

Parent Engagement: Listen, Wonder and Explore

~ Submitted by Margaret C. Holmberg, PhD, IMH-E®
President, Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health

Infant Mental Health principles and practices help providers to engage parents by **listening**, **wondering**, and **exploring** with parents. So often we believe we engage parents when we have something to tell them, something to teach them, or ways for them to change to be better parents. An infant mental health trained provider (who might be a home visitor, child care provider, or clinician) will **listen** to discover what parents are feeling and experiencing with their babies and young children. They will be sure they are hearing what parents are sharing by repeating back what they have heard (Did I hear you say....or so what I heard you say was....). They will **wonder** with parents about what the babies and young children's behaviors might mean (all behavior has meaning). They will **explore** with parents what they have tried, what has not worked for them, and what the next steps might be. With infant mental health knowledge and skills one will not depend on handouts from a curriculum to solve problems. The infant mental health trained professional will **listen**, **wonder**, and **explore** with parents and thus engage with them in making "good enough" decisions for their babies and young children.

[Watch Wait and Wonder](#); an approach to working with families and their babies.

Proulx, G.A. "Learning to See Her Son: A baby and his mother." In Case Studies in Infant Mental Health, Eds. Shirilla, J.J. Shirilla and Weatherston, D. J. Zero to Three, 2002.