A four-year training in Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

Onsite or Online: The training is available at our North London premises or online.

Can lead to registration with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy.

Suitably qualified individuals may complete the training in two years.

Next intake:

  - London-based: February or October 2014
  - Online: April 2014

Changing destinies...

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The School

The School of Infant Mental Health (SIMH) was established in 1990 as the first institution in the UK to provide professional training in this field.

For over 20 years the School has provided training, clinical practice, expertise and research with affiliation to the Parent Infant Clinic and the International preAutism Network (ipAn), under the pioneering vision of Dr Stella Acquarone.

The postgraduate training in infant mental health and parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapy is accredited by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). This clinical training can also lead to entry into a doctorate programme, for example, at the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex.

The School offers a variety of short courses suitable for continued professional development (CPD).

The School’s training meets the needs of candidates who seek to learn and apply psychodynamic theory and technique to babies, infants and small children.

SIMH operates an equal opportunities policy in our work, with a commitment to respecting and valuing diversity and difference.

The School is a leading provider of training in Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy.

Parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapy has developed out of the growing understanding of the inner forces that shape us from birth. These forces affect our early attachment relationships, relationships that set the scene for human growth and development, from birth throughout life.

The aim of parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapy is to understand these forces, as they operate within parent-infant relationships, and to facilitate normal communication and the development of emotions and relationships. By exploring the internal worlds of the parents and the infant, the therapist focuses on the mental representation that the parents and infant have of themselves and of each other.

‘I call this new world the "parent-infant space", and to enter as a professional – as an outsider to an intimate place – is to take on a different kind of awareness: the same kind of focused awareness, perhaps, that a surgeon adopts when entering the operating theatre’.


The training helps professionals to:

- Gain an understanding of theories of infancy and emotional development
- Develop methods of observing and thinking about the application of theory with infants
- Explore parent/infant emotional development
- Determine the most appropriate methods of early intervention and evaluation
- Focus on the latest research in infant emotional and cognitive development
- Provide a sufficiently secure base to enable a person to explore emotional experiences of the past and the present
- Assist a person to explore current relationships with significant others and the unconscious repetitions that may be re-occurring through transgenerational transitions of trauma
- Be able to work effectively with the counter transference using it as a tool to understand various causes of distress in the parents and infants
- Become aware of the effect of childhood and adult experiences on current feelings and what is being projected or untested in the parent infant relationship

The training is suitable for all professionals working in early years, including clinical psychologists, family centre staff, health visitors, nurses, nursery and early year’s educators, midwives, social workers and qualified psychotherapists.
The Programme

Course overview
This course concerns the early emotions that we all experience. We look beyond behaviour in the present, seeing how emotions are reactivated from the past and so gain the precious understanding that better allows us to help the baby and parents in distress.

The training consists of a part-time course over four years, with a conversion pathway of two years for already qualified psychotherapists.

We offer an innovative perspective on infant mental health with an optional specialisation in early signs of autism and treatments of early autistic behaviours.

Our training offers an experiential and theoretical approach to understanding infant mental health within the context of the parent infant relationship. A range of psychoanalytic theories and parent infant psychotherapies, are taught. These are integrated with other theories of infant emotional development making this a unique training.

Successful completion of this training can lead to accreditation by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) as a parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapist.

The training programme
The four-year course is divided into two two-year modules, the first in Infant Mental Health and the second in Parent Infant Psychotherapy.

The first module can be taken as a stand-alone diploma, by those who wish solely to study this subject. The second module can also be taken by itself by suitably-qualified trainees. For example, the second module can be used by an adult psychoanalytic psychotherapist as a conversion course leading to an additional accreditation as a parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapist. Most trainees undertake both modules, which together form a four-year training.

The first module provides a foundation in infant mental health, with theories of emotional development and other themes from infancy. There are opportunities to understand neurobiology and overall development, along with observations of early development with a two-year infant observation and four internships within institutions.

The second module builds upon this foundation to facilitate a growing relationship between theory and application to clinical work. This includes the practice of parent infant psychotherapy, infant research and infant psychiatry. Upon completion of the training there are opportunities to continue this research with a professional doctorate at a linked university.

The training can be undertaken in our North London premises or online. In both cases trainees take part in weekly theoretical and clinical seminars and, in their own time, undertake infant and organisational observations.

One of the first ways we learn is from observation. It is a skill as old as humanity.


Infant observation is a discipline that consists of weekly observations of the same parent-baby pair, from birth to two years of age. The aim is to witness and bear the emotional intensity of the growth of a special kind of relationship: the first and most important imprinting of emotions at play. These two years enable the trainee to observe the growth of the baby’s relationships, from the raw expressions of the neonate and its new mother, to those of the verbal, toilet trained, independent toddler and its parents.

Trainees are also required to undertake their own personal psychoanalytical psychotherapy and clinical supervision in accordance with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) training guidelines.
Course Structure

The Early Years: Themes in Infancy

This module gives trainees a framework with which to understand infant distress. This framework includes a psychodynamic perspective; differences in child rearing, and temperament and endowment at birth; mental health risk indicators; the development of the parent infant relationship; and an awareness of their own responses to infants.

There is also an overview of specific problems, e.g. autism, failure to thrive, sleeping problems and temper tantrums.

Theoretical content

- The emotional life and the observation of young infants
- Prenatal conscious and unconscious processes
- Perverted motherhood
- Learning from experience
- The importance of illusion and disillusion: transitional objects and phenomena
- Separation and individuation
- Biological approach to infancy
- Intersubjectivity
- About reciprocity
- The infant’s interpersonal world
- Civilization of fathers, the Oedipus complex

Learning outcome

To have an extensive overview of theories of child emotional development, and techniques of infant psychotherapy and infant mental health.

Early Years Development

This aspect of the training in infant mental health allows trainees to understand processes that occur in infancy and a general view of the effect of parenting in the neurological development of the infant. The student will also learn about early signs of alarm for future psychopathological development.

**Infant mental health is one of the most exciting and rapidly developing areas in the whole field of mental health. Research has shown that support for parents during their baby’s first year can significantly increase the proportion of babies who form secure relationships with their parents, and this has lasting benefits for their subsequent development.**

– The Association for Infant Mental Health UK (AIMH)

Themes covered:

- The mother-infant bond and attachment
- The effect of parenting on brain growth in infants
- Life’s first feelings
- Violence and young children: reducing the risks
- The premature baby
- Autism and autistic behaviour: The child who finds relationships difficult
- Attention deficit disorder – Early diagnosis and remedial action
- Dyslexia – Early signs of learning difficulties and language disorders
- Sensory defensiveness
- Touch-points: Pregnancy and postnatal period, childhood and adolescence
- Knowing the child’s temperament
- Discovering each baby’s unique strengths, capacities and difficulties
- Encouraging emotional and intellectual growth
- Family, therapy and school
- The fussy baby
- Depression and anxiety in infancy
- Emotional starvation in infants
- The smiling response
- Home visiting
- Early loss and attachment in adoption and fostering
- Adolescent parents and parents at risk
- Emotional communication
- Emotional regulation and development of positive feelings
Course Structure

Year 1 and 2: Infant Mental Health continued...

Entrance requirements

- A first degree from a British university or its equivalent in a relevant field of early years, healthcare or psychological discipline
- Experience of personal psychotherapy
- At least one year’s experience of working with babies and toddlers in a responsible role
- A police check showing no criminal convictions against children

(In some cases candidates will be accepted who do not fulfil all of these requirements, but who have substantial experience in a relevant field.)

Course requirements

- Seminars 3 hours a week (London course: Wednesday evenings, online: to be announced)
- Infant observation 1 hour a week (To be arranged by the trainee)
- Institutional observation 1 hour a week (To be arranged by the trainee)
- Three weekend workshops each year
- Personal therapy (Minimum twice weekly with a psychoanalytic therapist)
- In addition, trainees should put aside time to write up institutional and infant observations (Approx. 2 hrs p/w)
- Academic requirements (2 essays per year)

Institutional Observation

There are four three-month internships over the first two years of the postgraduate training, each one being for one hour a week at the same time. These should include a neo-natal unit, a special needs setting and a nursery.

The aim is for the trainee to observe the anxieties generated within institutions and how these are managed. Trainees will also see babies and parents in several different settings, and come to understand a wide range of normal and abnormal behaviour and ways of coping.

Infant Observation

Trainees are instructed in observation skills and follow an infant from birth for two years in their natural home environment (40 sessions each year). This is a non-clinical baby that the trainee arranges prior to the course, with advice from the School.

Observations are a formal context in which trainees see how families address development, difficulties, pleasures and crises.

Trainees are assessed on the written presentation of their weekly detailed observations. At the end of the two year observation trainees produce a written log of their observations.

Infant Observation Seminar

Within this small group trainees have an opportunity to discuss material from both the infant and institutional observations. Input from the supervisor ensures that trainees are supported in their parent infant psychotherapy journey.

Reading and Clinical Seminar

These small groups provide a discussion forum in which to explore theoretical papers and to develop critical thinking. The seminar also provides an opportunity to link theory with clinical material and with research.

Workshops

Each year the School of Infant Mental Health hosts a programme of international and home grown speakers who are leading researchers or experts in the field of infant mental health and parent infant psychotherapy. The workshops provide students with an opportunity to keep abreast of the latest developments in the field. A separate list of workshops and speakers is available on request.
Course Structure

Year 3 and 4: Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

**Theoretical seminars**

The aim of these seminars is to focus a discussion upon the nature and scope of the influences impacting on infant mental health.

- Infant psychopathology is considered from the framework of normative developmental science and related disciplines.

- Conceptual and practical approaches to the observation and assessment of psychological functioning are highlighted.

- Infant development is viewed in terms of continuity from the prenatal to the postnatal period.

- Advances in the multidisciplinary understanding of infant psychopathologies are presented, with perspectives on infant perceptual-cognitive development, emotional development, motor development and communicative development.

- More specifically, there will be a spotlight on infants with autistic disorders, blindness, prematurely and those with ill health

- Genetic, familial, societal, historical and cultural influences on infant mental health are considered.

**Seminar topics**

Infancy research:
- Doing research with infants: methods, ethics, assessments, atypical and typical infants
- Theoretical approaches to infant development: cognitive, ecological, psychoanalytic, constructivist, socio-constructivist, nativistic modular, dynamic systems approach
- Infancy and society
- Genetic and environmental influences on infant development
- Infants across the world

Understanding infant development:
- Sleep
- Perceptual and cognitive abilities
- Understanding others: attachment, patterns of interaction, play
- Learning to talk
- The infant and the family: siblings, fathers, mothers

Resilience and risk in infancy:
- Individual differences in patterns of resilience and risk
- Understanding typical development from atypical development: deaf infants, Williams syndrome, Down’s syndrome
- Understanding typical development from atypical development: Mind blindness and blindness: the case of autism, blindness, and autistic-like blindness
- Sick infants: making a difference
- Being an infant in the 21st century

This aspect of the training enable trainees to learn about the latest research in infancy and its use in identifying psychopathology.

Each year the School of Infant Mental Health provides students with a weekend workshop called Baby Brains: Research in Infancy which form’s an aspect of the modules in this part of your training.

*We observe infants as they relate to the world around them. Infants communicate with others via social cues such as gazing at another person or object, smiling, laughing, and responding to a person’s voice. By observing infants’ behaviour, we try to find out how they use these social cues as well as how they acquire language and learn new words for objects.*
Course Structure

Year 3 and 4: Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

Diagnostic Classification (0-3R) - Infant Psychiatry

Aims

This aspect of the training focuses upon the issue of assessment and diagnosis for trainees working with children. The initiation of major neuroses and behaviour disorders in childhood will be explored, with the specific effects of trauma or deficits in pregnancy and early childhood.

Content

Diagnosing and Treating Early Disorders in Infancy
- Temperament
- Anxiety disorders
- Feeding disorders
- Crying disorders
- Quality of parenting
- Regulation disorders in infancy
- Attachment disorders and maltreatment
- Affect disorders: Depression and early bipolar disorders
- Conscious and unconscious processes in pregnancy
- Sleep disorders in infancy
- Diagnostic classification (0-3R)
- Assessment of emotional development and parent infant relationship

Other topics in this module include gender identity disorders, psychosomatic disorders, traumatic stress in infancy, cultural diversity, communication disorders, attention and activity disorders and taught modules of eleven different types of parent infant psychotherapy.

Trainees form the ability to make accurate clinical assessments and diagnoses of infants and their parents, and as a consequence to plan appropriate treatment.

Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

This aspect of the course ensures an understanding and effective management of the various stages of the parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapy, from referral to interviews, assessment, ending and follow-up.

Content includes the following themes:

Introduction to Infant Psychiatry and Infant Psychotherapy
- Introduction: Infancy and life cycle
- Psychotherapeutic interventions with infants
- Clinical assessment of infant and their family
- Treatment modalities

Infant Caregiver Relationships and Development
- Prenatal development
- Perinatal development
- The psychological birth of the human infant: Differentiation—separation—Individuation

Psychoanalytic Technical Instruments
- Setting
- Transference
- Counter-transference
- Interpretation
- Clinical applications in parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapy
Course Structure

Year 3 and 4: Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

Entrance requirement

A student can only progress to year three and four of the postgraduate training:

- After completing all components of years one and two, with an 80% attendance rate
- Or as a conversion student, with an appropriate level of previous psychoanalytic psychotherapy training.

Course requirements

- Reading and clinical seminar (Fortnightly – London course: Wednesday evenings, online: to be announced)
- Three weekend workshops each year
- Personal therapy (Minimum twice weekly with a psychoanalytic therapist)
- 450 parent infant clinical hours
- Academic requirements (2 essays each year)
- Clinical supervision (1 hr to every 4 hrs of clinical work)
- Presentation of case study within one year of the end of training
- Group Viva

Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy continued...

Relationship Disturbances in Infancy

- Psychological birth of human infant: Reapproachement
- Fantasmatic interaction: Intergenerational transmission
- Early separation and loss
- Attachment system

Relationship Disorders in Infancy

- Attachment, loss and separation
- Infant’s relationship experience
- Relationship disturbance and early intervention

Therapeutic Interventions

- Treatment modalities
- Understanding defence in infants
- Understanding difficult infants
- Classification

Therapeutic Integration

- Parent-infant psychotherapy
- Reassessing the impact of pre-perinatal experience
- Difficulties around promotion of infant mental health
- Infant psychiatry and infant mental health as advocacy
- Disturbance in the development of sense of self
- Fantasmatic interaction
- Infinite mirroring in the therapeutic encounter
Admissions and Weekend workshops

**Admissions Process**

Individuals wishing to apply for the training should submit a completed application form and curriculum vitae. Application packs are available from the School.

Admission is based upon:
- Completed application form
- Curriculum vitae
- Relevant professional experience and academic ability
- One formal interview
- Two references

Applicants for the two-year conversion course must show that the contents of their previous training has already covered a significant part of the School’s syllabus.

Candidates will be asked why they wish to work therapeutically with infants and parents.

**Weekend workshops and short courses**

The School also offers to the public an annual programme of weekend workshops and short courses. These activities provide external participants with opportunities for continued professional development (CPD).

These workshops also allow the School to offer trainees opportunities to hear a broad range of speakers on subjects relevant to the training. Trainees are expected to attend a minimum of six days each year from this programme (equivalent to three weekend workshops).

**Previous workshops have included:**

- **Better outcomes in parent infant attachment**
  A close look at mother and infant communication: the role of oxytocin and the microanalysis of gestures. Presented by two experts in their fields: Kerstin Uvnäs Moberg, M.D., Ph.D., who is recognised as a world authority on oxytocin, and Colwyn Trevarthen, Professor (Emeritus) of Child Psychology & Psychobiology, University of Edinburgh, a pioneer of research into infant communication.

- **Childbearing across cultures**
  An intercultural look at childbearing, taking a psychodynamic view.

- **Trauma in infancy**
  Diagnostic and clinical skills in infant health intervention

- **Behavioural and Emotional Signs of Autism in Early Infancy**
  Mental and communication development during the first year of life. Identifying the early distress signs and how these can be overcome during work with professionals through early intervention. Understanding the screening tools, scales and monitoring of emotional development.

- **Baby Brains: Research in Infancy**
  Combining neuroscience and psychoanalysis to understand babies in NICU and childhood disability.

For further information and to find out when is our next open evening, please contact:

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