Kerry Infant & Toddler Mental Health Networks

What is an Infant & Toddler Mental Health Network?
An Infant & Toddler Mental Health Network is a multidisciplinary network forum which enables front line practitioners to incorporate infant & toddler mental health principles and knowledge, assessment and early intervention into existing service delivery for children aged 0-3 and their parents /carers. Infant & Toddler Mental Health Networks build on the knowledge that good mental health begins in pregnancy and that the first years and months in a child's life are critical as a developmental stage.
Infant & Toddler Mental Health Networks are multidisciplinary, educational, and supportive, and primarily use a model of reflective practice. Network groups are currently operating in Mallow & Fermoy in North Cork, Cork City, Clonmel in Co. Tipperary, the North East (with attendees drawn from Louth, Meath, Cavan, and Monaghan), and Ballymun in Dublin.

What are the Aims & Objectives of the Proposed Kerry Infant & Toddler Mental Health Networks?
Kerry Children & Young People's Services Committee through its Child & Youth Mental Health and Parenting & Family Learning Working Groups has recognised the need to establish Infant & Toddler Mental Health Networks in both North & South Kerry. The aims & objectives of the networks are to:

- Establish shared language, knowledge & understanding of infant & toddler mental health across a broad spectrum of services in Kerry which will enable early assessment & interventions and links to existing services & supports to promote improved infant & toddler mental health.
- Enable practitioners to recognise early when there is a vulnerability re infant /toddler mental health and to begin to develop & provide supports to address this within the framework of a supportive, multidisciplinary network forum.
- Enable services to provide a learning experience for parents to reflect on their parenting style so they can improve their relationships with their child/ children and thus impact positively on the child's mental health, well-being and development.
- IMH Network will support front line clinicians in having a conversation with parents to seek further support if needed

Who Should Participate in an Infant & Toddler Mental Health Network?
Networks are usually comprised of professionals /front line practitioners from Psychology; Speech & Language; Occupational Therapy; CAMHS; Adult Mental Health; Family Resource Centres; Early Years Childcare; Social Work, Public Health Nursing, Paediatrician, Disability and Community services.

Birth to 3: Early Experiences Matter!

Why Establish Infant & Toddler Mental Health Networks?

Infant & toddler mental health refers to the optimal development of infants and young children (0-3) within the context of secure, stable relationships with parents or carers. Early childhood experiences impact on mental health and well-being throughout our lives. Experiences, relationships and attachments in early life establish the foundation for psychological social & emotional functioning, health & well-being across the lifespan.

Some infants & toddlers will present to services with difficulties such as attachment & separation anxiety, behavioural & emotional regulation difficulties, sleeping & feeding difficulties, problems soothing the child, and /or parent /child relationship problems. The development of an Infant & Toddler Mental Health Network will enable front line practitioners to meet regularly, to expand and consolidate clinical knowledge and to support its integration into their work with families.

What will the Networks Do?

It is envisaged that the Infant & Toddler Mental Health Networks will meet regularly in North & South Kerry to organise training & share knowledge and experience of infant and toddler mental health. Initial 2 day training is planned for September 2016 and will provide Introductory Infant Mental Health Training. This will look at 'What is Infant Mental health? The interface of child and adult mental health; the neurobiology of early development; and Attachment and Pregnancy as a developmental phase. It will also focus briefly on psychodynamic theory and clinical practice, attachment, systems, psychodynamic theory and clinical work.

In future training and case presentations may look at aspects of infant & toddler mental health such as: brain development in early years; the importance of attachment & development; development of regulation in early years; the impact of trauma; parental depression; fetal alcohol spectrum; common disorders of early childhood; creating developmental support plans; developmental assessment tools & their applications; the impact of poor adult mental health on the child etc.

Through the networks practitioners will get the opportunity to improve their knowledge & professional practice re infant & toddler mental health as well as strengthen links & supports across services to improve infant & toddler mental health & well-being in Kerry.