



Infant Observation Training

Handbook

January 2021 – March 2023

The Oxford Parent-Infant Project

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The OXPIP Ethos

The Oxford Parent-Infant Project is a charity that tackles some of society's most challenging issues by helping parents and their babies to form strong and loving relationships.

OXPIP is a service specialising in the emotional needs of parents and babies from conception to two years. Our therapists are drawn from a variety of clinical backgrounds and have specialist knowledge, training and understanding of infant mental health, adult mental health, and attachment theory. The aim of therapy is to support parents who are experiencing difficulties in preparing for or being with their baby and to facilitate parent-infant relationships; in some cases, this will include working with other carers within the family as well.

OXPIP offers intensive therapeutic help to parents and their babies in Oxfordshire. We support families by working with parent(s) and infant together, to think about how unresolved issues from the past might impact on the parent-infant relationship, to build on the positive, to boost parental confidence, and to help the parents be attuned to the needs of the baby. We know from the evidence that OXPIP's approach can, and does, help.

The work requires flexibility. It is based on psychoanalytic principles and theory but draws on a range of other theoretical and therapeutic modalities including attachment theory, neuroscience, mentalisation, Watch, Wait and Wonder, and Video Interaction Guidance.

OXPIP has a number of satellite and outreach projects that are located across Oxfordshire, to provide easy and accessible services to the families with whom we work. OXPIP provides both free and sliding scale open access services as well as specialist work with families at risk. We are supported by charitable trusts.

In addition to the clinical work, OXPIP provides consultation, workshops and training to a wide range of professionals on the importance of early attachment and infant mental health. OXPIP works with other service providers locally and nationally to promote the importance of very early intervention within policy and practice.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is central to OXPIP's work.

The Infant Observation Ethos

It has been an expectation since OXPIP began in 1998 that all our clinicians will have undertaken a psychoanalytic infant observation lasting at least one year. We have been running our own Infant Observation Training since January 2013.

All analytic work depends upon an individual's capacity for observation, containment of one's own responses, and the processing of and reflection upon primitive emotional experience. Infant Observation provides an excellent means through which to develop these skills.

Origins of Infant Observation¹

Infant observation began more than 50 years ago at the Tavistock Clinic as part of the first child psychotherapy training. Its inception and development are primarily associated with Esther Bick. Her pioneering ideas, grounded in her observational experiences, have had a profound and enduring influence on psychoanalytic thinking about primitive emotional states in the baby. As a skilled observer of babies and as an inspiring teacher, she laid the foundations of an approach, which has provided a new and powerful way into the baby's world.

The Nature of Infant Observation

Infant observation takes place within the family. Unconscious communications are of fundamental importance. The observer's task is to seek to enter the baby's world and to observe minutely what is going on for the child within the family, particularly in relation to the parent. Observers are required to open themselves to the immediate experience and, as far as possible, to leave behind existing theories and presuppositions. Counter-transference responses are central to the observational process: the observer is required to register and make use of their own emotional responses as well as what they see in the relationship between parent and baby.

¹ Thanks to Blythe Ellis of the Jungian Training of the West Midlands Institute of Psychotherapy for this description

Pre-requisites

The OXPIP infant observation course for psychotherapists, health professionals and anyone who has an interest in gaining a greater understanding of a baby's early life and relationships and how they develop.

Applicants need to be:

- Reflective practitioners
- Open-minded
- Able to work in a group

DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service)

All observers will need to have an enhanced DBS check before beginning to observe a baby. We would advise ensuring this is in place before starting the course.

The Infant Observation Training

The infant observation training has several components:

1. Finding a baby to observe and the observations themselves
2. Observation seminars and writing observation notes
3. Individual tutorials for infant observation group members
4. A final essay based on the participant's infant observation

1. Finding a baby to observe and the observations themselves

The infant observation involves observing a baby from birth (or as close to birth as possible) for one hour a week up to the age of two, at a pre-arranged time, within the baby's home. The training includes an initial term prior to the observation, to allow trainees time to find a parent-infant dyad to observe. Therefore, the infant observation training is seven terms in total.

It is important that trainees do not observe members of their own family, children of close friends, colleagues, or even acquaintances. This can cause complications and interfere with the observation. Trainees are advised to approach their GP, local Health Visitors, or Midwives for help in finding a non-complex family, in which to observe. The emphasis needs to be placed on the baby's growing relationships, capacities, and activities. These issues will be covered in depth in the initial seminar.

Trainees will be expected to visit the family they are hoping to observe before the baby is born, and to arrange to see both parents at this visit if at all possible. In light of the current situation with COVID-19, there may be a need for part of the observation to be carried out virtually. If this is the case, trainees will be given the relevant support in order to carry this out effectively.

The observer should remain as open as they can to both what they see and what they feel during observations. The observer does not take notes during the observation, but records in as much detail as possible all that they can recall of the hours visit that pertains to the baby and their development and the relationship between parent and baby, as soon as possible after the observation.

While observing the baby, observers should demonstrate a capacity for:

- Analytic observation
- Sensitivity and responsiveness to the situation
- Maintaining a quiet, containing presence
- Thinking and reflecting on what is observed
- Maintaining a professional attitude and respecting the privacy of the family

The Head of Training will provide a letter for any trainee who, when searching for a baby to observe, might be requested to produce evidence that they are on a bona fide course.

2. Observation Seminars and Writing Observation Notes

The purpose of the seminars is to study the material of the observations. It is likely that 1-2 trainees will present an observation at each infant observation seminar. They will provide copies of the written recording of those observations for all other seminar members. It is expected that the baby's/family's real names will not be used.²

The task of the seminar is to explore the emotional development of the baby in relation to his/her parent, and any other members of the family who may be present during observations. The baby's relationship with the observer will also be thought about, as will the thoughts, intensity of feeling, and anxieties aroused in observers and seminar members. The seminar leader provides a containing presence and helps the seminar members to pay attention to the unconscious aspects of behaviour and patterns of communication.

Following each observation, notes shall be written as soon as possible, remembering as well as they can, the sequence of events, with the focus on the baby in his/her setting. The observer should also notice his/her own countertransference responses, which might be informative and relevant.

Trainees will be expected to keep full records of each of their observations, even though not all of them will be discussed in the observation seminars. This helps in building up a picture of the baby's development week by week and can prove vital when it comes to writing the essay on the observation experience. A copy of all written recordings must be submitted to the seminar leader at each seminar, even when the trainee is not presenting.

3. Individual Tutorials

It is possible for trainees to book individual tutorials during the year. This time can be used, for example, to think about how the individual participant is finding the process of observing a baby including any problems that might have arisen, or for thinking about the content of the forthcoming final essay on the observation. These sessions will be charged separately, please see page 10.

4. Final Essay

On successful completion of the infant observation, trainees will be invited to write a final essay. Writing an essay of 5,000 words maximum, focussing on the infant observation, is an integral part of the whole observation experience. It is expected to demonstrate links between the observed baby within the family, psychoanalytic child development theory, and the significance of the seminar member as participant observer. Participants will discuss the requirements of this essay with their infant observation seminar leader as part of their preparation for this essay, in which the development of the baby within his or her family setting will be central.

² With acknowledgements and thanks to the BAP Psychoanalytical Infant Observation programme for this outline of observational requirements.

Trainee Commitments

Time

The commitment is a minimum of 3.5 hours a week: one-hour observation and time writing up observation notes, plus time at the observation seminars. Trainees will need to allow some time for additional reading and preparation for discussion groups.

Location

The majority of the teaching days will be primarily delivered via Zoom. For any face-to-face sessions, these will take place at the OXPIP Office, Suite J, The Kidlington Centre, Oxford, OX5 2DL, which is within easy reach of Oxford Parkway railway station. Please see our website for details: www.oxpip.org.uk/contact

Seminars

There will be ten seminars a term, held on a Thursday morning from 9.30-11am. The dates for 2021 are listed in Appendix 1. Trainees are expected to attend and actively participate in the seminar groups. In order to be eligible for the certification, trainees must attend at least 80%.

Codes of Ethics and Practice

All trainees are required to sign and abide by OXPIP's Code of Ethics and Practice in relation to Infant Observation. Where applicable, trainees are also required to abide by the Code of Ethics and Practice of their registered counselling or psychotherapy organisation.

OXPIP Lectures 2021 & 2022

The course fee includes free places for trainees at the OXPIP lectures. Attendance at these is optional but encouraged for professional development. Details of these can be found on our website: oxpip.org.uk/lectures

Key Texts

Below is the key text:

Miller, L. (Ed). (2013). Closely Observed Infants. Bloomsbury: London

For those who are interested in further reading:

Stern, D. N. (1990). Diary of a Baby: What your child sees, feels, and experiences. Basic Books: New York

OXPIP Internal Liaison

Trainees will liaise with the:

- Head of Training
- Infant Observation Course Leader
- Operations Manager
- CEO, Clinical Director

Requirements

On application, trainees are required to provide two relevant contacts for references.

Course Fees

The cost of the course is £2,900 in total for the seven terms. By accepting an offer of a place on the training, trainees are committed to completing payment for the whole course which is due before the course begins.

There may be an option to pay in instalments, subject to agreement with the Operations Manager. Where exceptional circumstances arise, this will be evaluated at the discretion of the training committee.

The course fees are non-refundable.

Application Fees

In addition to the course fees, in order for the application to be processed, we charge a £50 non-refundable application fee which is required to be paid upon submission of the completed application form. We will be unable to proceed with the application until payment has been received.

If the applicant is successful and invited for an interview, they will be required to pay an interview processing fee of £75.

Other additional costs

Feedback on a draft final paper, as well as the marking of the final paper by two markers, is included in the course fee. However, if the trainee does not pass the essay first time and chooses to re-submit the paper, they will be required to pay a fee to cover the costs of re-marking and administration.

Individual tutorials may be booked termly. These are optional and will be charged separately at £80 per hour.

Payment Details

Any payments should ideally be sent via BACS or alternatively via cheque.

Our details are as follows:

Account/Payee Name: The Oxford Parent Infant Project

Bank Name: The Co-operative Bank

Sort Code: 08-92-99

Account Number: 65234507

Reference: Please quote "Trainee Name/IO" as the reference

These costings are effective at the time of publication but may be subject to annual increases.