Depression of Infancy and Early Childhood
Fact Sheet          Summer 2009

Condition Description
Depression of Infancy and Early Childhood is a formal mental health diagnosis given to an infant or toddler by a licensed mental health professional using the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition (DC:0-3R). The diagnosis requires the following five conditions:
- The emotional and behavioral pattern represents a change from the child’s typical emotional and behavioral displays;
- The depressed or irritable mood must be persistent everyday for most of the day over two weeks;
- The depressed symptoms occur in more than one activity and within more than one relationship;
- The symptoms cause the child distress, impair functioning and/or impede the child’s development;
- The symptoms are not due to a general medical condition or the effect of medication or environmental toxin.

Impact on Learning and Development
If untreated, young children with depression of infancy and early childhood may experience delays in development and demonstrate difficulties in their relationships with others. They may also demonstrate difficulties in later school achievement and develop behaviors that require juvenile corrections interventions.

Treatment Options
While the research surrounding effective treatment options is minimal, experts in the field recommend a combination of psychotherapy and parent education. Additionally, as with all interventions targeted toward young children, consistent and frequent communication across all of the systems working with the child (the child’s primary care givers, child care providers, primary health care providers, mental health providers, etc.), is essential for optimal success in treatment.

References