

# Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC)

For Child Care Professionals and Families

## How Children's Mental Health Develops

As young children develop, they learn many new things, like how to talk and how to walk. During this key time from birth to age five, they are also building other important skills. Children's developing mental health includes learning to handle strong emotions, form bonds with others, explore new things, and do things on their own.

Children need adults to help them learn new skills. Parents are children's first and life-long teachers. In addition, many children benefit from having other key teachers such as caregivers, teachers, home visitors, pediatricians, and other professionals.

One professional that may be a helpful resource as your child grows their mental health is an infant and early childhood mental health consultant.



## When Might Children Need Support with their Mental Health?

Just like snowflakes, children are all unique. These examples are some, but not all, of the reasons you might seek support for a child's mental health or social and emotional development.

Sometimes children may need more support:

- Handling strong feelings like worry, anger, frustration, and fear.
- Showing emotions in healthy, not hurtful, ways
- Learning to approach others
- Building friendships
- Exploring their environments
- Trying new things
- Solving problems



## What is Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC)?

Let's start by breaking down the terms.

**Infant and early childhood** refers to birth through age five.

**Mental health** refers to social, emotional, coping abilities, and how to make and keep healthy relationships. Everyone has mental health, just as everyone has physical health. Just as you keep your body physically healthy by eating well and exercising, the same care is needed for your mental health. You nourish your mental health by learning how to handle stress, express strong emotions in safe ways, and connect with others.

**Consultation** refers to support provided by a professional. A consultant will help others to set goals and learn about and apply strategies that have been shown to work. In short, IECMHC helps others build capacity to support children's strengths and social and emotional needs.

## What IECMHC Is, and What it Is Not

What IECMHC <i>Is</i>	What IECMHC <i>Is Not</i>
Consultation is prevention-based. Many programs work with consultants to set up practices and environments <b>before</b> issues even arise.	Consultation is not treatment. Consultation is designed to “establish a culture that supports social and emotional health”, not to “fix children.”
Consultants are highly trained licensed, or license-eligible professionals who help those supporting the child to feel empowered in their role and skills.	Consultants are not therapists. They do not work directly with the child.
Consultation is based on relationships and collaboration.	Consultants do not come in as “the expert” who considers only their opinion.
Consultants may conduct observations, use questionnaires, and/or facilitate meetings.	Consultants are not “diagnosing” your child. They are not evaluators.
Consultants help others set goals for children and support efforts to work toward those goals.	Consultants do not set goals <b>for</b> families, children, or programs. They work <b>with</b> others.
Consultants may model skills, provide helpful tips and information, foster conversation, and suggest resources and referrals, as needed.	Consultants will not attempt to “solve problems” on their own but will instead help everyone “problem-solve” together!

## How Do Consultants Work With Families?

If you are concerned, you can ask your child’s caregiver, home visitor, teacher, program manager, or family service worker about getting help from a mental health consultant.

- First, you will be asked to sign a permission form allowing the consultant to get to know your child better.
- Then, the consultant may conduct observations, use questionnaires, and/or facilitate meetings to learn more about your child’s strengths and needs.
- You will then work together with the consultant and your child’s caregivers to create and carry out a plan of action.
- When you, your child’s caregiver, and others work together as part of the same team, you can provide stronger supports to benefit your child’s mental health and a healthy environment for all children!



## What Are the Benefits of IECMHC?

Consultants help caregivers and families to:

- Identify children's strengths and needs
- Build relationships
- Dig deeper into a behavior to see what purpose it is serving for the child
- Help children develop social and emotional skills such as turn-taking, making friends, and handling problems when they arise
- Create supportive environments for children
- Learn more about services and resources in the community

## Resources to help you learn more about IECMHC:

### Videos

- What is IECMHC?
- Why is IECMHC Effective?
- IECMHC: Why it Matters

### Good reads

- [About IECMHC for programs](#)
- [About IECMHC for families](#)
- [Strategies for specific behaviors](#) (scroll down on page)

### Sources consulted:

Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (CoE/IECMHC)

### For More Information Contact:

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## Consultants can help programs to:

- Foster stronger relationships between children and the adults who care for them
- Promote healthy social and emotional growth for all children
- Reduce caregiver stress
- Help children get ready for readiness
- Reduce incidents of challenging behaviors
- Create a healthy, happy learning space for children and staff alike!

