Early support and intervention may prevent damaging patterns being established within families. Later remedial action may be more difficult, more expensive and less effective.

At the Child Psychotherapy Trust we have been thinking about how to add our voice to those promoting the importance of parent/infant relations and linking into the development of services and support for children and families and early intervention. With this in mind we have produced a review of the literature on early intervention and attachment in a publication Promoting Infant Mental Health to stimulate thinking and debate about potential for the establishment of a local parent/infant support service for young families and others caring for babies and infant. Such an integrated infant mental health service could focus on the child’s needs and on promoting the quality of the relationship between parents or caregivers and baby and encourage parents to have confidence in their own resources. It could support work in the community with families and young children and enable early intervention where difficulties for infants are developing.

Services provided by general practitioners and health visitors could provide the focus for a dedicated infant mental health service, working with child and adolescent mental health teams, community paediatricians, social services, early education, day care and the voluntary sector. To develop an integrated service, all those working with infants and their families will need training to increase their understanding and expertise in meeting the developmental and emotional needs of young children, which are, of course inextricably linked.

We hope to continue working with the Association for Infant Mental Health and other organisations to promote a wider understanding of the early life of infants and their emotional development.

Louise Pankhurst, Director