

# The perinatal period: A psychoanalytic perspective

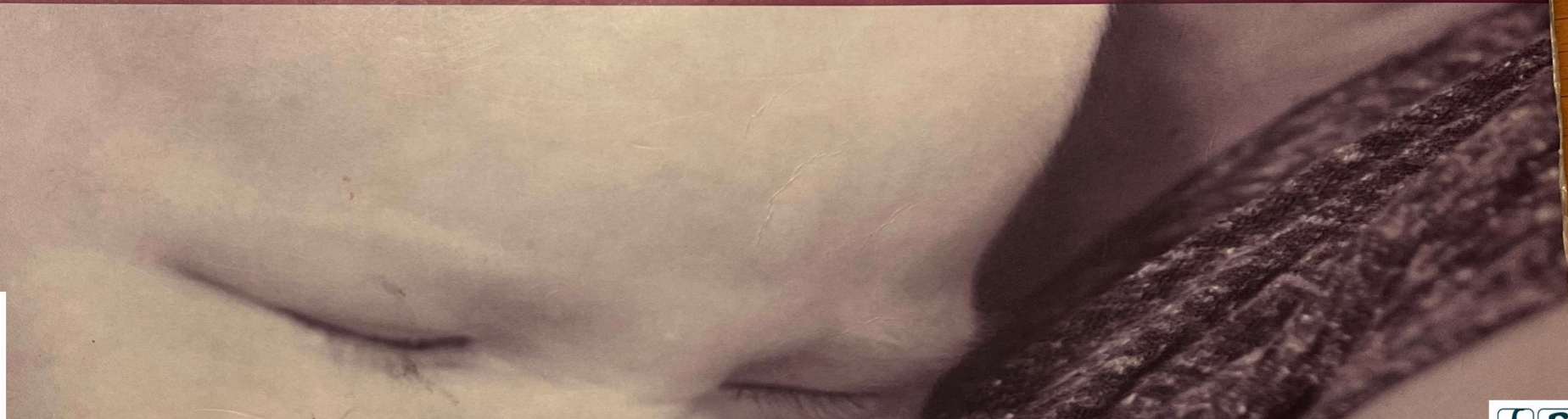


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# THE PRACTICE OF PSYCHOANALYTIC PARENT- INFANT PSYCHOTHERAPY

CLAIMING THE BABY

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# Attachment

- ▶ A unique and powerful relationship that develops between an infant and caregiver during the child's first year of life





# Relating

- Babies come into the world primed for affective interactions with others
- They are specifically receptive to feeling states in other people and sensitive to the emotional tone of interactions with their parents



# Dependency

- ➔ Babies are absolutely dependent on their parents, not only for physical care, but also for the emotional care that implements and sustains mental and psychic development



## Earliest anxieties and primitive defences

- Failure to protect babies can expose them to helplessness that can feel overwhelming
- This can lead to adaptations by the baby to the environment, rather than the other way around.



# Emotional regulation

- ▶ Regulation of emotional states is a fundamental ingredient of early development
- ▶ Through repeated experiences of his parent as a regulating other, the baby comes to feel varieties of emotions and levels of arousal without being overwhelmed





# What the parents bring to parenting

- The pregnancy: Planned? Complicated? Compromised by trauma?
- The birth: Straightforward? Difficult? Traumatic?
- The parental relationship: Stable? Conflicted? Separated?
- The parents' past; Traumas in their childhood?





## Our target group

- 2nd line of service
- Expecting parents or parents with a baby in the first year
- with mental health problems
- or
- worries about infant's development or attachment

# Common reasons for referrals

- Attachment difficulties
- Previous miscarriage, loss of a child or a difficult birth
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Parents' adverse experiences in childhood or later traumas, often presented as anxiety or depression
- Parent's serious mental health problems or addiction
- Complex family constellation
- Parent is isolated
- Severe conflicts between parents that relate to child
- Infant's regulation problems

## What we do

- Parents, one or preferably both, come to the sessions with the baby
- Parents' history, listen for risk factors
- Sensitive to former traumas which can be triggered in interaction with baby
- Assessment is made with the help of assessment scales
- What are the parents expectations, perception and feelings towards baby?
- Assess the infant's safety (notify child protection services if relevant)
- Referral to other services if relevant

# Emphasis in therapy

- Therapy is a secure base
- We talk to the baby, observe the baby's reaction and the relationship with parents
- Endeavour to strengthen parents' ability to mentalize
- Encourage thinking and observing before acting
- Mirroring, empathy, linking, normalizing
- Refrain from teaching or giving advice – empowering parents versus us being „the specialists“



# Group supervision

- Enhanced understanding
- Exploring own emotional reactions
- Shared learning

