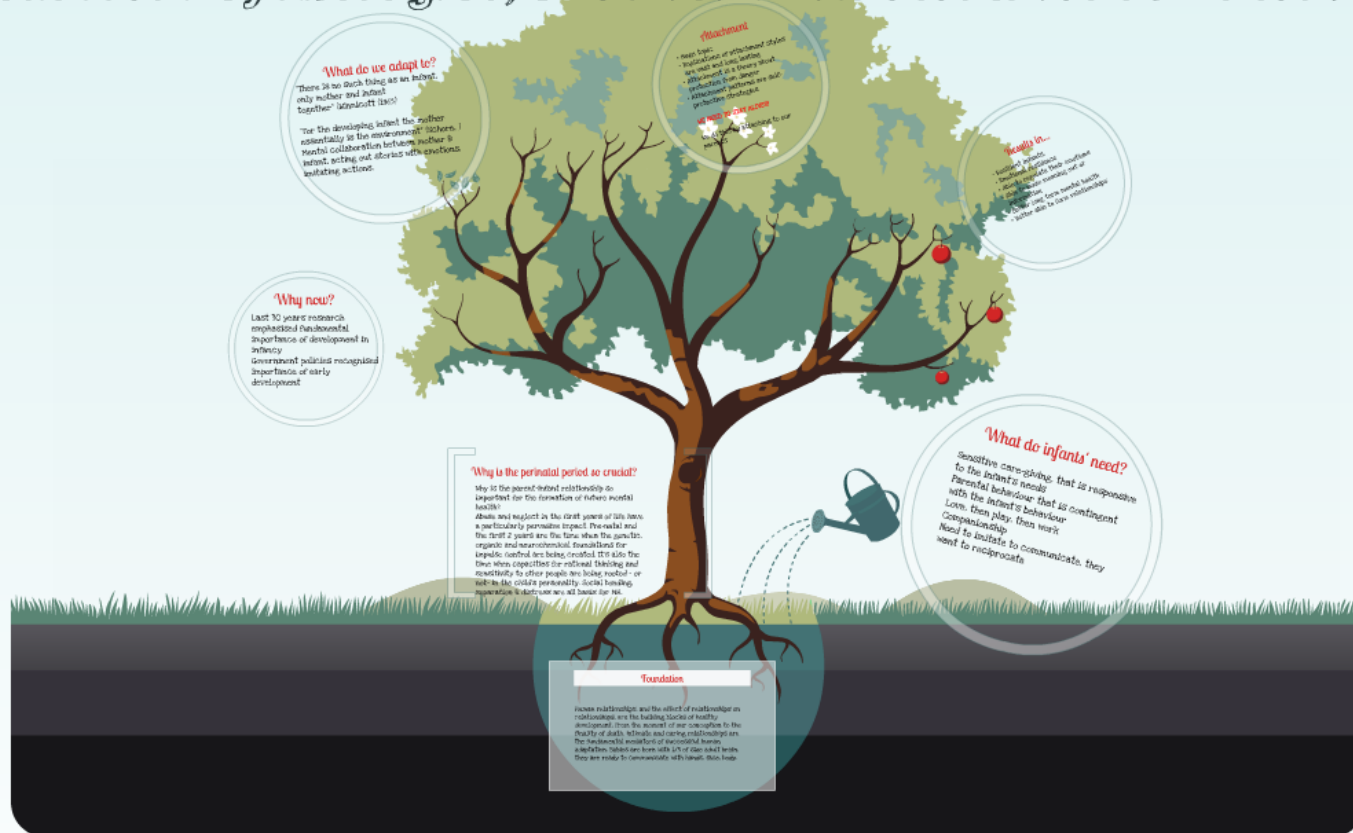


Perinatal Infant Mental Health

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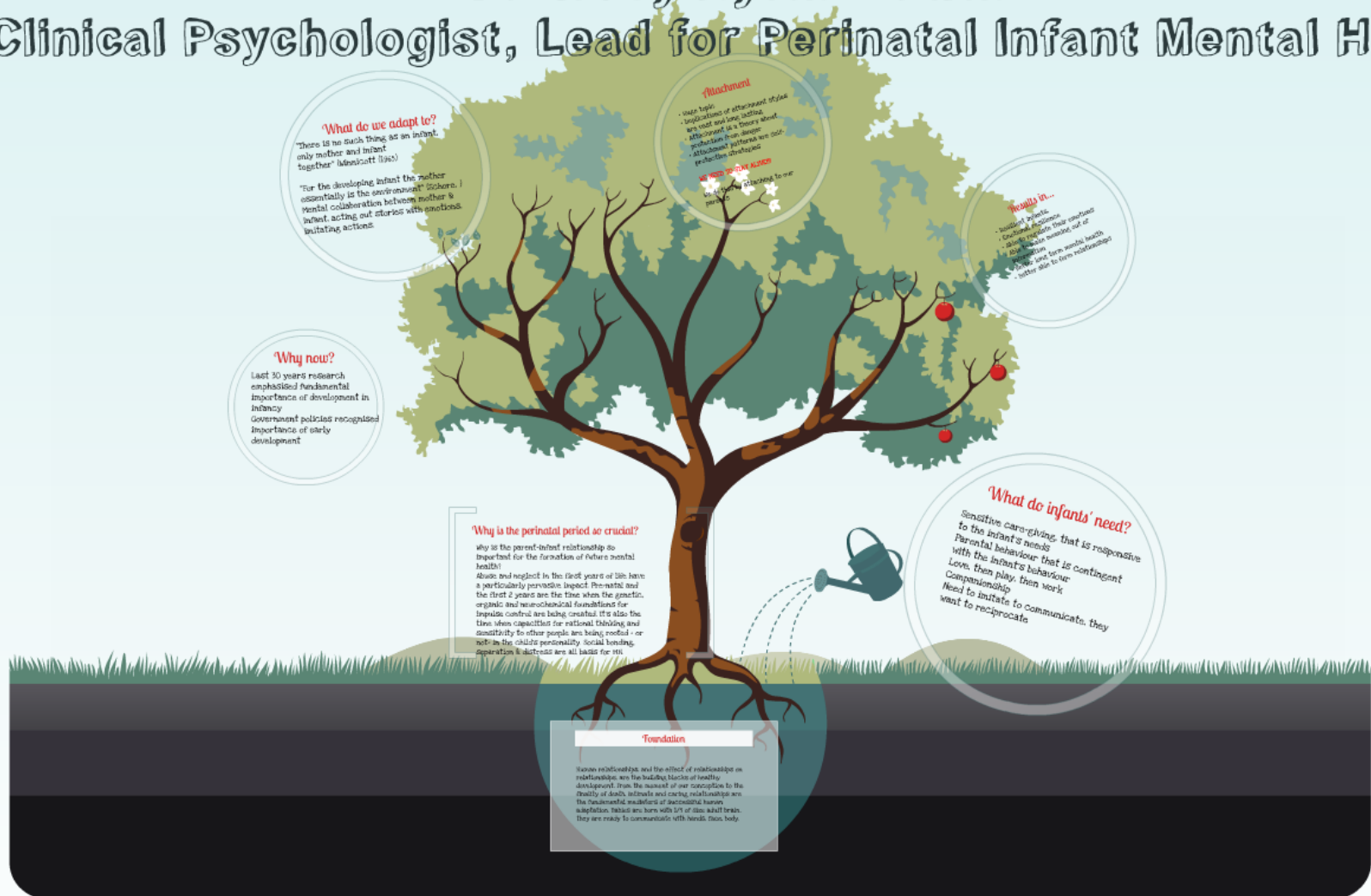
Clinical Psychologist, Lead for Perinatal Infant Mental Health



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Foundation

Human relationships, and the effect of relationships on relationships, are the building blocks of healthy development. From the moment of our conception to the finality of death, intimate and caring relationships are the fundamental mediators of successful human adaptation. Babies are born with 1/3 of size adult brain, they are ready to communicate with hands, face, body.

Why is the perinatal period so crucial?

Why is the parent-infant relationship so important for the formation of future mental health?

Abuse and neglect in the first years of life have a particularly pervasive impact. Pre-natal and the first 2 years are the time when the genetic, organic and neurochemical foundations for impulse control are being created. It's also the time when capacities for rational thinking and sensitivity to other people are being rooted - or not - in the child's personality. Social bonding, separation & distress are all basis for MH.

Why now?

Last 30 years research emphasised fundamental importance of development in infancy

Government policies recognised importance of early development

What do we adapt to?

"There is no such thing as an infant, only mother and infant together" (Winnicott (1965))

"For the developing infant the mother essentially is the environment" (Schorer,)
Mental collaboration between mother & infant, acting out stories with emotions, imitating actions.



What do infants' need?

Sensitive care-giving, that is responsive to the infant's needs

Parental behaviour that is contingent with the infant's behaviour

Love, then play, then work

Companionship

Need to imitate to communicate, they want to reciprocate



Attachment

- Huge topic
- Implications of attachment styles are vast and long lasting
- Attachment is a theory about protection from danger
- Attachment patterns are self-protective strategies

WE NEED TO STAY ALIVE!!!

We do this by attaching to our parents

Results in...

- Resilient infants,
- Emotional resilience
- Able to regulate their emotions
- Able to make meaning out of information
- Better long term mental health
- Better able to form relationships

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