

# Psychological (PMM) Maltreatment (PMM)

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**UNDERSTANDING THE ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND  
SEARCHING FOR EMPIRICALLY SUPPORTED PRACTICES**

**Family Violence & Larger Systems CFT-5150  
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**Presented By  
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# Redefining Psychological Maltreatment

Affective clinical intervention starts with understanding psychological maltreatment (PM) also referred to as emotional abuse and neglect.



**In 1983, at the International Conference on Psychological Abuse of Children and Youth the following definition was presented:**

“Psychological maltreatment of children and youth consists of **acts of omission and commission** which are **judged by community standards and professional expertise** to be psychologically damaging. Such acts are **committed by individuals**, singly or collectively, who by their characteristics (e.g. age, status, knowledge, organizational form) are **in a position of differential power** that renders a child vulnerable. Such acts **damage immediately or ultimately the behavioral, cognitive, affective or physical functioning** of the child.”

Hart, S., (1988). Psychological Maltreatment Emphasis on Prevention. *School Psychological International*, 9, 244.

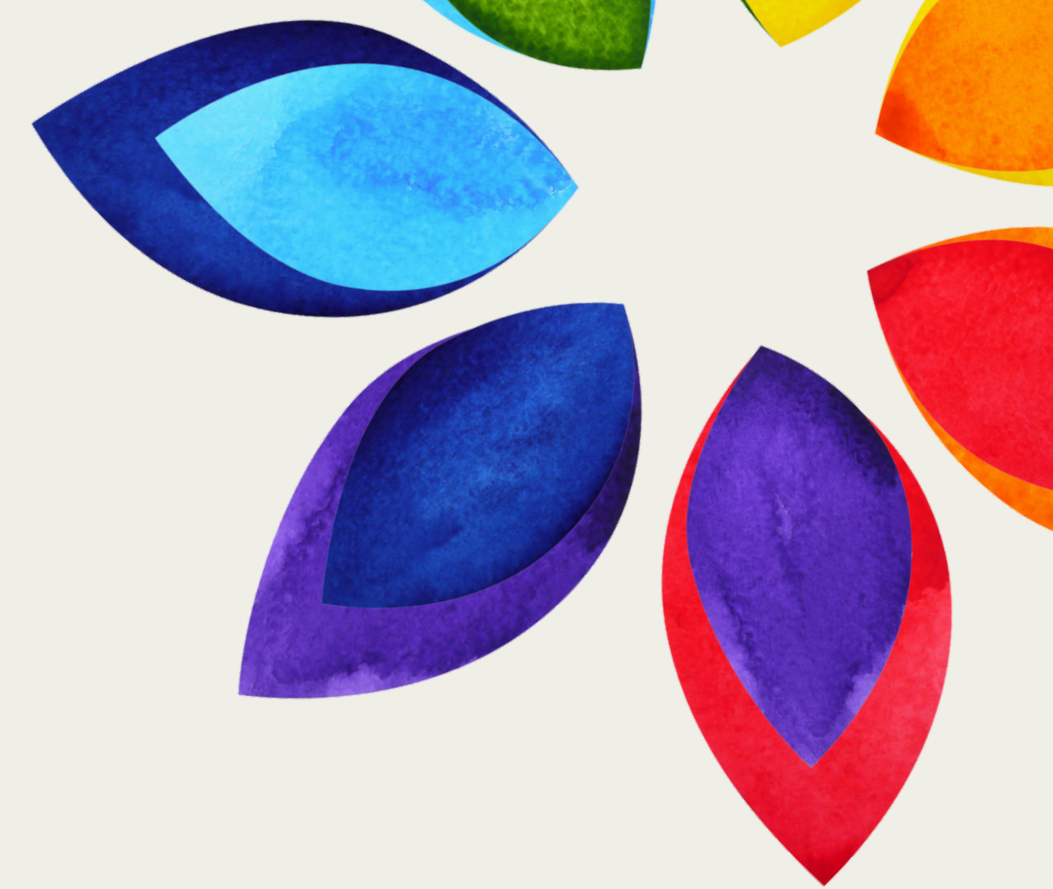


# Broad Definition

## **Slep, Glaser, and Manly's operational definition of pm:**

“Psychological maltreatment refers to **caregiver behaviors** toward or involving, a child (excluding physical/sexual abuse and physical neglect) which **cause or have a strong potential to cause serious harm to a child's emotional, cognitive, social, interpersonal, or physical wellbeing or development.** Psychological maltreatment could reflect a single caregiver act or omission or could reflect repeated caregiver behaviors. **Caregiver refers to any adult responsible for attending to the needs of a child as defined by the system** using these definitions.”

Slep, A.M.S., Glaser, D., Manly, J.T., (2022). Psychological maltreatment: An operational definition and path toward application. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 134 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105882>



# Operational Definition

**A paraphrase of Slep, Glaser, and Manly's operational definition of pm:**

(A) Acts that are not accidental, that possess actual, or with reasonable potential, (B) significant harm or potential thereof (Secondary Operationalizations) show an obvious lack of regard for a child's wellbeing, or verbal or non-verbal actions which give the child a perception that their wellbeing is at risk.

**Slep, A.M.S., Glaser, D., Manly, J.T., (2022). Psychological maltreatment: An operational definition and path toward application. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 134 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105882>**



# Visual Map A of Slep, Glaser, and Manly's operational definition of pm:



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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105882>

2022.105882

# Visual Map B & C of

**Slep, Glaser, and Manly's operational definition of pm:**

**B**

**Significant Impact on the child involving:**

## **Actual Psychological Harm**

- act/omission disruption in development
- significant psychological distress
- somatic symptoms
- more than inconsequential fear reaction

## **Reasonable Potential for Harm**

- act/omission disruption in development
- significant risk of psychological distress

**C**

## **Secondary Operationalizations**

- Egregious Acts of Disregard
- Threatening Acts


**Slep, A.M.S., Glaser, D., Manly, J.T., (2022). Psychological maltreatment: An operational definition and path toward application. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 134 1-11.**

**<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105882>**

**2022.105882**

# REPORTING PSYCHOLOGICAL MALTREATMENT

**LESS  
THAN  
18% . . .**



of child-protective services cases, where significant emotional abuse was present, were officially noted according to a study in 2009.

Trickett, P.K., Mennen, F.E., Kim, K., Sang, J., (2009). Emotional abuse in a sample of multiple maltreated, urban young adolescents: Issues of definition and identification. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 33, 27-35.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.12.003>



# THE RELEVANCE OF UNDERREPORTING



According to Spinazzola et. al., training and educating clinicians is necessary to address low detection rates at an exosystem level. This in combination with targeting public awareness may have the affect of addressing the cultural level / macrosystem.

Kisiel, C., Spinazzola, J., Hodgdon, H., Liang, L., Ford, J.D., Layne, C.M., Pynoos, R., Briggs, E.C., Stolbach, B., (2014). Unseen Wounds: the Contribution of Psychological Maltreatment to Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Risk Outcomes. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, and Policy*, 6, S18-S28.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0037766>

# An Operational List May Be As Good As it Gets For Defining PM

“Many people find this approach to defining child maltreatment frustrating, of course. They would like a final list of what is and what isn’t child abuse and neglect. But I am convinced that there is no such list. There is only a commitment to keep at the task of bringing social and cultural realities in line with our developing understanding of the basic needs — and thus human rights — of children, to bodily integrity, to emotional and psychological safety, and to being nurtured.”

~ James Garbarino

Garbarino, J. (2011). Not all bad treatment is psychological maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 35, 797-801. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.05.014



## RELATIONSHIP BASED PRACTICE

Clinicians must understand the diversity of relationships within families, taking into account gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and communication styles, as well as their own social location and biases, and their effect on the system as a clinician.



North, G., (2022). Skills and knowledge not checklists: social work interventions into childhood emotional abuse. *Social Work Education*. 41(5) 743-758. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2021.1887117

# EVIDENCE INFORMED PRACTICE (EIP)

EIP supports clinicians in making judgments and decisions that are backed by evidence without undermining the clinician's role in providing care, or minimizing their judgment.



North, G., (2022). Skills and knowledge not checklists: social work interventions into childhood emotional abuse. *Social Work Education*. 41(5) 743-758. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2021.1887117

## EARLY PREVENTION

Preventive methods at the eco- and macro-system levels suggest a reduction in physical abuse was created through an intentional use of legislation and promotional campaigns in Sweden.

**“For a period of 15 years no child died as a result of abuse in Sweden.”**

**Could this work for PM?**



# SPECIFIC PREDICTORS OF PM

Past Research has focused on three levels of the Ecological Model for identifying predictors of PM.



Individual / developmental

- Mental Illness and/or personality disturbance
- Emotional Reactivity
- Substance Misuse
- Physical illness
- Poor verbal reasoning abilities
- Engaging in fewer social activities/ social interaction problems
- Marital discord and IPV
- Experiencing PM as a child



Microsystem

- Age: Children over the age of 6
- Children living with nonbiological parents or with single parent



Macrosystem

- Low socioeconomic status
- Unemployment
- Living in rural areas

**Table Arranged by:**  
**Hines, D. A., Malley-Morrison, K. M., Dutton, L. B., (2021) *Family Violence in the United States* 3rd Ed. SAGE Publications. p. 379. Kindle Edition.**



# PARENT-FOCUSED INTERVENTIONS

## Psychoanalytically Informed Approach

Focuses on the primary parent's view of the child and how it is affected and connected to their past and present experiences.

## Home Visiting

Nurse Family Partnership Programme, which involves more than 2 years of home visits from an ecological perspective, is effective at preventing child abuse.

## Cognitive-behavioral approaches

Focuses on adjusting present behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs about how a parent perceives their child.



**Barlow, J., & Schrader-Macmillan, A. (2010). Safeguarding children from emotional maltreatment, London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.**

# ASSESSMENTS AND SCALES FOR IDENTIFYING PM WITH INFANTS

## The Care-Index

Differentiates... “between abuse and neglect, abusing and neglecting, marginally maltreating, and adequate dyads.”

It is also useful for identifying emotional maltreatment and determining if the concern is “parental affect”, “cognition,” “intrusiveness,” or “passivity.”

## Alarm Distress Baby Scale

Social withdrawal can be identified through a lack of positive behaviors or negative behaviors using an 8 item scale.

- facial expression
- eye contact
- general level of activity
- self-stimulation gestures
- vocalizations
- briskness of response to stimulation
- relationship to observer
- attractiveness to observer

Barlow, J., & Schrader-Macmillan, A. (2010). *Safeguarding children from emotional maltreatment*, London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. p.65.





# ASSESSMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING PM WITH INFANTS

## Watch, Wait, Wonder

This intervention is child led and focuses on who free play can increase the maternal figures ability to sense their child's needs and feelings, while at the same time helping the child to develop their own sense of self and emotional regulation.

This activity is consistent with the research that suggests interventions which address maternal sensitivity and infant attachment are very effective.

Barlow, J., & Schrader-Macmillan, A. (2010). *Safeguarding children from emotional maltreatment*, London. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. p.69.



# EVIDENCE-BASED CONCEPTUAL MODELS

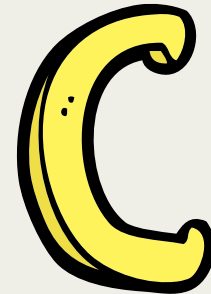
## Five-domain family process model of the connections between risk factors and child outcomes

A large, stylized red letter 'A' with a black outline and a slight shadow effect.

The quality of the mother-child and father-child relationships

A large, stylized yellow letter 'B' with a black outline and a slight shadow effect.

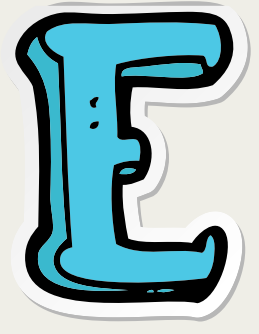
The quality of the relationship between the parents, including communication styles, conflict resolution, problem solving and emotion regulation.

A large, stylized yellow letter 'C' with a black outline and a slight shadow effect.

The patterns of both couple and parent-child relationships transmitted across the generations from grandparents to parents to children.

A large, stylized green letter 'D' with a black outline and a slight shadow effect.

The level of adaptation of each family member, his or her self-perceptions, and indicators of mental health and psychological distress.

A large, stylized blue letter 'E' with a black outline and a slight shadow effect.

The balance between life stresses and social supports outside the immediate family.

Cowan, P., & Cowan, C. (2008). Diverging family policies to promote children's well-being in the UK and US: some relevant data from family research and intervention studies. *Journal of Children's Services*, 3(4), 4-16.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/17466660200800022>

# ATTACHMENT BASED MODELS: A THEORY FOR APPLICATION

Barlow and Schrader-Macmillan suggest that attachment-based approaches are significant for addressing psychological maltreatment. They highlight four processes for using attachment based models broken down by application and clinical skills



## APPLICATION

## CLINICAL SKILLS

**Assessing the impact of the abuse in terms of the child's attachment system.**

**Intervening to address the child's attachment needs in terms of the support that is put in place to address problems at the level of both parent and the child.**

**Identify the impact of parenting on children's attachment, particularly in terms of their ability to recognize children showing signs of disorganized attachment.**

**Work in partnership/therapeutically with families to bring about change.**

# Attachment, Self-Regulation, Competency (ARC) model

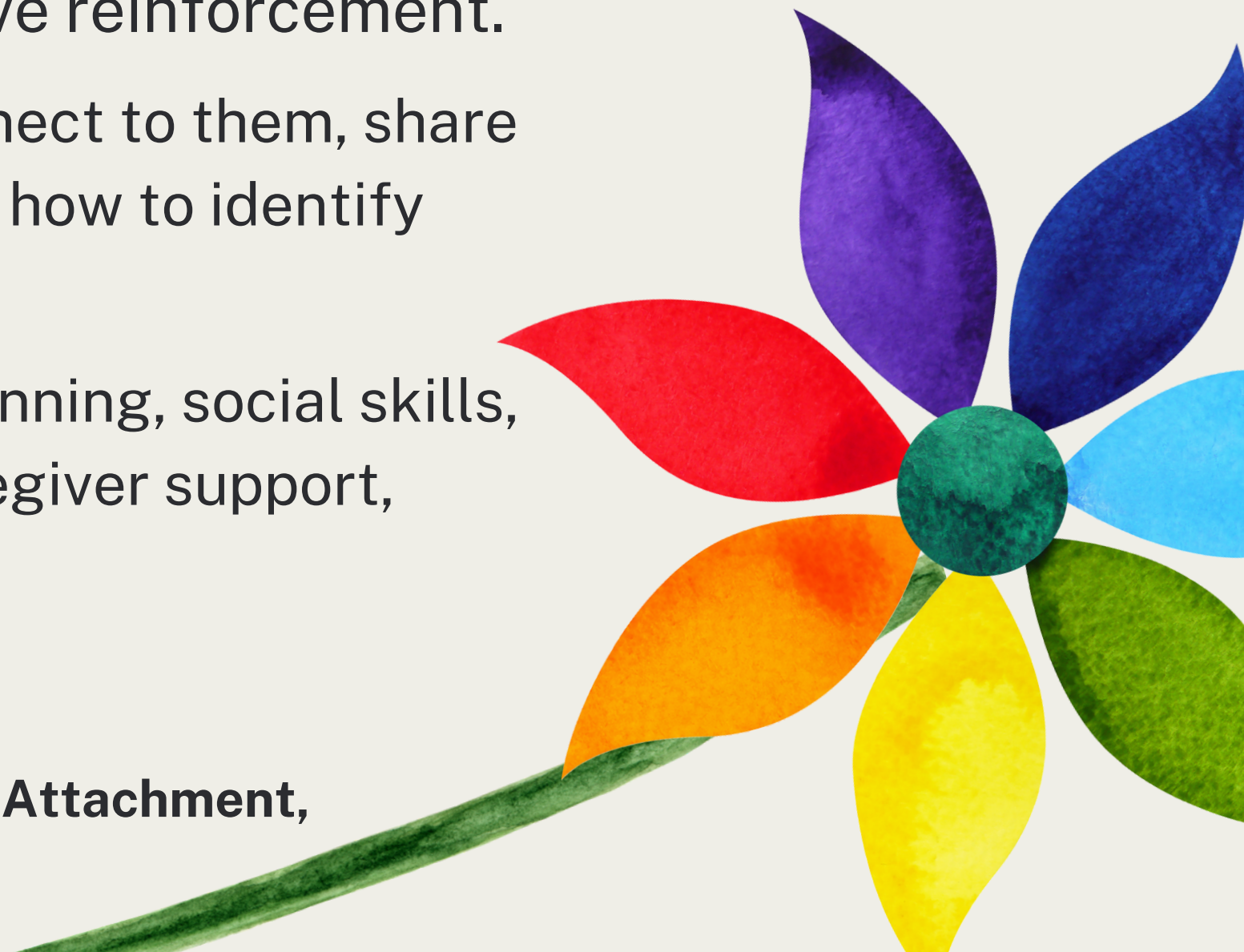
This empirically grounded model works from the position that systemic change provides the best context for lasting positive outcomes.

**Attachment:** By establishing attachment and safety, ARC creates predictability, assists caregivers in managing strong affect, improves attunement within the family system, and increases positive reinforcement.

**Self-Regulation:** ARC helps clients identify their feelings, connect to them, share them appropriately, to moderate their arousal, and understand how to identify emotions in others.

**Competency:** ARC helps children to develop such skills as “planning, social skills, impulse control” as well as utilize social supports such as “caregiver support, connections with teachers, and use of mentors.”

Kinniburgh, K. J., Blaustein, M., Spinazzola, J., & van der Kolk, B. (2005). Attachment, Self-Regulation & Competency. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35, 424 – 430.



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