

# About Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

## What is IECMHC?

IECMHC is a prevention-based service that pairs a mental health consultant with families and adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as child care, preschool, and their home. The aim is to build adults' capacity to strengthen and support the healthy social and emotional development of children—early and before intervention is needed.

Social and emotional health—the ability to form strong relationships, solve problems, and express and manage emotions—is critical for school readiness and lifelong success. Without it, young children are more likely to:

- Have difficulty experiencing or showing emotions, which may lead to withdrawal from social activities and maintaining distance from others
- Have trouble making friends and getting along with others
- Have behavior problems, such as biting, hitting, using unkind words, or bullying—behaviors that often lead to difficulty with learning, suspension or expulsion, and later school dropout

## What Do IECMH Consultants Do?

Mental health consultation is not about “fixing kids.” Nor is it therapy. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to facilitate children's healthy growth and development.

- It starts from the premise that all relationships in a child's life matter, and works to promote both strong relationships and supportive environments for children, all of which are key to brain-building.
- Mental health consultation focuses on building the capacity of the adults in children's lives, so children are supported in all settings where they learn and grow, including home visiting, child care, and preschool.
- Mental health consultation can be an important support to home visiting programs by enhancing their capacities to address children's and families' mental health needs.
- Mental health consultants are highly-trained licensed or license-eligible professionals with specialized knowledge in childhood development, the effects of stress and trauma on families, and the impacts of adult mental illness on developing children.
- Mental health consultation helps families thrive.

Here are some specific examples of activities that IECMH consultants might engage in:



- Group consultation to home visitors or preschool staff to assist them in processing their complex work with children and families
- Case consultation to share tools and insights to address specific families' mental health needs and to refer them to outside mental health services when appropriate
- Support for administrators related to policy development (e.g., expulsion policy) and implementation of evidence-based practices to support mental health

## **What Are the Potential Outcomes of IECMHC?**

IECMHC has been shown to improve children's social skills and emotional functioning, promote healthy relationships, reduce challenging behaviors, reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions, improve classroom quality, and reduce provider stress, burnout, and turnover.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation works. Make IECMHC the norm in all early childhood programs.

