

How Can I Help? An SLT Case Study from an Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Home Visiting Programme



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Background

Let's Grow Together! Infant & Childhood Partnerships CLG works with parents and young children living in the North-West of Cork City (an area of social and economic disadvantage), through a [home and community-based prevention, promotion, and early intervention \(PEI\) model](#). A central aspect of this work involves provision of an interdisciplinary home visiting (HV) service informed by the Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health HV (Michigan A-IMH, 2015). IECMH HV strengthens the capacity of parents and caregivers to establish and grow safe and securely attached relationships with their children from the antenatal period through to age 4.



Through PEI, SLTs can provide families with timely, tailored supports so children can reach their full potential and achieve positive oral language, learning and well-being outcomes (Snowling et al., 2006). 'The development of early communication skills is firmly rooted within an infant's primary relationship' (McGlinn, 2020). Offering support to promote and nurture early communication development within the context of the parent-child relationship, in their most natural environment - the home - is a unique aspect of this HV Programme. Adopting a relational and strengths-based framework when working with families is vital to build relationships and provide early communication support in the context of early adversity, poverty and trauma.



Composite Case Study : Cían & Fiona*

*family names are pseudonyms



Cían, aged 2;01, enjoys music, books and stacking and organising toys. Cían was communicating through vocalisations and babbling, and often got overwhelmed when around other children. Cían's Parents were worried about his development. Cían was linked in with multiple services, and the family had difficulty trying to navigate them all.

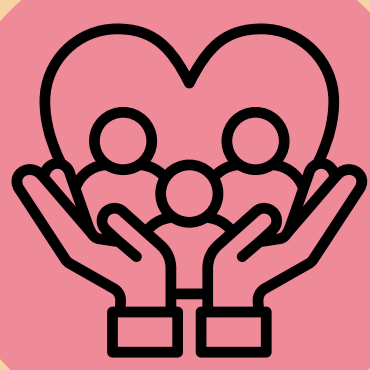


The family engaged with the IECMH HV Programme, for support with Alex's communication development and emotional regulation. Fiona and her son Cían met with the SLT regularly over the next two years. During this time, the family developed a strong and caring relationship with the SLT, who incorporated play into every visit, modelled communication support strategies and provided developmental guidance. Fiona learned how to support Cían's communication, social and emotional development through co-regulation, getting down to his level, following his lead, commenting on what he was doing, interpreting his nonverbal communication and expanding on single words. Fiona was able to identify many of Cían's strengths, and felt more confident in supporting his development.



Recommendations

SLTs working in PEI IECMH programmes support early communication development by nurturing high-quality parent-child interactions. Incorporating any one of the relational approaches below allows a port of entry for communication guidance to thrive.



THE RELATIONSHIP

Relationships are at the heart of the work between SLT, caregiver and babies and young children. The role of the SLT is "invaluable in nurturing the communicative foundation of relationships" (McGlinn, 2020). Spending time nurturing this relationship is crucial for successful partnership working to meet child and family outcomes.



Jennifer Harte (author) with a HV family

COMMUNICATION & FLEXIBILITY

Many families experience everyday challenges and adversity that require empathy, flexibility and a relational approach. SLTs can contact families through a variety of methods (Phonecall, text, WhatsApp, voice note) and offer flexible settings and times; don't give up!



EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

When families are experiencing adversity, from lack of family support and childcare to domestic violence and mental health issues, and navigating complex services and systems, providing an empathetic ear is vital. Emotional support facilitates engagement and recognises where each family is at.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE SUPERVISION

In order to fully support families we work with in IECMH HV, regular reflective practice supervision is key, and is best practice. Reflective practice supervision offers an essential opportunity to collaboratively explore infant and family work through relationships and the emotions elicited in relationships (Weatherston & Barron, 2009).



PLAY

Work alongside caregivers and children to model and support play. Always remember, every time we support play with a child, listen to a parent and offer to help any way we can, we are giving the child and family a positive experience that will lead to a more positive outcome; and "every moment & interaction can be an intervention" (Dr. Karen Treisman, 2017).



The Families' Voices

Gave me more tips and tricks to help avoid frustration as my daughter is non verbal so would be come frustrated when we didn't understand what she wanted

Very kind, chatty; didn't feel awkward when my daughter would have a meltdown. It was easy and at whatever pace suited us



Changed me & my family life in such a positive way

[My son] loved when Jennifer called. Jennifer was not just support for [my son], she was always there for me as well and I will be forever grateful for all her help

I definitely learned how to communicate with [my son] and understand autism a lot more and a sleep routine too!



Got to know my strengths and how they will help my son around communication



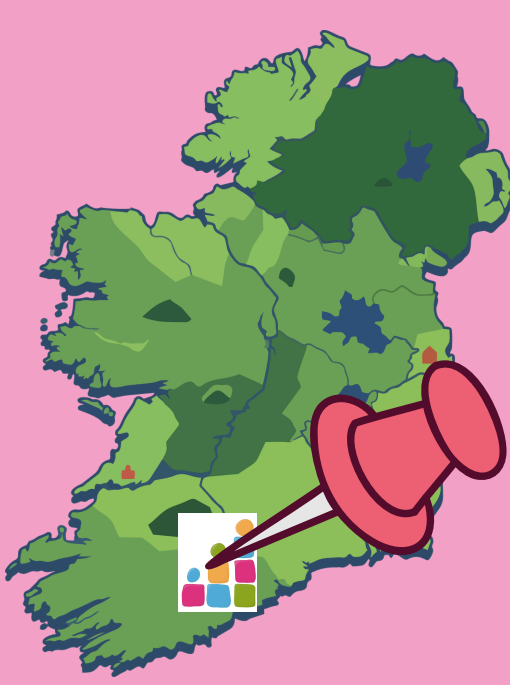
It took some pressure off me as i felt i had more support

Helped me understand how he sees life and how to communicate with him over the autism

References

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Thank you to all the Let's Grow Together families for permission to include their photos!