WHAT IS INFANT/EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION?

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (I/ECMHC) is a multi-level, proactive approach that focuses on supporting and enhancing children’s social emotional development and overall well-being. It teams multi-disciplinary infant early childhood mental health professionals with those who work with young children and their families in a wide variety of settings.

I/ECMHC is built upon research-based findings that social and emotional development is the foundation for success in learning and in life, and can be supported by creating early partnerships between families, providers, programs, systems and I/ECMHC professionals. These partnerships promote and support an understanding of infant/young children’s healthy social emotional development; are a catalyst for building the capacity of providers and families to recognize the powerful influence of their relationships on young children’s development — prenatally through the early elementary years.

“State-funded preschool programs with access to Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation services reported significant decreases in expulsions rates: 5.7 children per 1,000 compared to 10.8 children per 1,000 for programs with no consultation services (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006).”

WHO ARE I/ECMH CONSULTANTS?

I/ECMH consultants are often professionals with advanced Degrees in Social Work, Counseling, Psychology, Early Childhood Development, Psychiatry, Marriage and Family Therapy, or Nursing. They may also hold an Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Credential. IECMH consultants demonstrate the following competencies:

- Knowledge of early childhood development, mental health, and early care and education;
- Skill in engagement, relationship building, and collaboration with families, providers, programs and systems;
- Knowledge of best practices for information gathering and synthesizing observations;
- Ability to collaboratively develop a plan and shared measures of success;
- Knowledge of community systems and resources and the effective development of partnerships;
- Adherence to ethical guidelines and professional standards of behavior; and
- Continuous use of reflective practice to support professional behavior and ongoing professional growth.
Promotion-Oriented/Preventive — Supports healthy development, emphasizing social emotional development and nurturing responsive relationships for the benefit of children and the early identification of social, emotional, behavioral and developmental challenges in infants and young children.

Multi-level — Supports young children’s social, emotional and mental health needs by mobilizing the collective resources of families, providers, programs, systems and communities; enhances collaboration on behalf of children’s well-being; and values and employs reflective practice.

Relationship-based — Recognizes the critical role and power of positive relationships and the parallel process that is reflected at all levels—among families, children, providers, programs, colleagues, communities and systems—in support of healthy child development.

Capacity building — Increases the ability of infant/early childhood staff, providers, programs, systems, and policies to recognize children’s physical health and developmental needs—emphasizing social emotional and mental health needs—within the context of their family, culture and community; works collaboratively to meet the needs of children and their families, and increases the capacity of providers to be more reflective in their work.

HOW DOES I/ECMHC OCCUR?

I/ECMHC can begin in a wide-variety of ways, depending on whether it will be child and family-centered or programmatic. This can include being part of a new service contract, being hired as part of a professional staff, or being brought in to respond to a crisis. Consultants join the work of an organization by making a connection with agency leadership to discuss the needs and outline the services that can be provided. The consultant offers reflective practice opportunities to the supervisor and team on a regular, predictable schedule to help staff process issues, concerns and cases. Consultation is also available to individual staff to support their reflection on practices and issues that arise in their work. Consultants can provide training to address the needs of the program staff, and enhance their understanding of social and emotional development. Consultants may join in co-facilitation of established groups, and may observe a child or family.