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Working with parents and babies living in temporary accommodation



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'Weigh in' as 'way in' to parent infant psychotherapy

Hostel in same street but families didn't come, needed imaginative approach

New hostel opening for 150 families with integrated facilities

Develop relationship with specialist HV

Child health clinics often missed opportunities to support infant mental health. Babies are talked about but not with

Value of working across disciplines, thinking together

Parents and babies living in homelessness

Unstable accommodation, restricted and uncomfortable

High levels of ACE in family background

Trauma leading to homelessness: family breakdown, DV, recent arrivals in UK, teenagers

Many families with safeguarding concerns

Babies unstable start: high incidence of developmental delay (NSPCC, AFC), parents pre-occupied, high levels of cortisol and difficulties with emotional regulation

Even so resilience and baby brings opportunity for change, with parents wanting the best for their babies

A different kind of baby clinic

Drop in and drop out, free to take control

Priority given to babies over adult concerns

Staff member 'magnet on the mat'

A space to play and value non-verbal connections.

Develop a sense of belonging, offer emotional support

Contact with professionals in natural setting - engage in the moment 'now, not later'

Joined up multi-disciplinary thinking

DVD clip Making Connections

Babies equal participants, directly talking and interacting with babies

Culture develops, parents contribute, modelling playful and responsive ways of relating

Experiences of feeling connected, building a sense of belonging

Atmosphere of valuing relationships and just being together

DVD clip: focus baby N age 8 months

Risk factors, previous baby removed, DV, neglect, learning difficulties

Been attending weekly, trust developing

Becoming part of the group?

HV support during routine interactions

Therapist interventions: Direct with baby to offer new experiences, scaffold parent and baby relationship, mark moments of meeting, make connections, opportunity to practice

Reflective discussion post group – shared observations, different positions

Research evaluation

Ameliorate the effects of homelessness and encourage child development. (2013 Slead M, James J, Journal Psychology and Psychotherapy)

25 families controlled with local hostels no intervention

Mental and motor Bayley developmental scores significantly improved.

'They spoke with my baby, I didn't know babies could talk, but I tried at home and she did' (mother 4 month old baby)

'They helped me hold my son when he was crying, I got more confident to come down'

'Everyone says hello to me and my baby, we look forward to each week'

Papers/Chapters

Sleed, M, James, J, Baradon, T, Newbery, J and Fonagy, P (2013) A psychotherapeutic baby clinic in a hostel for homeless families: Practice and evaluation. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 86 (1): 1-18,

James, J (2016) Parent infant psychotherapy in groups. In Baradon, T, with Biseo, M, Broughton, C, James, J and Joyce, A : *The Practice of Parent Infant Psychotherapy, Claiming the Baby* London: Routledge

James, J (2017) Health care baby clinics. In Celebi, M (ed) *Weaving the Cradle: Facilitating groups to promote bonding between parents, their babies and toddlers* London and Philadelphia: Singing Dragon

James, J and Rosan, C (2019) *Remodelling Baby Clinics: Opportunities to Support Parent Baby Relationships* Journal for Health Visiting, London