



# Long-term Benefits of Infant Mental Health Treatments

## References

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Several types of treatments have been used to help mother-child dyads. Overall, these treatments have addressed disturbed mother-child relationships, have increased parenting skills, and have decreased problematic infant behavior. The best researched of these treatments are brief psychodynamic therapy, interaction guidance, parent-child interaction therapy and a program known as “Watch, Wait, and Wonder.” All studies included here used an experimental design that included control and/or treatment comparison groups.

While many studies report on the benefits of treatment, most often these effects are measured when treatment ends. Relatively few studies have done long-term follow-up to determine if benefits persist after treatment ends. Among these, range of time for follow-up assessments has been from 6 months in some studies to as long as 10 years in others. Most often, however, the follow-up period has ranged from 6 months to 3 years.

As a whole, these interventions have improved children’s outcomes, mothers’ parenting patterns, and mother-child interactions and relationships.

In children, long-term benefits of treatment have included both reduced problems and enhanced positive social-behavioral development. Infants’ feeding and sleeping problems have been reduced, as well as children’s disruptive, aggressive, and anxious behavior. In the one study that followed participating children into young adulthood, internalizing psychopathology (i.e., problems with anxiety and/or depression) was also reduced. Positive social-behavioral outcomes have included greater cooperativeness, independence, calmness, happiness, and seeking contact with other children.

In mothers, treatments have also reduced some problematic behaviors and enhanced positive parenting patterns. Mothers who had received treatment showed lower levels of controlling behavior and intrusiveness in play. They also reported lower levels of depression and of parenting stress. Overall, these mothers also showed increased acceptance of their child and more accessibility, sensitivity, and responsiveness. They reported increased feelings of competence and greater happiness.

In measures of the mother-child relationships, dyads that had received treatment showed greater reciprocity in play. Higher rates of secure attachment were also associated with earlier parent-infant intervention.