

Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis
Observational Studies Program
Online Program – Fall 2026
Seeing the Unseen in Clinical Work



A Two-Year Online Training Based on the Esther Bick Infant Observation Model

Program Overview

The Observational Studies Program at the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis provides a unique, multidisciplinary training grounded in the Infant Observation Method by Esther Bick at the Tavistock Clinic (1948). We developed our program at the Washington School of Psychiatry (Now New WSP), and since 2022 is part of the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis. Beginning in Fall 2026, a fully online track will be available, offering access to clinicians and professionals across the United States and abroad, who wish to deepen their observational and clinical skills but cannot attend in person. “Seeing the Unseen in Clinical Work” is taught by a faculty of child, adult, couple, and family psychotherapists and psychoanalysts. Through careful, sustained observation and reflection, students learn to identify subtle emotional and relational processes that shape child development and are detected later in clinical interaction. This experiential program develops the right mindset to work with patients of all ages including adults, families and couples.

This online program allows participants to do the 2 year observation and the option to add all of the other segments in our program: Work Discussion (One year), Young Child Observation (one year) and psychoanalytic papers focused on Infant observation as the students go along. It provides the opportunity to students to master their own time.

Program Philosophy

Across two years, students cultivate a refined awareness of early emotional states, interpersonal dynamics, cultural contexts, and the impact of the observer's own experience.

The training strengthens the capacity to:

Notice subtle affective, sensory, and relational cues

Attend closely to moment-to-moment experience

Reflect on the emotional meaning of what is observed

Develop containment and emotional attunement and the capacity to bear the unknown/certainty.

Apply observational insight to clinical and professional work.

Program Structure

Meeting Schedule

The online program meets weekly for 28 classes/year, always focused on the unfolding infant observation and its emotional and theoretical implications.

The proposed meetings are:

Thursdays at 7:00 PM and Fridays at 1pm.Eastern Time.

This schedule aims to accommodate professionals across U.S. time zones while maintaining consistency and continuity throughout the year.

Year One:

The first year includes:

Four or five weekly Infant Observation seminars per month, each centered on the student's ongoing observational experience.

The observer visits the family once a week for one hour, ideally starting soon after birth (or even before) and continuing until the child's second birthday.

The observer is a non-participant witness who avoids taking notes during the visit, responding to questions, or acting as a professional clinician. Their role is to simply be present and receive the experience.

The observation focuses on the infant's development, their interactions with family members (especially the primary caregiver/mother), the emotional atmosphere of the home, and the unconscious communications between family members.

Students develop the foundational observational stance, steady attention, emotional presence, and the capacity to reflect deeply on the experience of the observed relationship.

This sustained, regular, and neutral presence over time allows the student to witness the emergence of the infant's personality.

Weekly supervision group:

Immediately following the visit, the observer writes a highly detailed, account of everything that happened, including their own feelings and reactions , which are seen as central to understanding the emotional impact of the observation. This material is discussed in a confidential seminar group with experienced seminar leaders on a weekly basis.

Year Two:

Students continue with their second year of Infant Observation.

An optional Work Discussion Seminar is also offered, where participants present:

Clinical encounters and observational moments from their own professional environments.

The skills developed in Year One become tools for exploring unconscious communication and relational processes in diverse contexts.

All components outside the Infant Observation seminars are optional and scheduled based on the needs and availability of the group.

Annual Joint Gathering

At the end of each academic year, students from the online program and the in-person program in Washington DC, come together for a joint meeting.

This gathering is designed to:

Strengthen personal and professional connections.

Create a sense of intimate community across the WBCP

Build a national network of colleagues committed to observational learning

The shared meeting honors the Tavistock tradition of learning in community and offers a meaningful bridge between the two program tracks.

Who Should Apply

Applications are open to:

Mental health professionals

Medical practitioners, including nurse practitioners

Educators and teachers

Anyone working with children, families, or emotionally vulnerable populations

No prior psychoanalytic training is necessary.

We encourage you to apply promptly. Once the groups are complete, we will be having a monthly meeting to help students get to know each other and to find the right resources to find a possible family to observe.

We will be having an OPEN HOUSE in February 2026 for those that would like more information.

In the meantime, for more information you can reach the Co-Chairs:

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