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# Evaluation Report “Why our early experiences matter”

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An Introduction to  
Infant Mental Health  
Webinars  
Oct 2020 - Mar 2021

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Dr Karalyn Hill, Clinical Psychologist and Orla Connolly, Social Worker were funded by CYPSP locality planning, to deliver a series of workshops on Infant Mental Health as part of the recently launched Infant Mental Health Strategy in the Southern Health and Social Trust.

## **Introductory Workshop on Infant Mental Health - Why Our Early Experiences Matter**

### Learning Objectives

- Introduce the science of attachment, and knowledge of how experiences and relationships influence infant development and specifically early brain development.
- Develop understanding of the relational experiences that promote positive child development.
- Develop understanding of risk factors that can impact parent-infant relational experiences.
- Consider implications for practice and ways we can support parents to promote infant mental health

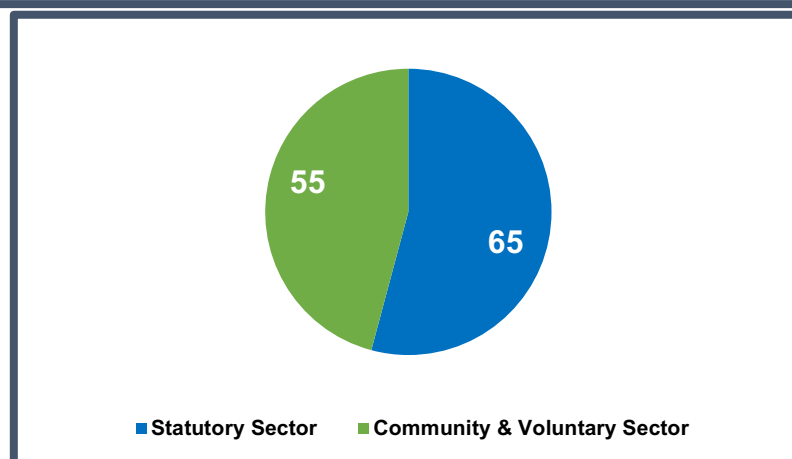
### **Attendance**

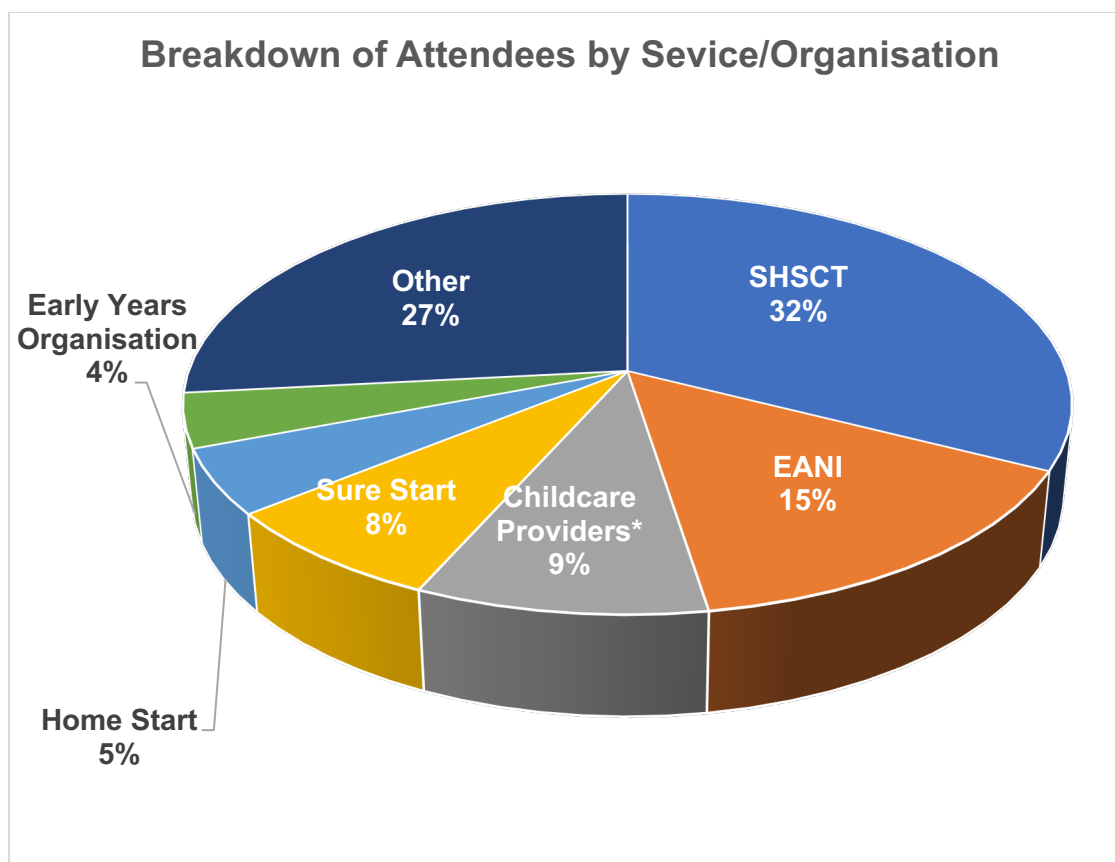
A total of five 2.5 hour sessions were offered to practitioners across Statutory, Community and Voluntary Sectors who worked with Children and Families in the SHSCT area.

A total of 148 people expressed an interest in attending the workshops. A total 120 (81% of those who had expressed an interest) attended.

Overall the majority of attendees were from the Statutory sector (65%) with 55% from the Community and Voluntary sector.

**Breakdown of Attendance across the 5 Infant Mental Health Introductory Workshops**





**Further Information on Chart:**

**SHSCT** are healthcare professionals with the Southern Health & Social Care Trust. Participants include workers in the fields of Midwifery, Social Workers, Promoting Wellbeing Team, Student Social Workers and Health Visitors, Occupational Therapists, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Training and Development and Regional Integrated Education & Support (RISE) NI Service.

**EANI** are education professionals with the Education Authority for Northern Ireland. Participants include Education Psychologists, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Service, School Age Mothers (SAMS) Service, Primary Behaviour Support & Provisions (PBS&P) Service, Advisory Teachers for Early Years Inclusion Service and Teaching staff & Principal of Special Schools.

**Childcare providers** include Childminders, Play Groups and Nurseries.

**Other** include Community & Voluntary Services, PSNI, local councils and Independent Practitioners.

(See appendix 1 for additional charts)

## Evaluation

85 of the 120 attendees completed the anonymous online evaluation questionnaire. The results are summarised below.

- **100% of respondents would recommend the webinars**  
(94.2% strongly agree, 5.8% agree)
- **97.7% of respondents felt the content enhanced their knowledge of infant mental health**  
(84.7% strongly agree, 11.8% agree and 3.5% neither agree nor disagree)
- **97.6% identified that the webinars increased their understanding of ways to support infant mental health**  
(84.7% strongly agree, 12.9% agree, 2.4% neither agree nor disagree)
- **96.4% of participants perceived the webinar was the right length.**  
(1.2% thought it was too short and 2.4% thought it was too long)

## Qualitative Feedback - Key Learning Points from the Training

Participants were asked to identify key learning points taken from the workshop. In total, 69 participants responded to this question. The quotes outlined below represent the most frequently recurring themes.

- Theme 1 - Respondents commented on the value of the training overall.

***“Excellent explanation of the topic in an easy yet fun way, which I will use to explain to parents and families whom I am working with.”***

***“Super introduction. Covered so many key areas.”***

***“Overall I took so much learning from the webinar. I enjoyed this and found it so informative.”***

- Theme 2 - Respondents identified an increased awareness about ways to support parents and promote infant mental health in their professional roles as one of the key learning outcomes.

***“How we can support children in the early years and how we can support their parents so that they can support their children.”***

***“Was great to get an insight in how to support parents when you are aware of attachment issues”***

***“Importance of supporting parents with infant mental health and showing/encouraging them how it can be built into every day.”***

- Theme 3 - Respondents identified information on the science of brain development as one of the key learning points.

***“Really loved the comprehensive part on the biology and science of brain development with practical examples and visuals.”***

***“How the brain works in relation to the connections we make within the early years.”***

***“How important the brain is and especially in early childhood.”***

- Theme 4 - Respondents identified awareness about the importance of relational experiences as a key learning point. Specifically, respondents referenced learning about the importance of early attachment experiences, relationships across the lifespan and also relational experiences provided by professionals to parents/families.

***“The science of attachment”***

***“The value of interaction at all levels for all human beings, and its impact on our mental health.”***

***“The importance of relationships both between parent and child and professional and parent.”***

***“Importance of relationships between parent and child but also with workers who are engaging with the family.”***

- Theme 5 - Respondents made specific reference to the concept of “Serve and Return” as a useful learning point.

***“Serve and return theme is a useful way to explain to parents the importance of their interactions with their child's mental wellbeing and development.”***

- Theme 6 - participants identified their learning about how sensory experiences relate to brain development and infant mental health as a key outcome from the workshop. Specifically respondents made reference to learning about the importance of touch.

***“All sensory needs, importance of touch, smell etc...”***

***“Touch is so important.”***

### **Additional Comments on the Workshop**

In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to share any additional comments about the workshop. 64 people provided additional comments, **97%** of these responses praised the workshop, for example describing it as “excellent”, “fantastic” or “brilliant”. (see appendix 2 for further information)

The following frequently re-occurring themes emerged from the responses provided

- Theme 1 - Respondents referenced how informative the workshop was or described how it had developed their knowledge
- Theme 2 - Respondents specifically described their enjoyment of the workshop
- Theme 3 - Respondents referenced the knowledge and presentation skills of the trainers
- Theme 4 – Respondents praised the different methods used throughout the workshop to support learning
- Theme 5 - Respondents specifically commented on the relevance of the workshop to their work

The following quotes exemplify these specific themes:

*Loved the webinar. Thank you for sharing with me so much knowledge and ideas. Looking forward to more events like this*

*Fantastic and very valuable learning experience."*

*Fantastic training. Informative and interesting - so well presented - great slides and use of videos. Super workshop. Thank you*

*"This is by far the most interesting training I have attended in a long time, the way the trainers used video clips and songs brought the key points to life in a fun way...Excellent!"*

*I really enjoyed this webinar, I felt it was informative and really will support me in my professional role and has strengthened my personal knowledge and skills. I found it very interesting*

*"Really enjoyed the session, it was extremely beneficial and helpful to the work that I do."*

*"I enjoyed the videos - it helped to explain concepts very well. Each theme of the workshop was backed up with lots of evidence which has helped to strengthen my understanding of the workshop themes."*

*This was brilliant training, very informative and I really enjoyed it. Thank you guys."*

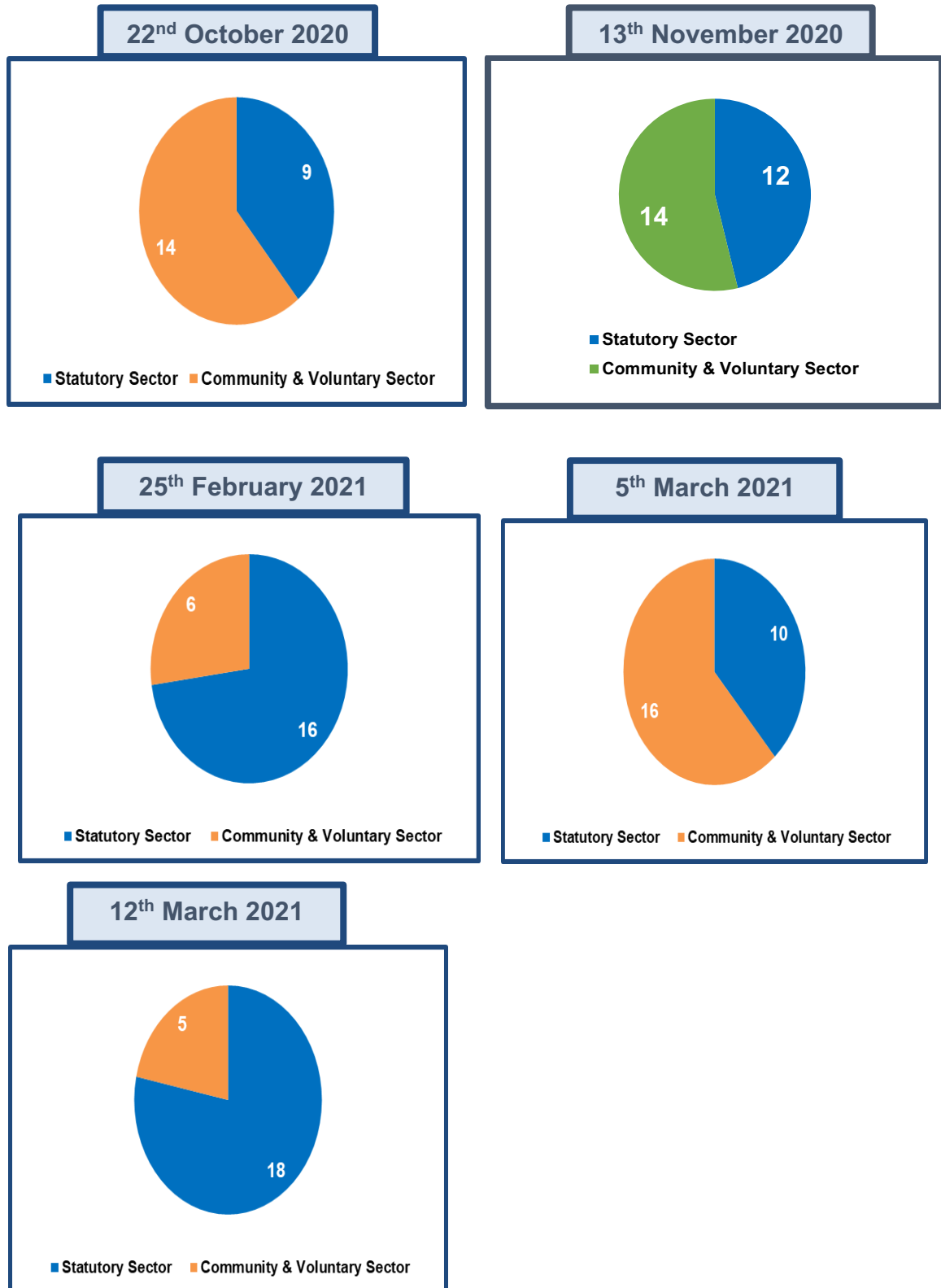
*Great delivery and fantastic wealth of knowledge shared, made it all very relevant and understandable."*

*Fantastic training, well done to all involved, very engaging and well-pitched with the interjection of short video clips."*

*Very knowledgeable speakers, excellent and well delivered, such valuable information on the importance of early intervention."*

## Appendix 1

### Breakdown of Workshop Attendance





## **Appendix 2**

### **Extract from evaluation**

#### Key Learning as identified by participants

- The information around attachment and how to support this on an informal basis with parents.
- Reinforcement of learning and importance of attunement on children's social emotional wellbeing.
- Interacting with a child.
- Enjoyed watching a visual of serve and return interactions. Good tips to pass onto parents to give their children attention and to support them through stressful times.
- The importance of attachment.
- I think the being with versus doing - the inside out clip is a very good tool for highlighting the importance of understanding and naming emotions something that a lot of parents struggle with. Really loved the comprehensive part on the biology and science of brain development with practical examples and visuals.
- Really enjoyed listening to videos and a few of the experiments. Learned about development of the brain.
- I just found the whole presentation extremely informative.
- Serve and return theme is a useful way to explain to parents the importance of their interactions with their child's mental wellbeing and development. importance of relationships between parent and child but also with workers who are engaging with the family.
- I have learned a lot about this over the years through books and training but it was great to have it all consolidated.
- Brain development, attachment, the importance of nurturing a baby and parent.
- Reinforced the importance of bonding, touch serve and return. Excellent training.

- The importance of relationships both between parent and child and professional and parent. The importance of supporting infant mental health in the early years It's ok not to get things 'right' all the time but need to ensure we can 'repair' an interaction if it breaks down.
- How theories are applied in real life situations.
- How the brain works in relation to the connections we make within the early year's.
- Importance of first 1000 days of life Role of attachment Developing brain Strategies to help parents.
- Importance of Neurons connection in early stages of babies development and how to support the optimal growth of babies brain. Excellent explanation of the topic in an easy yet fun way, which I will use to explain to parents and families whom I am working with.
- The importance of connections, touch, interactions and serve and return.
- Super introduction. Covered so many key areas.
- Importance of supporting parents with infant mental health and showing/encouraging them how it can be built into every day. Using a strengths based approach with parents The effectiveness and importance of naming/acknowledging an infants emotion/feelings Importance of ques and being responsive.
- The importance of a positive start for every child in life, positive & engaging interaction between parents and child, caregivers and child, the importance of the first three years of a child's life as the building platform for the rest of their life.
- The importance of early interaction and containment.
- That we don't have to orchestrate situations to connect with parents and children, these happen in everyday normal interactions. The important of listening and acknowledging others, that I don't have to jump in, or start thinking of what my response will be!
- Thinking about the disconnected world we are living in and how to reconnect to support my own personal wellbeing. The impact of Covid on attachment.

- Parents respond to 1/3 of signals and that's ok.
- How important it is to overall communication verbal and non with children and how it will help with their progression.
- How early experiences can effect a baby.
- Understanding children's feelings, not dismissing it or distract them but help them understand. Recognising feelings and attachments.
- Rupture and repair is vital. Loved serve and return.
- Touch so important and it's the way you talk.
- All sensory needs, important of touch, smell etc Serve and return Toxic stress.
- Importance in early Brain development in children.
- How important the brain is and especially in early childhood.
- supportive adult relationships are key to brain development in children and help negate the effects of adverse childhood experiences.
- The importance of early intervention.
- Science of attachment.
- Brain development, child development, relevant research and stats, ACEs, supporting parents, importance of human contact.
- Infant brain development.
- Importance of attachment for all care givers. The value of interaction at all levels for all human beings and its impact on our mental health.
- The importance of the parent's psychological emotional health in the development of the foetus.

- How to better support families to promote healthy infant mental health.
- The videos were very helpful seeing the interactions between parents and children. Strengthened importance of parents getting the support they need in the early years.
- The simplicity of interactions between parent and child that can have significant and lasting implications for the child's health in adulthood.
- The importance of serve and return. Good links to key authors in the area e.g. Dan Siegel.
- Importance of creating opportunities to learn across all senses.
- The serve and return idea.
- Lots of very interesting information - the information around the hunter gatherers really struck home - 4 adults for one child and now we are about 1 adult to 4 children.
- Brain wiring Serve and return concept.
- Although I was aware of many of the theories/perspectives surrounding IMH/brain development, I felt that this training built further on this to help implement it into everyday support.
- How important it is for parents to make connections with their babies; .also what an impact the workers have and ability to help babies to get the experiences, connections etc
- Learning on how infant mental health can be supported by parents/professionals and wider society. Learning on how the brain chemistry and architecture informs infant mental health, into adult life
- Was great to get an insight in how to support parents when you are aware of attachment issues.
- The importance of physical touch.
- Importance of early brain development on later life.

- The importance of relationships and maternal mental health.
- Thank you. Just to explain answers to questions 2 and 3 - I have previous knowledge and training in this area. Lovely quotes and references to research. Will be sharing video links. They were great!
- Very engaging and relevant!
- Some lovely videos which could be useful for further training.
- How we can support children in the early years and how we can support their parents so that they can support their children.
- Early development.
- Overall I took so much learning from the webinar. I enjoyed this and found it so informative. Once again it clarified the importance of good relationships for mental health.
- Brain development-fascinating.
- Great reminder of brain development and the importance of relationship. Love good enough parenting emphasis and will use this with parents to help them feel empowered and less guilty.
- The science of attachment How to support parents.
- Always fascinated by the brain development 0 - 2 years.
- Brain development, tolerance of stress, great reinforcer for current programmes eg: Incredible Years, Solihull, Support for Perinatal Mental Health.
- Somatosensory bath ratio parents as care givers V's technology care givers culturally reduced focus on rest for mums and impact on attunement. plus lots of useful quotes/ ideas to help parents grasp concepts.
- Really enjoyed the science of brain development. Also the importance of touch.
- It was all very informative.

### **Additional Comments**

- Thank you for this very insightful talk. Please let me know of any upcoming events
- Very informative workshop, I would definitely recommend to others.
- I absolutely loved it. The pictures and videos were excellent!
- Thank you
- very knowledgeable speakers, excellent and well delivered, such valuable information on the importance of early intervention
- Thoroughly enjoyed the workshop. The information was informative, presented well and also enjoyed the videos shared.
- Really enjoyed it
- This was brilliant training, very informative and I really enjoyed it. Thank you guys.
- Excellent webinar , Very interactive and engaging via zoom.
- Loved the webinar. Thank you for sharing with me so much knowledge and ideas. Looking forward to more events like this.
- I enjoyed the videos - it helped to explain concepts very well. each theme of the workshop was backed up with lots of evidence which has helped to strengthen my understanding of the workshop themes.
- A very informative webinar that covered the information evidence in a very comprehensive yet accessible way. I personally found it very beneficial and am already considering ways that I can use the information with the mothers I work with
- Excellent!
- Would welcome an opportunity to be able to get any other training available.

- It was very well presented and organized - very informative. Good use of videos etc as examples.
- Very interesting and informative - I would like to be able to provide it to all my staff in my childcare setting.
- I know it is better face to face training and seminars, however we are in the times we are in and I think everyone is doing a great job adapting to the new norm. thanks a million for the awareness session this morning, i felt it was very informative and interesting. i have completed the Solihull Foundation Training and it was wealth of information, however this i still learn something new every time. I would love to look into this area of expertise a little further. Thank you.
- Many thanks enjoyed the mix of slides, video clips etc.
- Thanks so much girls - I took a lot form this.
- Very interesting.
- Excellent & very informative.
- I found it very interesting I took a lot from this and hope to share with my colleagues.
- Really enjoyed that very pertinent to my work! Thanks
- Really enjoyed and learnt a lot from this seminar. Thank you so much to Orla and Karalyn. I am starting my IMHOL training next week so this came at great time. I am really looking forward to learning and studying more. Thank you so much.
- Very well explained and presented.
- Thank you very much, really enjoyable and interesting training.
- Trainers were excellent in their delivery thank you.
- I really enjoyed this webinar, I felt it was informative and really will support me in my professional role and has strengthened my personal knowledge and skills. I found it very interesting.

- Fantastic and very valuable learning experience.
- excellent style of presentation- very easy to engage and listen to.
- It was really informative and delivered well. Thank you.
- Excellent overview and although I was revisiting some of this information, it has certainly refreshed my knowledge and added to it. Well done to all involved.
- I would love more training on practical suggestions on how to develop infant mental health as a professional. Brilliant training. Thank you.
- Well presented and organised.
- I really enjoyed the training.
- Excellent presentation - very informative.
- Very enjoyable and interesting presentation. Thank you so much.
- Extremely informative, thank you.
- Brilliant. Thank you.
- Enjoyed the balance between the science of the brain and the social side.
- I always love to watch some videos, great presentation, thank you very much :)
- Excellent, informative presentation. Thank you very much.
- Great delivery and fantastic wealth of knowledge shared. made it all very relevant and understandable.
- Eye-opening.
- Excellent work shop.



- Thanks Orla and Karalyn!!!!
- An amazing session! Thank you!
- Thank you both, great workshop!
- very informative and so well presented.
- Fantastic training. Informative and interesting - so well presented - great slides and use of videos. Super workshop. Thank you
- Thank you very much-brilliantly presented :-)
- Good example of how powerful video clips can be. Great training thank you.
- This is by far the most interesting training I have attended in a long time, the way the trainers used video clips and songs brought the key points to life in a fun way...Excellent!
- Found the session really informative. Enjoyed the videos/resources which helped to reinforce key messages.
- I loved the saying "it is easier to build strong children that mend broken men" Although I had heard a lot of the content before I really enjoyed the session. It was very clearly presented. thank you.
- Very informative also refreshing to hear the term "teenage parents without support" rather than the blanket umbrella term " teenage parents" that can often stigmatise young parents and naturally assume that the life trajectory of their infants may be negatively impacted. Very enjoyable session thanks.
- thank you to Karalyn & Orla and also to Martina and Darren for helping to make it happen :)
- Really enjoyed the sessions it was extremely beneficial and helpful to the work that I do.
- I would suggest more breaks - it was a lot of information to take in with a very short break in the middle.

- It was a really interesting workshop and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It has enhanced my practice when working with wee ones, although I would have benefitted from it including some information for children who may be neurotypical and so develop attachment in different ways. The presenters were really interesting although the background noise was quite distracting at times.
- Thank you very much. Trainers very knowledgeable! Enjoyed very much!
- I really enjoyed this session and found this to be very interesting.
- Fantastic training well done to all involved very engaging and well-pitched with the interjection of short video clips.
- Really enjoyed the session. Thank you



*“From little acorns mighty oaks can grow”*