



Creating the future

Building the foundation for life success through healthy early relationships

The relationship between parents and their babies and young children forms the foundation for healthy development and well-being. Recent brain imaging research documents that infants and toddlers with strong and secure attachments to their parents develop the brain structures and functions necessary for the cognitive, social and emotional skills that determine future success in school and life.

In contrast, children who experience neglect, abuse or the chronic toxic stress of family dysfunction are two to four times as likely as adolescents and adults to drop out of school, engage in risky health habits, be diagnosed with serious physical and mental health problems, and live in poverty.

The Need

Breaking this generational cycle of family stress and poverty requires interdisciplinary collaboration to:

- Develop better ways to identify children and families at risk;
- Test and develop effective interventions that can be implemented in existing community programs and agencies;
- Conduct cutting edge research on early influences on children's brain development and social functioning to inform interventions;
- Create training and certificate



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programs for professionals already working in human and family services, child welfare, family therapy, early child care and education; and

- Generate strategy papers and conferences to inform policy makers in government and industry whose decisions impact the development of children and families.

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Identifying effective, feasible and

economical strategies to promote healthy attachments and supportive relationships are not only in the child's best interest, but in the interest of all of us who rely on the next generation to be good, productive citizens and successful future parents.

The Institute for Building Early Relationships (IBEaR) will be a catalyst for learning and applying those strategies and conditions that result in a new generation of Oklahomans who have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential as students, workers, citizens and future parents. Early strategic planning for the Institute has involved multiple disciplines and stakeholders across Oklaho-

ma including professionals from Oklahoma State University, the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences, the University of Oklahoma, the University of Oklahoma Health Science Center, The Parent Child Center, Oklahoma Association for Infant Mental Health, and Oklahoma's state departments of Health and Mental Health & Substance Abuse. The Institute is in its early stages of programming and training, and is ready to expand its efforts.

Current activities of the nascent Institute include:

- Community continuing education programs on infant and toddler development;
- Research on the role of parent stress and young children's executive function skills (the cognitive and self-regulation skills that best predict future success in life);



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- A national survey of knowledge and attitudes about infant mental health and development; and
- Formal training programs for collaborating researchers and therapists in state-of-the-art interventions to reduce poor parent-child attachments.

Goals

The primary goals of the Institute are to conduct advanced research on early development and relationships, and to provide training and education to students and professionals on young children's social and emotional development fostering successful early attachment relationships.

The Oklahoma Baby Study will be a longitudinal study of 200 babies and their families living in Oklahoma and will be the cornerstone for understanding the impact of early relationships on children's brain development, health, and self-regulation. The study will follow babies and their families over time, using cutting edge research methods such

as fMRI brain scans, observational coding of caregiver-child interactions, and biomarkers of stress and genetic assessments. Results will be used to inform intervention efforts and as a comparison sample for intervention programming.

Benefits

The long-term impacts of the Institute are expected to be observed in lower rates of child abuse and neglect, greater academic readiness in kindergarten and eventually high school graduation, and ultimately a more skilled adult workforce and healthier communities.

For More Information

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