
Although this book is not a music therapy text and does not refer to music therapy, it is an important and informative read for all music therapists working with parents and young children. The book is relevant to all health professionals in this field and is no doubt written with social and welfare workers, maternal and child health professionals in mind. The sole reference to music is a quote in the introductory pages “…the infant hero can suffer shame if submitted to a dull gaze and tuneless voice of indifference even if kept warm and well fed” (Trevarthen, C. 2001.p119).

There are four parts to the book.

1. The clinical framework - attachment, the principles of assessment and assessment of risk;
2. The early infant – parent relationship including pregnancy, labour and birth, sleeping, and feeding;
3. The toddler period, including behavioural and emotional difficulties, consequences of trauma and gender development and identity;
4. Parents and Society including perinatal mental illness, parents abused as children, parents with personality disorders, parents and substance abuse, adolescent parents and families with multiple adversity.

The chapters have been written by the various authors and apart from the chapter on feeding, it is written in a cohesive style. Each chapter is clearly structured which makes for easy reading and later access of the relevant sections. Each begins with a summary of the key issues in point form, followed by descriptions of the area and definitions of the issues and the chapters include theoretical and knowledge base information. For instance, in Consequences of trauma, trauma is defined and its effect on the child discussed in relation to attachment and brain development, structure and function and the effect on social and emotional development with the later mental health implications. This is followed by assessment, formulation and intervention principles. Case vignettes elucidate the complexity of the cases and strategies employed in interventions. The potential role music therapy can be extrapolated here, validating current music therapy programs in early childhood intervention. “Interventions in the infant period have the core aim of promoting infant development and motivating infant potential” and “…a comprehensive program for infant mental health involves preventative interventions and targeted services for high-risk infants and parents.”
(Chapter 1, p.21). Additionally the consideration of the biopsychosocial model resonates with the holistic approach of music therapy.

This text is authoritative and thorough in relation to childhood development and disruptions to development. The chapter on attachment is particularly informative and is cross-referenced throughout the book. This chapter describes the various types of attachment behaviours: secure, insecure/avoidant, insecure/ambivalent and disorganised. The last of these is the only one linked to a disorder. This chapter is so valuable and clearly written and seems to underpin the rest of the work. The section on assessment principles also provides food for thought. This highlighted how thorough assessment covers so many areas that often little opportunity is left for the intervention itself. The concept of formulation is informative. That is, the process of determining why this family is seeking help at this time and how this informs the intervention.

For music therapists working with children at risk and their families and carers this book will be well thumbed. The case for music therapy as an appropriate milieu for therapy for children with maladaptive behaviours and to assist the development of healthy parent-child relationships may not be stated but comes to mind frequently. As a general resource on this area Clinical Skills in Infant Mental Health is an excellent reference, written in an accessible and professional style.


Reviewer: Helen Efron, RMT, Director, JAM Music therapy, Private Practice, Melbourne, Victoria