perspective as the long-term savings that can be generated are considerable. At a national conference in Westminster on this week we will be highlighting key recommendations of the 1001 Critical Days Manifesto, which is the only cross-party children's manifesto in the country.

As a society, we are left with a choice - to wait to address the mental health problems of older children and adults down the road which entails a vacuum of wellbeing in our families, schools and workplaces and is expensive for society - or to recognise where the foundations of mental health are laid (Infancy) and seize the window of opportunity to promote a best start and positive vision holding the future in mind.

Key statistics:

1. One in ten children need support or treatment for mental health problems
2. Failure to fully address mental health problems in pregnancy and following childbirth costs over £8 billion for each one year co-hort

of births - Nearly three-quarters (72%) of this cost relates to adverse impacts on the child rather than the mother.

3. 26 per cent of babies in the UK have a parent affected by domestic violence, mental health or substance misuse
4. 36 per cent of serious case reviews into deaths or serious abuse involve a child under one

Primary sponsors of the week include Public Health England, the Royal College of Midwives, the Institute of Health Visiting, Community Practitioners and Health Visitors' Association, the Association for Infant Mental Health and Zero to Three.

Viv Bennett, Chief Nurse at Public Health England, said:

“Relationships matter; what happens to babies during pregnancy and the early weeks and months of life can have consequences throughout the life course into adulthood. Supporting new parents at this critical time is an investment in the future. Confident, sensitive, attuned parenting promotes strong and secure attachment between parents and infants which in turn enables babies to learn to manage their emotions and builds resilience for life.”

Jacque Gerard RCMs Director for England says;

“RCM are pleased to be involved with and support the UK's inaugural Infant Mental Health week. Midwives are in an ideal position to support the mental health of mothers and their babies as they provide all round care from early pregnancy through to labour and the first days of the baby's life. It is crucial that midwives appreciate the importance of infant mental health as they can explain to mothers how the emotional development of their baby will aid attachment. This in turn will enhance the mothers' relationship with her baby in a positive way from birth and onwards. This early relationship will have an impact on the child for the rest of its life.”

Dr Cheryll Adams, Executive Director, Institute of Health Visiting

comments: 'It is the mental health of infants that assures the mental, social and physical health of our society. There can therefore be no better public health investment. By directing more professional time to supporting all new parents during the critical early years the benefits, both fiscal and to the health of our society, would be felt by all.'

Clair Rees, Executive Director, Parent Infant Partnership (PIP) UK states:

“Good mental health begins in early childhood. When a baby has the opportunity to form a secure bond with their parent or caregiver, this can support their potential and ability to form healthy relationships throughout life”.

During the course of the week over 100 organisations will together be shining a spotlight on why emphasis on the first 1001 days of a child's life matters, and the importance of infant mental health as a positive, preventative public health strategy for future generations.

Parent Infant Partnership (PIP) UK is an umbrella organisation for a growing network of Infant Mental Health services across the UK which work with vulnerable families, to enable secure attachment and healthy early relationships for babies, toddlers and their relationships. We are seeking to extend the network across the UK so that every locality has parent-infant therapeutic provision available.

Join the conversation and case for change.

Notes to editors

#IMHAW16

www.infantmentalhealthweek.com

The website will have an extensive calendar of events happening across the UK during the week, webinars, blogs and twitter chats, and will provide resources for policy makers, professionals and families.

Key documents

1. **1001 Critical Days Manifesto**

http://www.1001criticaldays.co.uk/the_manifesto.php

2. **Future in Mind**

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414024/Childrens_Mental_Health.pdf

3. **Building Great Britons Report**

<http://www.1001criticaldays.co.uk/buildinggreatebritonsreport.pdf>

4. **Economic Report – Costs of perinatal mental health problems**

<http://everyonesbusiness.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2014/10/Embargoed-20th-Oct-Final-Economic-Report-costs-of-perinatal-mental-health-problems.pdf>

For media enquiries and to arrange interviews contact:

Email: clair.rees@pipuk.org.uk

Tel: 07983494438