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Children's Literature and Infant-Child Mental Health

A Select Sampling of Children's Books and their Central Themes

Author	Book	Some Central Theme(s) or Issues in Infant Mental Health
Robert Munsch & Sheila McGraw	<i>"Love You Forever"</i>	Parental unconditional love as a precondition to growth. Intergenerational transmission of parenthood – the “mothered” child can mother
Margaret Wise Brown & Clement Hurd	<i>"Goodnight Moon"</i>	Regularity, stability, repetition, predictability engender feelings of permanence, control, safety and security; Importance of “proper” good-byes and transitions.
Margaret Wise Brown & Clement Hurd	<i>"The Runaway Bunny"</i>	Parental permanence of love and the allowance of separation, individuation and autonomy in the child; capacity and importance of separate affect in mother and child
Anne Braff Brodzinsky & Diana L. Stanley	<i>"The Mulberry Bird": Story of Adoption</i>	Addresses parental and child feelings about adoption; feelings of rejection, abandonment, loss in adoption and the formation of parent-child attachment.
Judith Viorst & Ray Cruz	<i>"Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day"</i>	Recovery from and tolerance of loss and disappointment are made possible by the underlying formation of love and security; loss need not be seen as “forever”
Judith Viorst & Ray Cruz	<i>"Alexander, Who Used to Be Rich Last Sunday"</i>	Impulse control and delay of gratification; sibling rivalry and distinctions among impulse, feeling and action; acceptance of symbolized and fantasy aggression
Judith Viorst & Arnold Lobel	<i>"I'll Fix Anthony"</i>	Sibling rivalry; the importance and permission of fantasy around anger and “negative” Emotions; revenge fantasies borne out of envy and powerlessness
Judith Viorst & Kay Chorao	<i>"The Good-Bye Book"</i>	Acceptance of anger, fear and sadness around separation; importance of preparation, “proper good-byes” and transitional persons and objects in handling separations; promotes capacity to tolerate separation.
Barbara M. Joosse & Barbara Lavalle	<i>"Mama Do You Love Me?"</i>	The need for a child to test parental limits; the requirement for unconditional love – parental love exists even in the face of negative emotions, mistakes, failures and misbehavior.
Harriet Ziefert & Susan Baum	<i>"The Wish Pillow"</i>	A child’s wish to be more or different never prevents parental love; the parental acceptance and encouragement of a child’s fantasy life

Mercer Mayer	<i>"There's a Nightmare in My Closet"</i>	The use of fantasy and exaggeration to conquer and control fear; the acceptance of aggressive feelings (symbolized); the fear generated by uncertainty; empowering features of fantasy and the transformation of fear; the “eyes” into a child’s world.
Mercer Mayer	<i>"There's An Alligator Under My Bed"</i>	The use of fantasy to conquer and control fear; the empowering features of fantasy, the “eyes” into a child’s world.
Mercer Meyer	<i>"Just Me and My Little Brother"</i>	Positive fantasies about a sibling; identifies shared meanings and affective bond of siblings.
Wendy Lewison & Stephen Cartwright	<i>"My Baby Brother" (Hug Me Books)</i>	A limited view into the expectations and disappointments surrounding the arrival of a new baby sibling
P. D. Eastman	<i>"Are You My Mother"</i>	The need for a mother as a fundamental search; the emergence of an “identity” through the infant-parent relationship
Jack Gantos & Nicole Rubel	<i>"Rotten Ralph"</i>	The expression of “bad” impulses and behaviors symbolically as acceptable; the enduring and unconditional nature of love – that relationships survive failures disappointments, “ruptures”.
Anne Mazur & Stacey Schuett	<i>"Watch Me"</i>	The wish for, and pleasure in, parental admiration of a child’s industry and autonomy; Feelings of competence, effectance – that the world values and is affected by “me”.
Mem Fox & Jane Dryer	<i>"Time For Bed"</i>	A gentle description, using repetition and affectionate interactions between infants and mothers in the animal kingdom, transitioning to sleep; The importance of rituals and preparation to ease transitions; ritual as a transition to sleep
William H Hooks & Lynn Munsinger	<i>"Rough Tough Rowdy"</i>	Struggles to control aggressive and hurtful impulses in a child; the use of fantasy and displacement in the expression of aggression; the social and emotional issues around aggression – acceptance of affect even when behavior is unacceptable.
Margery Williams & Tien	<i>"The Velveteen Rabbit"</i>	Becoming “real” emerges from a close, loving, personal attachment that is consistent, predictable and unconditional; growth occurs through loss and pain; love survives loss.
Demi	<i>"The Empty Pot"</i>	The importance of a child’s individuality and unique effort. A child’s authenticity is affirmed;a child’s best and honest effort is more important than whether or not he/she succeeds.
Audrey Penn	<i>"The Kissing Hand"</i>	Love and security given to a child become internalized and available to the child when separated from those who love him/her.