
UAIMH NEWSLETTER

Utah Association for Infant Mental Health

Issue 10 – October 2008



Special Topic: Weight Issues in Young Children

President's Corner

It has been an honor and a privilege for me to be associated with the Utah Association for Infant Mental Health (UAIMH) and serve as President this past year. I have had the opportunity to learn much and associate with some of the greatest people in the state of Utah. People who are passionate about infants and young children are the heart and soul of our communities and UAIMH is truly the heart and soul of many of us.

We have had amazing opportunities to collaborate with other organizations and agencies in the state this year to sponsor Dr. Joy Osofsky and promote social/emotional wellness in young children and their families. We have participated in workshops focusing on autism and other pertinent issues affecting young children today.

My daughter recently had her first baby and I was able to spend some time with them. It is a gift to hold a new baby in your arms, feel the warmth, gaze into large trusting eyes, snuggle, and kiss soft skin. It is a reminder to me of the attachment, bonding, positive nurturing, and love that is so much a part of what infant mental health is about. It is also a reminder of the numerous diaper changes, fussy times, and irregular schedules, all of which affect parents in a different ways. I will be thankful to UAIMH for promoting positive, nurturing, and best practices for young children and their families. There are many different places for a parent or professional to expand their knowledge and expertise. It is nice to know that UAIMH is a multi-disciplinary organization reaching out to professionals and families to ensure that children are emotionally healthy and nurtured to develop

their full potential.

I have a favorite saying: “Our children are a living message that we send to a time we cannot see.” This thought truly reflects the mission and purpose of UAIMH. I am so happy to turn the leadership of this organization to Dr. Vonda Jump from Utah State University. She has a wealth of knowledge and resources to share from her personal life and her remarkable professional accomplishments. She will lead us to greater involvement and levels of nurturing within our communities, the state of Utah, our nation and the world.

Aziele Jensen, M. Ed.
Past President of UAIMH

I am honored to have the opportunity to work with a great group of professionals in promoting the mental health of parents and their young children in Utah. If it weren't for UAIMH, I wouldn't necessarily have the privilege of being affiliated with many of them. That is one of the perks of being involved in UAIMH—we all get so busy in our professional lives that we sometimes don't “travel outside our little circles.” But when we come to UAIMH conferences, workshops, and meetings, we get to talk to others with similar goals but different world views, and I believe this meeting of the minds helps to enrich all of us. I for one am thankful for such opportunities. As we all know, relationships are at the core of all we do.

I think we have an exciting year ahead of us. People in other fields are beginning to realize the importance of mental health for our overall well-being, and ZERO TO THREE has been instrumental in helping parents, professionals,

and ordinary people on the street understand that young babies and children have feelings and reactions to the actions and behaviors of others, and that they develop most optimally when the relationships they form early in life with their caregivers are ones that support and encourage their individual needs. As the parent of a teenager who is anxious to spread her wings, I take comfort in the knowledge that she has a great foundation that began in [my] pregnancy to prepare her for her launch in another year. While I feel that she has seemed wobbly at times during her adolescent years, I know that the foundation built in those first years has kept the building from actually falling, and will carry her as she takes flight.

To take the analogy further, UAIMH is still in its infancy, and we continue to build a strong foundation for its later development. I hope that you will join us in our work by attending conferences, being part of a committee, and getting the word out that what happens to babies and young children is important. We need to do all we can to promote their optimal development. After all, babies can't wait. And because of that, neither can we.

Vonda Jump Norman, PhD
President of UAIMH

News from UAIMH

Annual Board Meeting

We had an exciting and productive Spring UAIMH Board meeting in the Children with Special Health Care Needs conference room, with a number of UAIMH members also in attendance. After the board meeting, we had a small workshop on autism. Thanks to Catherine Johnson for sharing her expertise and experiences in working with young children with autism in our state.

At our board meeting, we discussed the pros and cons of implementing an infant mental health certificate program in Utah. We'd love to hear

from members about your thoughts on this issue. Is it worth it to obtain credentials in infant mental health? Is the system working for you now? How can we ensure that children's mental health needs do not fall between the cracks?

As you all know, being part of the Board of UAIMH is a volunteer position. We also have committees that are always in need of volunteers, so if you have a certain interest or talent you'd like to further to benefit young children, drop us a line!

Vonda Jump Norman, PhD

Annual Board Change

At our Annual Board Meeting in April, Vonda Jump Norman was instated as the new President of UAIMH. Aziele Jenson, M.Ed., is now Past-President, and Judy Ahrano, MD, is President-Elect. Kate Gardiner is our Secretary, and the Treasurer position is currently open.

Also, two of our Board members decided it was time to move on and make room for others. Adrienne Akers was one of the original founders of UAIMH, and we definitely appreciate her leadership, expertise, guidance, and wisdom throughout our infancy years. Catherine Johnson also left the Board, and besides her insightful comments and experience, we want to say thanks to her for her prudent fiscal handling of UAIMH affairs. We wish to thank both of them for everything they have put into UAIMH!

We are also excited about our new Board members Nellie Arrieta and Jan Welsh.

Nellie Arrieta is from Puerto Rico, where she studied psychology and worked with at-risk youth and their families. She completed a Master of Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, and provided pastoral care to Latinos in the Los Angeles area. She worked in Guatemala in 1987, teaching in a theological seminary, and later that year moved to Salt Lake City. She graduated from the University of Utah with an MSW, and since 1987, has worked in community-based mental health centers. She had the privilege to work with the Safestart Team in San Francisco and trained in Child-Parent Psychotherapy, providing mental health services

to very young children and families who were affected by violence. She returned to Utah in 2005, and currently works at South Valley Mental Health as a clinician and supervisor. She also has a small private practice and provides consultation on cultural competency to mental health providers. She is very pleased to be able to contribute and participate with UAIMH.

Jan Welsh is an Infant/Toddler Specialist working with the Baby Steps Program through the Office of Child Care. She is currently employed at the Family Connection Center in Clearfield, where she has worked for six years. She has a degree in Social Work from Lewis-Clark State College and is a certified Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers (PITC) trainer. She has worked with community-based organizations such as the Girl Scouts of the USA and the American Red Cross, and has been the owner and operator of her own business. Jan has been married for 17 years and has a four-year-old son named Tyler. She enjoys training and is passionate about making care for infants and toddlers better.

Training Offered by UAIMH

UAIMH Fall Workshop 2007

The Utah Association of Infant Mental Health collaborated with the Children's Behavioral Health Institute in partnership with a grant from the Health Services Administration and the Utah Maternal and Child Health Bureau through the State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems, Utah Department of Health, Division of Community and Family Health Services, Utah's State Early Childhood Comprehensive System Grant, to offer a special pre-conference event at the 11th Annual Conference on Critical Issues Facing Children and Adolescents 2007. The pre-conference event was held November 7 and titled "Critical Issues in Infant and Toddler Mental Health." Dr. Joy Osofsky, PhD, a psychologist, psychoanalyst, and Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, was the presenter. Dr. Osofsky is the editor of several publications including *Children in a Violent Society, the*

Infant Mental Health Journal and Young Children, and Trauma: Intervention and Treatment. She is also a past president of ZERO TO THREE and the World Association of Infant Mental Health.

Workshop objectives included the following:

- Be able to describe the importance of infant mental health and maternal interventions that can be taught to clients in order to improve their infant's mental health.
- Be able to assess infant mental health directly and through the evaluation of the infant-parent relationships.
- Be able to apply child-parent psychotherapy techniques.

We were thrilled that she was able to come and present to approximately 90 participants from a variety of professional fields including parents. Dr. Osofsky presented on the importance of understanding early childhood healthy mental development including the importance of early screening and providing clinical tools for working with infants, toddlers, and their families. It was an extremely interesting and useful presentation for everyone. Several books were also available for purchase at the event.

This collaboration provided a wonderful opportunity for UAIMH to participate in sponsoring a nationally recognized expert in infant mental health to share expertise with professionals in Utah.

Aziele Jensen

Special Topic: Weight Issues in Young Children

To whet your appetite (no pun intended) for the October 17 workshop, "The Kaleidoscope of Child/Adolescent Weight Problems and Infant/Child Mental Health," we are dedicating space in the newsletter to the issue of weight. Weight in young children is difficult to assess, as they grow so quickly and children's body fat

changes with age and is affected by gender.

However, the percentage of young children who are categorized as overweight has increased dramatically in the past 30 years. From 1976-1980 to 2003-2004, the prevalence of children aged 2-5 who were overweight increased from 5% to 13.9% (Centers for Disease Control website, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/childhood/prevalence.htm>, accessed August 6, 2008).

Why is this a big deal? In one study, 80% of children who were overweight between the ages of 10 and 15 were obese at age 25 (<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/childhood/index.htm>). In addition, overweight children are more likely to have health problems during their youth and when they are adults (<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/childhood/index.htm>). And the mental health costs of being overweight are significant, although we may not know the true extent of the emotional toll of being overweight any time soon, if ever.

Eating as a form of developing self-regulation in young children

“Supportive, nurturing relationships between babies and their primary caregivers are necessary for the development of self-regulation...Over time, the early regulatory capacity for physical or neurobehavioral organization evolves into a more generalized ability to control emotions and behavior.” (Talmi, Jump, & Goldman-Fraser, p. 9, 2005). What does self-regulation have to do with a child’s eating behaviors?

The development of self-regulation is seen across a variety of spheres, including behavior, attention, toileting practices, delayed gratification, and, yes, eating. Thus, it seems as if there is indeed a link, and that parents can be important facilitators of emerging self-regulation in young children’s eating behaviors.

Surprisingly enough, restricting children from eating certain foods does not seem to be effective in helping children’s ability to make decisions

about what to eat when they are on their own. Studies have found that young children whose mothers were controlling in their attitudes toward food were more likely to overeat and/or drink when offered foods when they were not hungry in a laboratory setting, indicating that these children may have lost their internal ability to regulate how much they ate (Fisher & Birch, 1999; Johnson & Birch, 1994). However, when children are supported in their developing ability to make decisions about food, they are able to listen to their internal cues about hunger and eat according to their hunger status (Johnson, 2000).

This research is a far cry from the “Clean your plate, no dessert unless you eat your food, if you stop whining, I’ll give you a cookie, and if you behave while you are in the store, I’ll buy you a candy bar” philosophies, and indeed, can be quite stressful for parents who worry whether their children are eating enough or who want to reward their children with treats. But according to the research, “the parent’s role is to offer a variety of healthful foods, oversee the planning and assembly of meals, and set the schedule for meals and snacks. The child’s responsibility is to decide what, how much, and even whether to eat.” (Evers, 1997, p. S116).

In fact, parents who bribe a child to eat an undesired food for the reward of a treat decrease the likelihood that children will accept that food in the future (Birch, Marlin, & Rotter, 1984). So what is a parent to do? How do we help parents rethink their roles? And how do we do that when culture is intertwined with food so that it is difficult to separate the two? How can we best promote healthy eating and the development of self-regulation in our children?

Young children are facing an uphill battle, as many societal forces are against them. If looked at simplistically, Americans drive everywhere and eat fast food quite often. In addition, video games have almost become a fabric of society, and watching TV is part of the American way of life. What can we do to help young children?

- Model healthy eating behaviors, which may mean changing your own eating habits.

- Give children healthy snack options instead of those loaded with fat, sugar, and calories.
- Exercise as a family and make exercise fun for children.
- Turn off the TV and spend time playing, walking or hiking together.
- If videogames are important to you and your family, invest in a Wii so that children are required to be more active while playing.
- When possible, ride bikes or walk to the store and to other destinations.
- Ask children to tell you when their bellies are full and listen to what your children have to say. Respect their developing ability to regulate food intake.

In conclusion, the issue of obesity in young children is a complicated issue, with many factors affecting a child's weight issues, including genetics, parent-child relationship dynamics, activity levels, and other factors. What we hope to accomplish with young children is to assist them in developing to their optimal potential in all spheres of development. When young children are overweight, their development may be compromised in a number of ways, as they have to work harder physically, may have lower self-esteem as a result of being teased, may have health issues, and may be discriminated against (Centers for Disease Control website, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/healthyweight/children/index.htm>, accessed August 6, 2008). If parents, professionals, and their children work together, children can be allowed to just be kids, without the burden of extra weight.

Birch, L. L., Marlin, D. W., & Rotter, J. (1984). Eating as the "means" activity in a contingency: Effects on young children's food preference. *Child Development* 55 (2), 431-439.

CDC website, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/healthyweight/children/index.htm>, accessed August 6, 2008.

Evers, C. (1997). Empower children to develop healthful eating habits. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 97 (10) Supplement 1, S116.

Fisher J. O., & Burch, L. L. (1999). Restricting access to foods and children's eating. *Appetite* 32, 405-419.

Johnson, S. L. (2000). Improving preschoolers' self-regulation of energy intake. *Pediatrics* 106 (6), 1429-1435.

Johnson, S. L., & Birch, L. L. (1994). Parents' and children's adiposity and eating style. *Pediatrics* 94 (5), 653-661.

Talmi, A., Jump, V., & Goldman-Fraser, J. (2005). All alone: Promoting regulation during separations from intimate caregivers. *ZERO TO THREE* 25 (6), 8-13.

Vonda Jump Norman, PhD

Journal Review

"Preventing Childhood Obesity", *ZERO TO THREE*, September 2007, Volume 28 No.1
Journal of ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

This timely edition is introduced with the question-and-answer, "Ask the Expert" format, supporting parents and caregivers in establishing "healthy feeding relationships" with infants and toddlers, by Kathryn E. Barnard, RN, PhD, ZERO TO THREE Board member and internationally known researcher in the field of infant mental health and infant-parent interactions.

The monograph provides a comprehensive review, supported by research evidence, of the major issues in preventing childhood obesity, from both individual and population-based perspectives. Each article (capitalized and in quotes in this review) provides a wealth of additional resources and full research reference documentation.

Individual articles review recommendations

for “Prevention” of overweight by supporting the development of healthy habits from early life, modeling healthy eating habits from birth, and teaching appropriate nutrition. These methods are applied in conjunction with promoting healthy physical activity for families, and “Embedding Physical Activity and Nutrition in Early Care and Education Programs.”

The relationship of “Poverty and Obesity” is explored, with its resultant emotional, physical, and cognitive effects, secondary to issues of ‘food insecurity.’ Currently available resources for families experiencing these problems are presented.

The question “Is TV to Blame for the Obesity Crisis?” is examined by discussing the tension between the importance of early education and the simultaneous need for age appropriate physical activity, to support physical development and adequate energy/caloric expenditure. Suggestions are offered for “Promoting Outdoor Play,” which addresses both physical needs and educational concerns, as a healthy accompaniment to combat more sedentary learning.

The relationship of “Eating and Emotions” helps to understand the development of regulation of eating in concert with the development of emotion regulation and the important role of parents in this process. Specific recommendations for parents for teaching and modeling emotional self-calming from infancy are discussed as an alternative to the learned use of food for emotion regulation. An illustrative and delightfully successful case study of intervention is presented.

A research-to-practice discussion of “Does Breast-Feeding Reduce the Risk of Pediatric Overweight?” presents compelling evidence that breast-feeding is associated with reduced risk for overweight.

At the end of the monograph, there is a review and discussion of how the current economic crisis is impacting families who have historically been expected to provide infancy and early childhood nurturance, care, and education either in the home, or in private individually-funded early childhood education programs.

The economic crisis imposes increasing problems for parents and providers, with resulting inadequate “Caregiver and Teacher Compensation.” Inadequate compensation impacts the quality of early education outside of the home and begs the question of whether we should begin thinking about and advocating for greater public funding of comprehensive early childhood education in this country.

Reviewed by Judith Abrano Kittel, MD/Developmental Behavioral Pediatrician

Mark Your Calendars!

- **UAIMH Annual Training: The Kaleidoscope of Child/Adolescent Weight Problems and Infant/Child Mental Health.** Friday, October 17, 2008, 8 AM-1 PM. Williams Building, 295 Chipeta Way, Research Park, Salt Lake City.

UAIMH Activities

- **Don't forget to visit the UAIMH web page!** You can find us at www.uaimh.org.
- Please email any upcoming events that you would like to post to janetwade@utah.gov.
- To become a UAIMH member, log on to www.uaimh.org or contact Janet Wade at janetwade@utah.gov
- Please send ideas and submissions for the next Newsletter to Vonda@eri.usu.edu or ilse.dekoeijer@psych.utah.edu

UAIMH Newsletter by Vonda Jump, Ilse DeKoeijer-Laros, Judy Ahrano, and Janet Wade