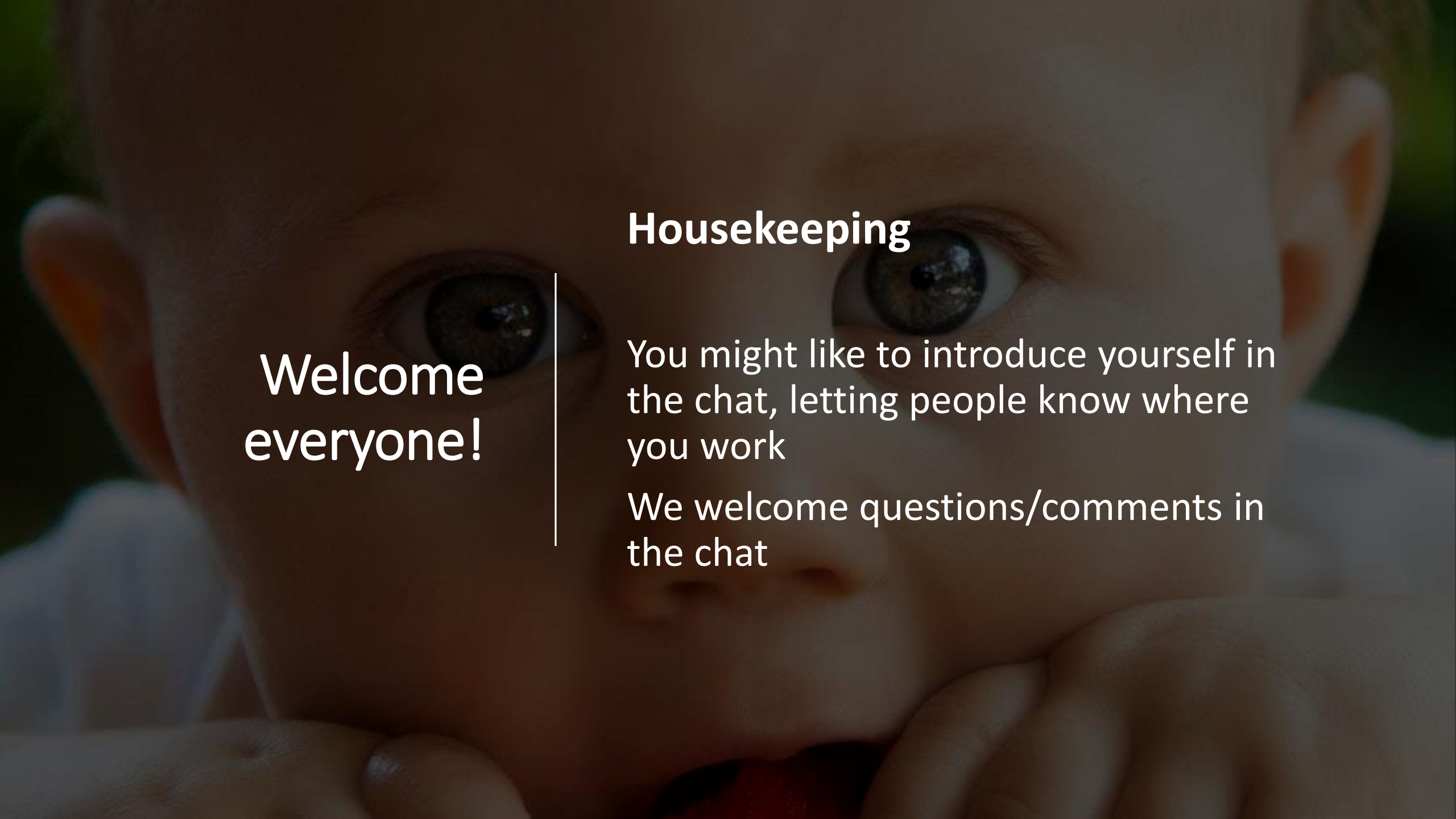


A close-up, low-angle photograph of a woman holding a baby. The woman's face is partially visible on the right side, looking down at the baby. Her hands are gently cradling the baby's head and shoulders. The baby is wrapped in a light-colored blanket. The lighting is soft and warm, creating a intimate and tender atmosphere. The background is blurred, focusing attention on the woman and the baby.

Infant mental health awareness week 2021

Jane Turner - Parent infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist



**Welcome
everyone!**

Housekeeping

You might like to introduce yourself in the chat, letting people know where you work

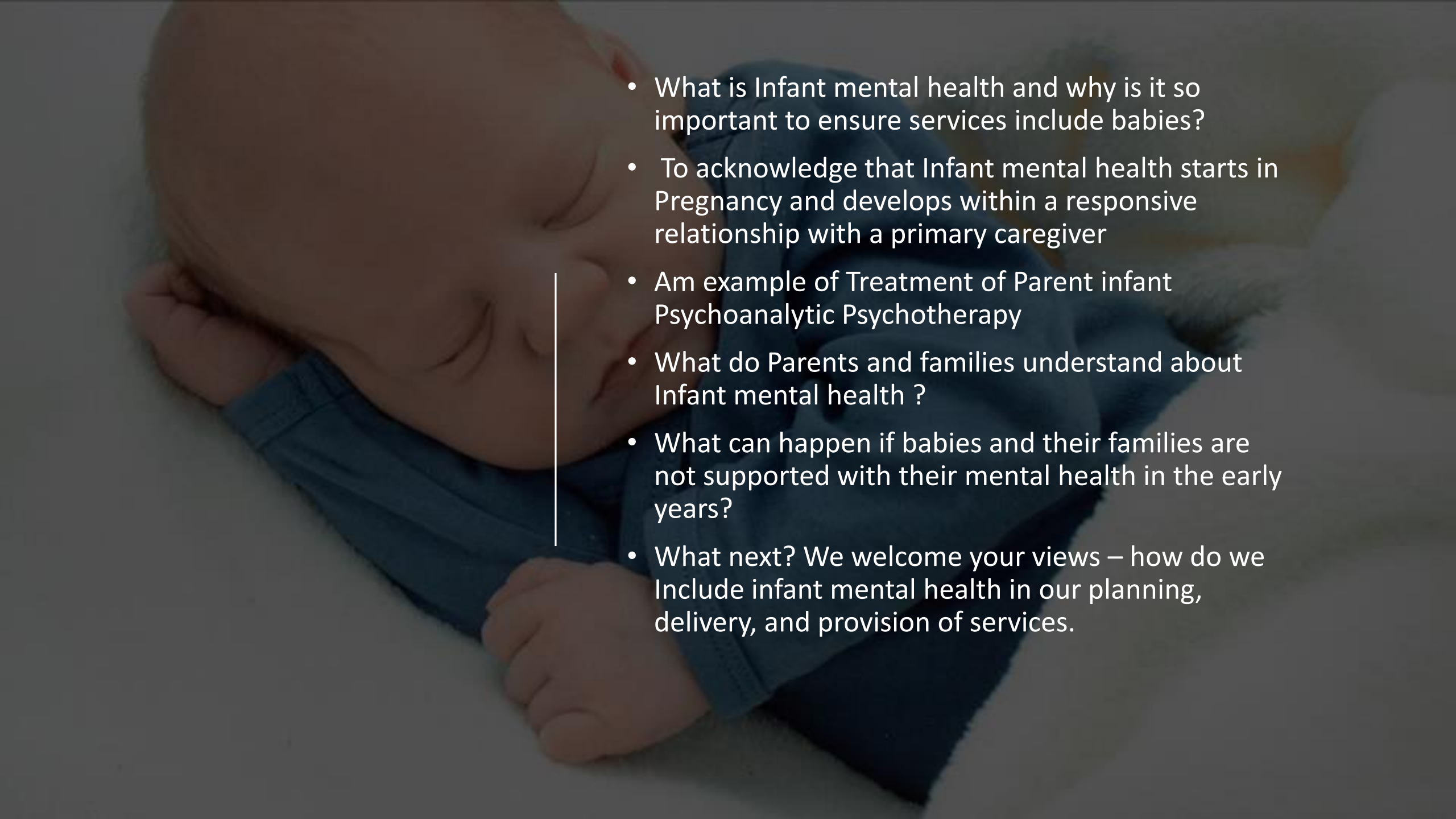
We welcome questions/comments in the chat



The theme:

**‘Including infants
in children and
young people’s
mental health’**

The goal of this year’s IMHAW theme is to encourage everyone working in children and young people’s mental health policies, strategies and services to think about and include babies. Children and young people’s mental health should refer to the mental health of all children from 0-18 and beyond, but too often it is focussed on older children. There is a “*baby blindspot*”. We are encouraging everyone to think and talk about infant, children and young people’s mental health, and to consider how babies’ mental health needs can be met.

- 
- What is Infant mental health and why is it so important to ensure services include babies?
 - To acknowledge that Infant mental health starts in Pregnancy and develops within a responsive relationship with a primary caregiver
 - An example of Treatment of Parent infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy
 - What do Parents and families understand about Infant mental health ?
 - What can happen if babies and their families are not supported with their mental health in the early years?
 - What next? We welcome your views – how do we Include infant mental health in our planning, delivery, and provision of services.

What is infant mental health

- A capacity for a baby to experience, regulate and express emotions, and to form close and intimate relationships. To be able to explore the environment and learn.
- To be able to communicate, to be able to play, and to have a fundamental experience of feeling 'safe enough' as to be able to be themselves authentically, and feel accepted for who they are.
- All these capacities develop within a safe lively relationship with a primary caregiver and are essential for development and preventing mental health difficulties for the future.

Why does infant mental health matter?

1001 critical days

<https://youtu.be/n-DgyinHL5c>



The infographic features a white background with orange and teal accents. At the top left is the '1001 First 1001 Days Movement' logo, and at the top right is the '20:20 Vision' logo with the tagline 'Seeing the world through babies' eyes' and the hashtag '#IMHAW2020'. The main title 'What is Infant Mental Health? Why does it matter?' is in orange. A blue silhouette of a parent holding a baby is on the right. The text 'Infant mental health describes the social and emotional wellbeing and development of children in the earliest years of life.' is in teal. Three text blocks are arranged around a central teal family silhouette: one on the left about relationships, one in the middle about the first 1001 days, and one on the right about long-term impacts. A large orange circle at the bottom left contains the heading 'Good infant mental health:' and a list of four bullet points, each with an icon. A teal circle on the right contains text about promoting emotional wellbeing. At the bottom right, text states 'Good infant mental health promotes positive outcomes...' with an icon of a person under a sun. The URL 'https://1001days.org.uk/resources' is at the bottom right.

1001
First 1001 Days Movement

20:20 Vision
Seeing the world through babies' eyes
#IMHAW2020

What is Infant Mental Health? Why does it matter?

Infant mental health describes the social and emotional wellbeing and development of children in the earliest years of life.

Sensitive, responsive and trusted relationships are fundamental to infant mental health. Parents and caregivers help babies to learn how to experience, manage and express their emotions, and to feel safe to explore the world.

Although children's futures are not determined by the age of two, severe and persistent problems in early relationships and emotional development can have pervasive and lifelong impacts on a range of outcomes.

Because the first 1001 days are a period of rapid development, early experiences affect not only babies' emotional wellbeing now but also influences how their bodies and brains develop.


It's very important to **promote emotional wellbeing and development** and to provide support to families if they experience difficulties in parent-infant relationships.

Good infant mental health promotes positive outcomes throughout a person's life and influences how they parent their own children. **Investing in infant mental health pays dividends for generations to come.**

Good infant mental health:

- enables young children to **feel safe and secure**, ready to play, explore and learn as they enter early education and school;
- increases the chances of babies **achieving their potential** in later life and **contributing to society and the economy** as adults;
- lays the groundwork for children's ongoing **social and emotional development**, including resilience and adaptability - key competencies that will help them to **thrive**;
- helps children to **develop behavioural and physiological regulation** which are linked to lifelong physical and mental health and wellbeing;
- gives babies the **skills to form trusting relationships** which are essential for living a healthy and fulfilling life.

<https://1001days.org.uk/resources>



How might we imagine the experience for the baby?

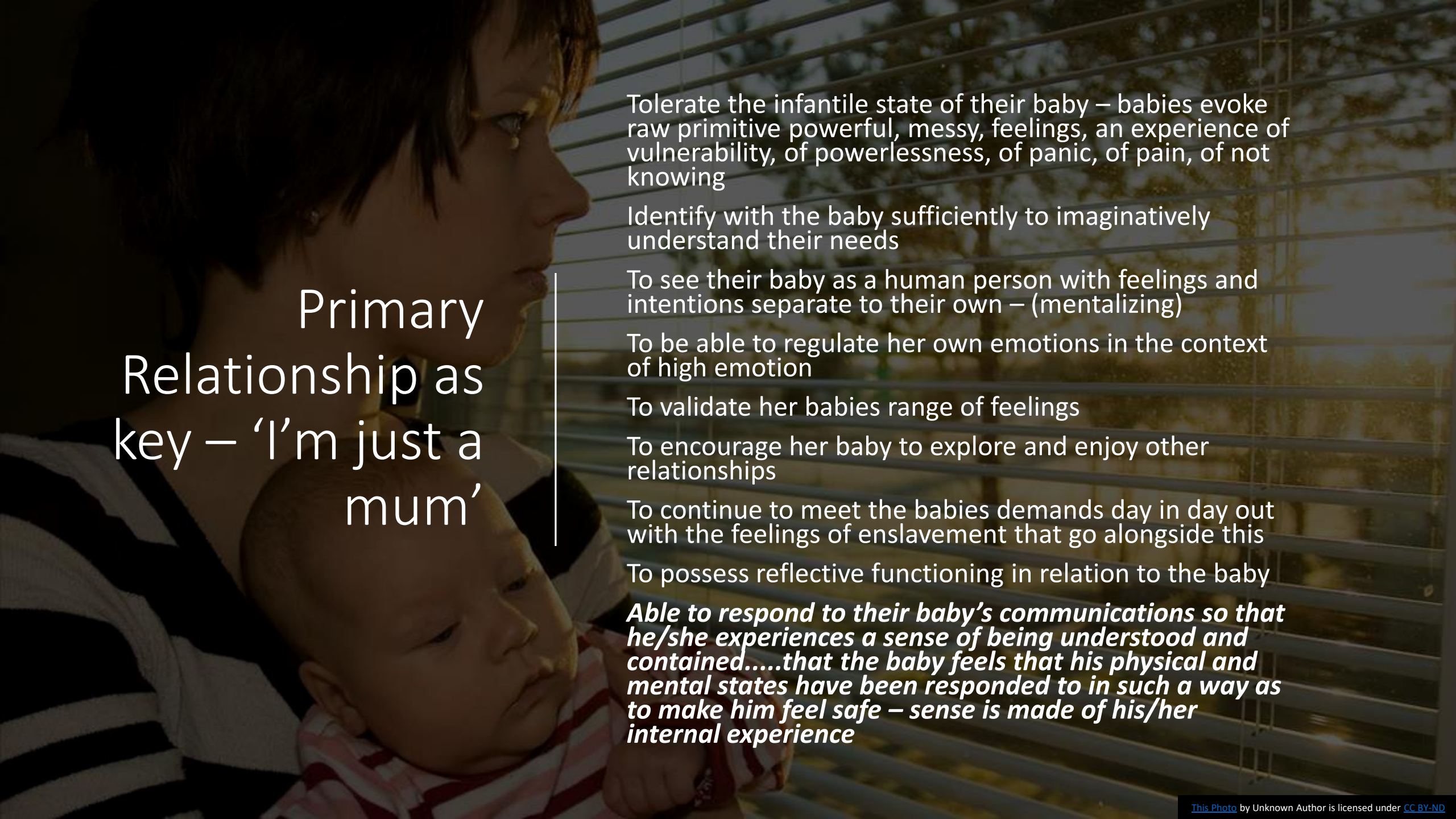
- In utero – completely dependant inter relationally on the mother's body and state of mind, (both bodily and psychically) what she takes in, her experiences and her responses and how this impacts on the neurobiology of the baby
- Being born and the first breathe – what is it like for the baby to experience this new world, air, gravity, to have to wait for a feed, to 'not know'? A baby takes in the world through all the senses
- Dependency : a baby is born into an absolute state of dependency requiring the mother to be highly sensitive to, and preoccupied with her baby – 'primary maternal preoccupation.' Described by Donald Winnicott - at any other time, like an illness. The mother is the baby's environment, extending to include the father, other primary carers and siblings
- Is both powerless, and powerful in their communications and so impact. Evoke strong and powerful feelings in primary caregivers.
- The relationship between the physical and the psychical - the baby takes in both the physical experience, and the emotional experience e.g. not just taking in the food, but the experience of being fed, how is the baby held for example?
- Consistency/unpredictability/rhythm important for baby
- Full range of emotions e.g. Frustration/joy/rage/excitement
- Every baby is different and is born with his/her own innate qualities – baby will communicate and initiate – wait, watch and wonder – giving space to their baby in the relationship



The world according to mother....and
father...it takes a village to raise a baby

*'There is no such thing as a baby ... if you set out to describe a baby,
you will find you are describing a baby and someone.'* (Winnicott, 1947)

'there's no such thing as a mother and baby without a father' Sebastian
Kraemer



Primary
Relationship as
key – ‘I’m just a
mum’

Tolerate the infantile state of their baby – babies evoke raw primitive powerful, messy, feelings, an experience of vulnerability, of powerlessness, of panic, of pain, of not knowing

Identify with the baby sufficiently to imaginatively understand their needs

To see their baby as a human person with feelings and intentions separate to their own – (mentalizing)

To be able to regulate her own emotions in the context of high emotion

To validate her babies range of feelings

To encourage her baby to explore and enjoy other relationships

To continue to meet the babies demands day in day out with the feelings of enslavement that go alongside this

To possess reflective functioning in relation to the baby

Able to respond to their baby’s communications so that he/she experiences a sense of being understood and contained.....that the baby feels that his physical and mental states have been responded to in such a way as to make him feel safe – sense is made of his/her internal experience



Relationship starts in Pregnancy – 'the world according to mother'

The mind body connection and the impact of stress - some examples

- An increase in stress hormones can lead to secretion of leptin which impacts on appetite and food intake. Stress hormones impact on the propensity of the foetus to store fat around the tummy, increasing chances of obesity (mid pregnancy between 14 and 23 weeks)
- Alcohol most damaging in the first few weeks. Serious impact on foetal brain – smaller brains, less ability to connect right and left, less capacity in learning, paying attention, as well as empathising and communication with others (Maier and West 2001, Cockburn 2013)
- Babies exposed to more cortisol have been shown to be more irritable and prone to crying more
- Lower birthweights (Vrijkotte et al 2009)
- Neural pathways are myelinated – coated with a slippery sheath to ensure that nerve signalling is up to speed, enabling messages to whiz along more quickly.

Pregnancy – ‘the inside story’


The inside story is the mother’s internal personal feelings, hopes, fears, memories and thoughts in response to her pregnancy and to her baby as Raphael-Leff (1993) describes:

‘For the duration of pregnancy a mother must share her body with another who is always there, even in her most private moments, who interrupts her thoughts and disturbs her sleep, forces her to change her eating, working, and toilet habits, and alters activity patterns of a lifetime’

‘An imaginary baby is juxtaposed on the embryo implanting in her
fertile womb’


This inside story, the mother’s psychological experience, connects with the biological experience for both mother and baby, her stress levels, her reactions to her pregnancy, her relationships, and her

developing relationship with her baby.



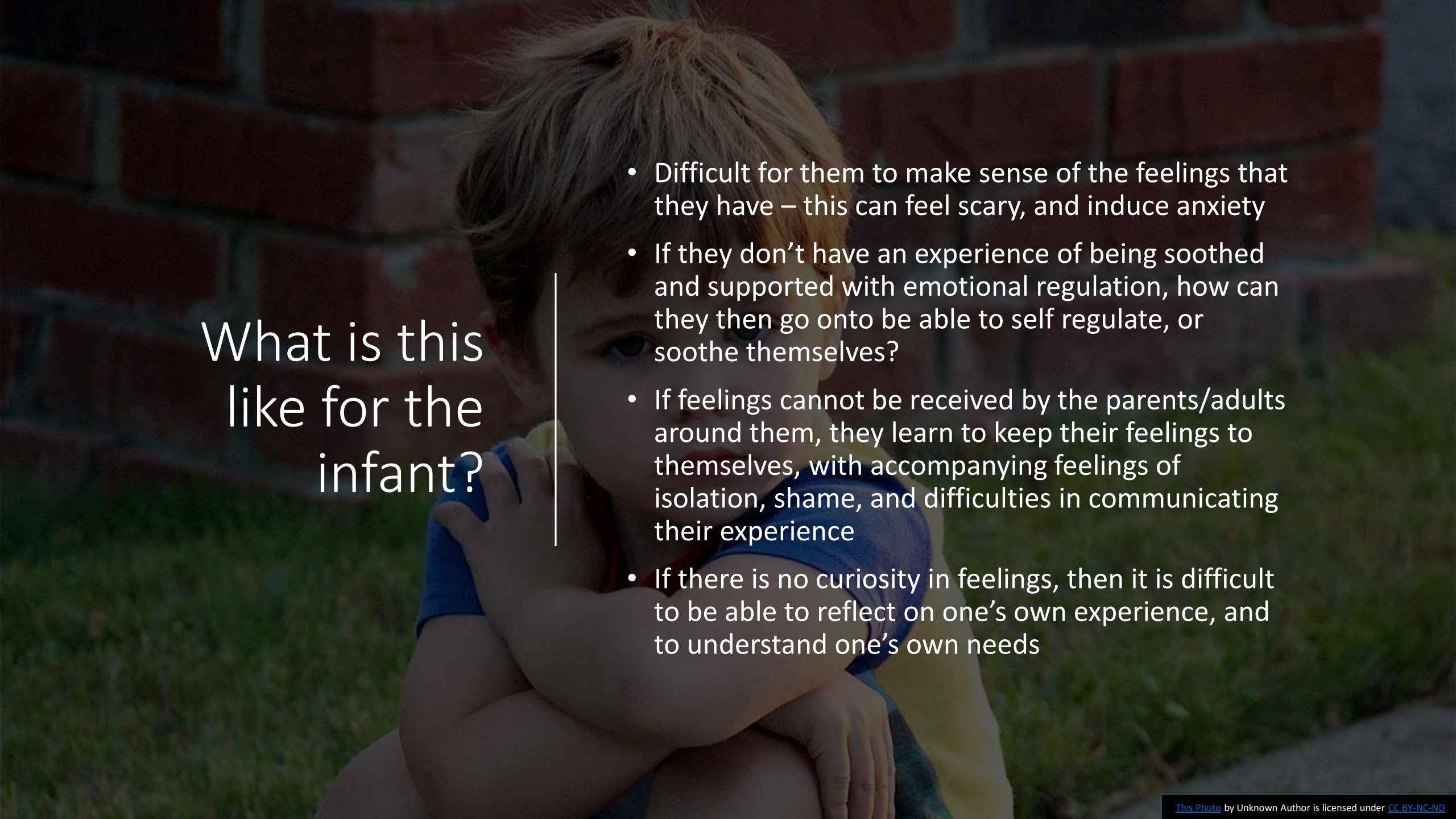
Treatment
provided:
Parent infant
psychoanalytic
psychotherapy
during
pregnancy

- Lindy, professional, first baby
- Referred during pregnancy as not forming a relationship with her baby in utero
- Experience of painful miscarriage impacted on relationship of new baby in utero
- Felt like new baby was an intruder in the context of not having mourned her first baby
- Painful feelings of grief and shame
- Difficult relationship with own mother – doesn't like to feel vulnerable or depend on others so difficult for her to ask for help



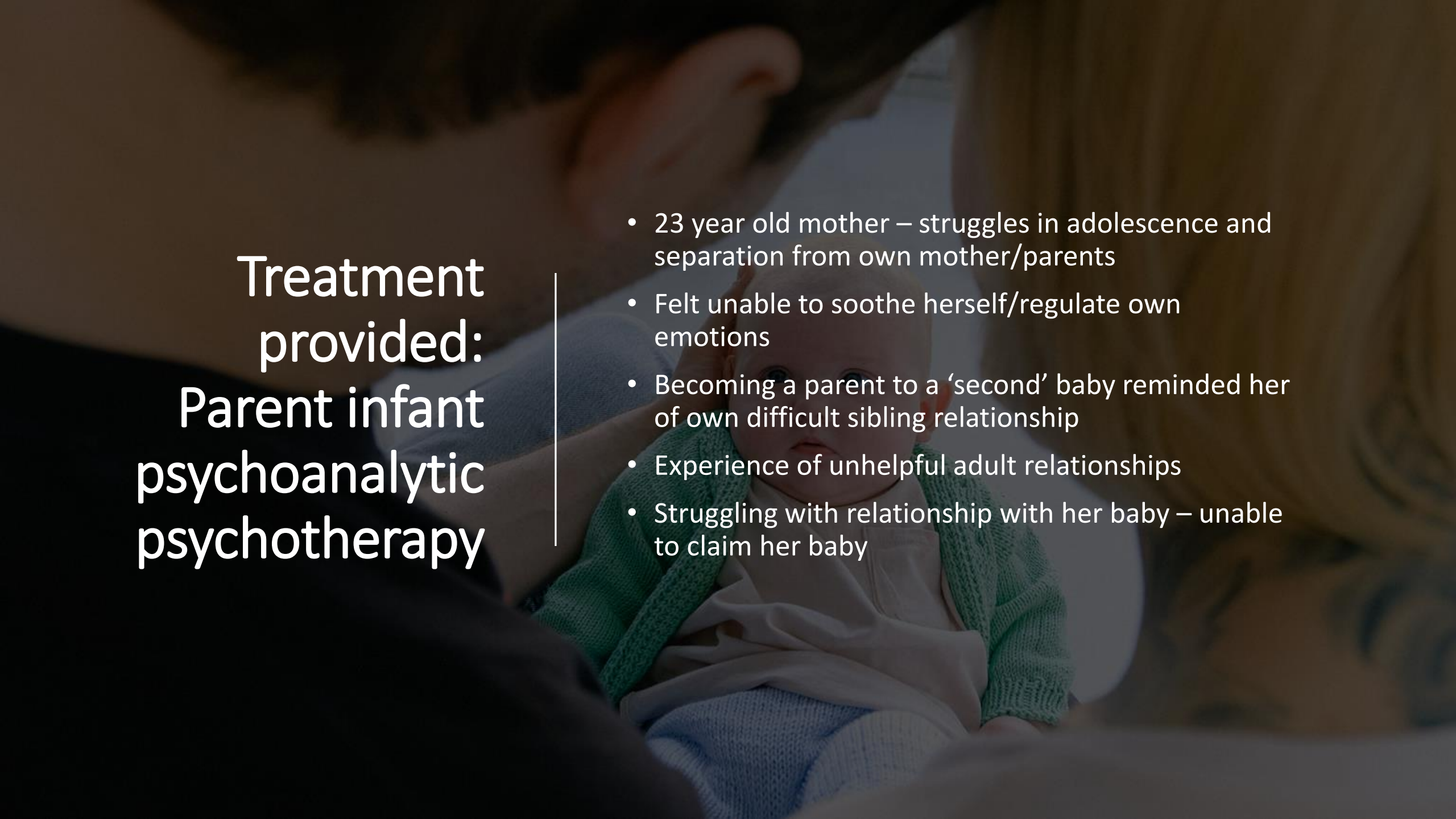
What can get in the way of a healthy relationship for parent and baby

- Previous losses, including abortions, pregnancies, babies and their relationship to these – have they been mourned?
- Baby unplanned/unwanted/worried about gender
- Concerns around siblings – loss of relationship/reminder of own sibling relationships
- Relationship with own parents/including loss of parents
- Adverse childhood trauma (ACES) – this is complicated. Experience of the traumatic event is mediated by supportive secure trusting relationships and fundamental experience of safety, Event, Experience, Effect.
- Experience of premature birth
- ‘Ghosts in the nursery’ – Fraiberg et al – identity and relationship with own mother/father/caregivers/being little/dependant comes under review
- Difficulties in the change from being a couple, a two, become a three. What does this evoke for parents?
- A lack of support around the parent/s/ stigma to the reality for parents
- Incapacity to put the needs of the baby as a priority as not had their own needs put first/ a parent’s own mental health
- Substance misuse – may increase to self soothe
[fathers_suffering_from_substance_abuse.pdf \(fnf.org.uk\)](#)

A young child with curly hair is sitting on a brick wall, looking thoughtful. The child is wearing a blue shirt and has their arms crossed. The background is a brick wall and some greenery.

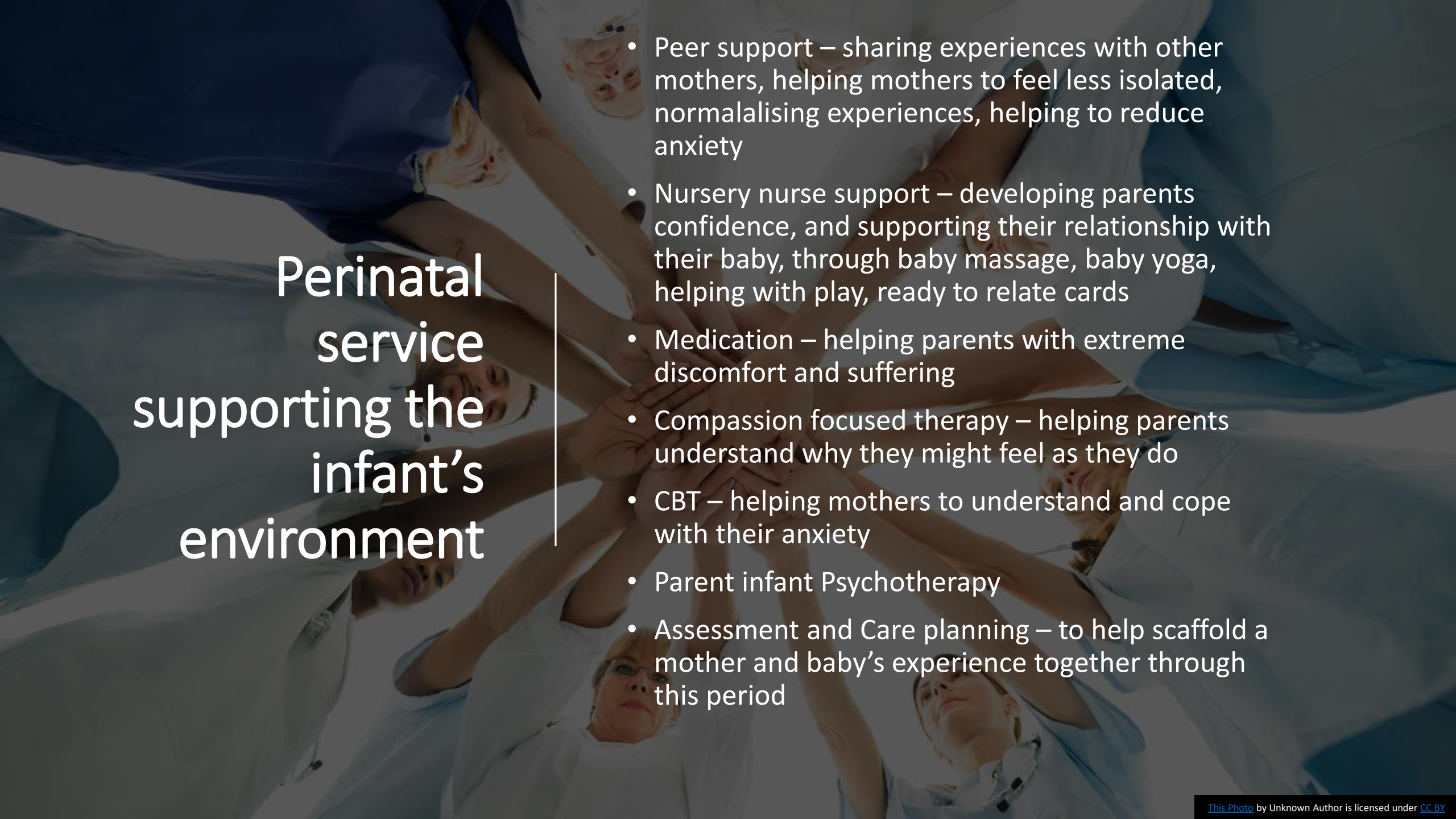
What is this like for the infant?

- Difficult for them to make sense of the feelings that they have – this can feel scary, and induce anxiety
- If they don't have an experience of being soothed and supported with emotional regulation, how can they then go onto be able to self regulate, or soothe themselves?
- If feelings cannot be received by the parents/adults around them, they learn to keep their feelings to themselves, with accompanying feelings of isolation, shame, and difficulties in communicating their experience
- If there is no curiosity in feelings, then it is difficult to be able to reflect on one's own experience, and to understand one's own needs

A blurred background image showing a person's hands holding a baby. The baby is wearing a green cardigan and is looking towards the camera. The overall scene is dimly lit and out of focus, serving as a backdrop for the text.

Treatment provided: Parent infant psychoanalytic psychotherapy

- 23 year old mother – struggles in adolescence and separation from own mother/parents
- Felt unable to soothe herself/regulate own emotions
- Becoming a parent to a ‘second’ baby reminded her of own difficult sibling relationship
- Experience of unhelpful adult relationships
- Struggling with relationship with her baby – unable to claim her baby



Perinatal service supporting the infant's environment

- Peer support – sharing experiences with other mothers, helping mothers to feel less isolated, normalising experiences, helping to reduce anxiety
- Nursery nurse support – developing parents confidence, and supporting their relationship with their baby, through baby massage, baby yoga, helping with play, ready to relate cards
- Medication – helping parents with extreme discomfort and suffering
- Compassion focused therapy – helping parents understand why they might feel as they do
- CBT – helping mothers to understand and cope with their anxiety
- Parent infant Psychotherapy
- Assessment and Care planning – to help scaffold a mother and baby's experience together through this period



Growing an emotional brain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVN0YzBVAkQ>



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1001 critical days

Why does infant mental health matter



20:20 Vision
Seeing the world through babies' eyes
#IMHAW2020

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<https://1001days.org.uk/resources>

The argument for investment

Investing in the emotional wellbeing of our babies is a wonderful way to invest in the future.

Giving children the best start in life.

Improving the mental and physical health of the next generation.

Reducing risky and antisocial behaviour and the costs they bring.

Building a skilled workforce to support a thriving economy.

Creating a compassionate society.



The **first 1001 days**, from conception to age two, is a period of rapid growth. During this time **babies' growing brains** are **shaped by their experiences**, particularly the **interactions** they have with their parents and other caregivers. What happens during this time lays the **foundations for future development**.



Early relationships between babies and their parents are incredibly important for building healthy brains.

I need a **secure relationship** with at least one sensitive, nurturing caregiver who can respond to my needs.



Supporting my parents and other important people in my life to develop this relationship will give me the best start in life.

Stress factors such as domestic abuse and relationship conflict, mental illness, substance misuse, unresolved trauma and poverty can make it harder for my parents to provide me with the care I need. The more adversities that my family experiences, the harder it can be to meet my needs.



Healthy social and emotional development during the first 1001 days:



- Lays the foundations for lifelong mental and physical health.
- Means I feel safe and secure, ready to play, explore and learn.
- Leaves me ready to enjoy and achieve at school, and progress in the workforce.
- Enables me to understand and manage my emotions and behaviours; which means that I can make a positive contribution to my community.
- Gives me skills to form trusting relationships and to be a nurturing parent myself; sowing the seeds for the next generation.



**Tackling adversity + supporting early relationships
healthier brains + better futures**

References and further information can be found on <https://1001days.org.uk/resources>





Baby Brain Facts

Babies:

- hear at around 24 weeks of pregnancy,
- recognise familiar voice at birth, and
- prefer faces to other shapes.

We are hardwired for relationships!



In the first years of life, more than 1 million new connections are formed every second in a baby's growing brain.

The way babies' brains develop is shaped by their interactions with others.

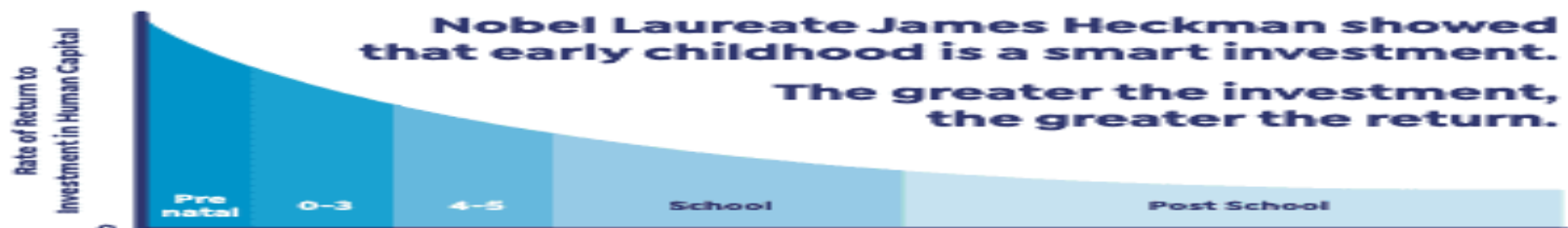


A range of research shows that **the way parents interact** with their babies predicts children's later development.



Family income and education is strongly related to children's development. Babies in higher income families are more likely to have frequent caregiver-child conversations. By age 3, babies with university educated parents have been found to have vocabularies 2-3 times larger than those whose parents had not completed school.

Children's development in the early years sets them on a positive trajectory, although what happens next also matters. Children's development at just 22 months has been shown to predict their qualifications at 26 years.



8,300 babies under one in England currently live in households where domestic violence, alcohol or drug dependency and severe mental illness are ALL present.

Rigorous long term studies found a range of returns between £4 and £9 for every pound invested in early intervention for low income families.



When parents experience problems in the first 1001 days it can have long term impacts on their children.

One study showed that children whose mothers were stressed in pregnancy were twice as likely to have mental health problems as teenagers.



Adults who reported four or more adverse childhood experiences had 4- to 12-fold increase in **alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempts** compared to those who experienced none.



Tackling adversity + supporting early relationships healthier brains + better futures

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