

## Webinar 26

# Building parents' understanding of play to nurture infant and toddler mental health

7:15 pm to 8:30 pm AEST  
Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022

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**Emerging  
Minds.**

**National Workforce  
Centre for Child  
Mental Health**



Emerging Minds and MHPN wish to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Australia upon which our webinar presenters and participants are located.

We wish to pay respect to the Elders past, present and future for the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Indigenous Australia.

# Welcome to series four

This is the sixth and final webinar in the fourth series on infant and child mental health, presented by Emerging Minds and the Mental Health Professionals' Network.

## Webinar in Series 5 will be:

- Practice strategies for working with children and disability
- Paediatric Anxiety
- Working with children with higher weight
- Supporting children who have disclosed trauma
- First nations children – family violence
- Bullying

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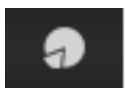
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# Learning outcomes

At the webinar's completion, participants will be able to:

- Explore the significance of play for infant and toddler mental health.
- Outline how play interventions can be applied across the infant mental health spectrum.
- Discuss parent and child vulnerabilities that impact on the child's experience of play.
- Identify multidisciplinary perspectives for supporting parents to play with their children to nurture secure relationships, build infant and toddlers communication skills, and promote social and emotional development.

# Tonight's panel



**Laura**  
Child and family partner,  
NSW



**Dr Rickie Elliot**  
Clinical Psychologist,  
NSW



**Lauren Haskins**  
Speech Pathologist, NSW



**Facilitator:**  
**Vicki Mansfield**  
Emerging Minds, SA

**“Parenting is not a function of gender; it’s a function of willingness and thought and care.”**

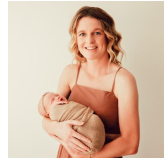
Tomlins, J. (ND). Rainbow Families Early Years Support Guide.



# Child and family partner's perspective

## The benefits of play

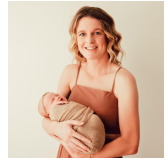
- Play allows us to build relationships with our children.
- Play allows us to support our children's learning naturally.
- Exploration of play for children's brain development.



Laura



# Child and family partner's perspective



Laura

## Simplifying the stigma around “play”

- Simplicity of play.
- What we think/ feel we need to have to play vs basic play tools.



# Child and family partner's perspective

## Play looks different every day



Laura



- No two days are the same with our children and that is OK!
- Taking the pressure off ourselves as parents to always have a set routine and everything organised.
- Remaining calm and accepting each day as it is.

# Child and family partner's perspective

## Seeing our partners through a different lens

- The changes in our relationship as a family watching each other explore play with our newborn.
- Learning, supporting and guiding each other.



Laura



# Child and family partner's perspective



Laura

## Case study reflections:

### Possible parent thoughts/ feelings:

- There is something “wrong” with my child.
- The feeling of guilt/ anxiety that we as parents have “done something wrong”/ that we are being “judged” on our parenting.

“Embrace the unique way your child is blooming- even if it’s not in the garden you imagined”

- JENN SOEHNLIN

# Clinical Psychologist's perspective



Dr Rickie Elliot

## The significance of play for infant and toddler mental health

- Play is critical in infant mental health and all aspects of development – cognitive, social, emotional, physical.
- Play is critical in the foundation of attachment, emotion regulation and building trust, confidence and self-worth.
- Play begins almost immediately in a baby's life.
- Play is the building block for nurturing relationships and one of the best preventative early interventions to protect mental health at our fingertips.



# Clinical Psychologist's perspective



Dr Rickie Elliot

## Parent vulnerabilities that can impact a child's experience of play

- Parent developmental trauma & intergenerational transmission of attachment insecurity.
- Parent experience of play and connection as an infant/child.
- Parental mental health difficulties – high stress, low emotional availability & sensitivity and low parental reflective functioning.
- Building parents confidence – strengths-based approach always.
- Therapist relationship with parent primary intervention.



# Clinical Psychologist's perspective



Dr Rickie Elliot

## Applying play interventions across the infant mental health spectrum

- Referring to dyadic interventions that nurture the primary attachment relationship, not individual play therapy between child and therapist. The goal is supporting and nurturing attachments by building parenting confidence, emotional sensitivity, parent reflective functioning, relational joy and connection. The focus is quality not quantity.
- Wait Watch Wonder.
- Bringing Up Great Kids.
- Circle of Security Principles.
- Theraplay.
- Community-based play interventions – play group; swimming; dads playgroups.



# Clinical Psychologist's perspective

## Child vulnerabilities that can impact a child's experience of play

- Prematurity.
- Developmental difficulties that impact relationships.
- Physical health.



Dr Rickie Elliot

# Speech Pathologist's perspective



Lauren Haskins

## Early communication

- There are communication milestones that children are expected to achieve at certain ages (as provided by the GP).
- A referral to a speech pathologist may be helpful if:
  - A child is slow to reach these milestones.
  - There is a regression of skills.
  - There is significant parent/caregiver concerns.
- There are ways to help parents to support their child's communication development (even when they aren't concerned with skills for age).
  - The most powerful way for parents to support their child's communication development is:
    - In naturalistic settings (family's everyday, real life activities).
    - With a child-centred approach.
    - Builds on activities and routines that the child enjoys.
    - Parents/carers view the world through their child's eyes.



# Speech Pathologist's perspective

## The Power of Play

### Play and communication develop hand in hand



Lauren Haskins

- Play is one of the most important ways a child learns about the world.
- Play and communication develop hand in hand.
- Play offers opportunities for parents and children to connect and take turns.
- Playing together becomes even more important for children who have language difficulties because they need more time and support from their main caregiver to learn about the world as they play.
- Like all of us, children communicate about what they know.  
The more he experiences during play, the more he has to talk about!





# Speech Pathologist's perspective



Lauren Haskins

## Play routines

- Specific steps.
- Same order.
- Repeated many times.
- Specific roles.

Early play games and routines help children acquire language because they have limited and familiar language forms, predictable task structure, allow for reversible roles and are enjoyable, which encourages persistence.

(Carpenter & Tomasello, 2005; Ratner & Bruner, 1978)

# Speech Pathologist's perspective



Lauren Haskins

## Ways for families to support communication during everyday activities

- Focused Stimulation.
  - Respond to children's interests and initiations.
  - Repeating key/target words during interactions in a natural and meaningful way.
  - The child is not expected to repeat or respond.
- Use natural gestures during play and everyday activities.
- Be consistent with the use of the same gestures, sounds and words.
- Get face to face.
- Talk about what you are doing and while you play.
  - About what you are doing.
  - About what they are doing.
  - Don't ask too many questions.
  - Make questions open ended.
  - Balance comments and questions.



# Q&A Session



**Laura**  
Child and family partner,  
NSW



**Dr Rickie Elliot**  
Clinical Psychologist,  
NSW



**Lauren Haskins**  
Speech Pathologist, NSW



**Facilitator:**  
**Vicki Mansfield**  
Emerging Minds, SA

*Keeping the infant and toddler in mind* is a free two-hour online course for practitioners working with infants, toddlers and families. It introduces a relationship-based framework that promotes the mental health of children aged 0-5 years.



**For more information, please visit:**

<https://learning.emergingminds.com.au/course/keeping-the-infant-and-toddler-in-mind>

# Thank you for participating



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- Statements of Attendance for this webinar will be issued within four to six weeks.
- Each participant will be sent a link to the recording of this webinar and associated online resources within four to six weeks.



# Resources and further reading

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## Upcoming webinars in 2022:

- Practice strategies for working with children and disability
- Paediatric Anxiety
- Working with children with higher weight

## Upcoming MHPN webinars:

- Collaborative care for people living with Tics and Tourette syndrome (6<sup>th</sup> July 2022)

This webinar was co-produced by MHPN and Emerging Minds for the Emerging Minds: National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (NWCCMH) project.

The NWCCMH is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program.

MHPN supports over 350 networks across the country where mental health practitioners meet either in person or online to discuss issues of local importance.

Visit [www.mhpn.org.au](http://www.mhpn.org.au) to join your local network.

Interested in starting a new network? Email: [networks@mhpn.org.au](mailto:networks@mhpn.org.au) and we will step you through the process, including explaining how we can provide advice, administration and other support.



# Thank You

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