



Improving the mental health of children, young people and their families since 1949

## ACP Response to the PIPUK Consultation:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/KZMH8FM>

1. What language do you normally use when you talk about infant mental health? (e.g. parent-infant relationships, attachment, babies' brain development, emotional wellbeing, social and emotional development...)

*All these terms are relevant and useful depending on the context and what is being communicated. We would always emphasise above all the importance of relationships within which attachment, brain development, emotional wellbeing, social and emotional development takes place.*

2. How would you describe infant mental health in a sentence?

*The first few months and years of life are a sensitive and critical period when children develop attachments and learn about emotions and social interactions in their family which lay the foundations for future social, emotional and cognitive development.*

3. What factors does research show us have the greatest impact on infant mental health? (please consider both risk and protective factors)

*The evidence for the crucial importance of the period from conception to age 2 is well known and has been described in many publications and reports. Children who do not have secure relationships early in life are at greater risk of significant mental health problems, educational difficulties or conduct disorders. Research shows that poor attachment patterns in the first years result in poor outcomes later in life. Poor attachment results from factors such as poor mental health in the parents, parental discord, intergenerational trauma, and external factors such as poverty, poor housing etc. Protective factors include good mental health in at least one parent, a stable parental relationship, supportive resources in the extended family and/or friendships and wider community, and ability to access support services when needed.*

4. Infant mental health is associated with improved social, emotional and cognitive development, and better outcomes for children across the life-course. What do you believe are the key reasons why national and local decision makers should care about infant mental health?

*The importance of the first 1001 critical days, and the impact of adverse experiences during that period, have been increasingly recognised both by national policy makers and local service commissioners and providers. There is still much work to be done and still significant harm occurring during these critical days that has far reaching and serious outcomes for individual children, their families and for us as a society. During the perinatal period and the early years of a child's life brief therapeutic interventions are often highly effective and can reduce the likelihood of problems becoming chronic, and far more difficult and expensive to address. They can also be very cost-effective as a brief intervention can be sufficient and result in a better course of development for the infant over the following years.*