



Texas Infant & Early Childhood **Mental Health Consultation**

CONTEXT

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) is a prevention-based approach that pairs a mental health consultant with adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as child care, preschool, home visiting, early intervention programs, and pediatric primary care settings. IECMHC is a mental health service distinct from other mental health services, like therapy. IECMH consultants work with early childhood providers and caregivers to implement practices that create healthy environments and promote the development of social and emotional skills in children. They also partner with providers to develop plans to address child-specific (or family-specific) concerns and continue to monitor as these plans are implemented and adapted to reach defined goals. IECMH consultants make programs stronger, support staff well-being, and help adults provide nurturing environments that help children grow and build a strong foundation for lifelong mental health and school success.

IMPACT

IECMHC has been shown to improve children's social skills and social-emotional development, increase positive interactions between adults and young children, reduce challenging behaviors, reduce suspensions and expulsions in early care settings, improve classroom quality, and reduce provider stress, burnout, and turnover.

IECMH CONSULTANT

An IECMH consultant is a licensed or license-eligible mental health provider with a wealth of experience and knowledge in child and adult mental health and wellbeing who focuses on relational health between adults and children to foster the child's social emotional growth.



MENU OF SERVICES

The following is a list of some of the services that an IECMH consultant may provide. There are three main types of IECMHC services of which child and family-serving programs can engage with any or all three types.

1. **Individual Child/Family-Focused Consultation** helps providers address developmental or mental health concerns of an individual child or family. Typically, the request for consultation comes from a provider (e.g., teacher, home visitor, pediatrician) who identifies an issue that they are struggling to understand or address effectively, but requests may come from families as well.

Examples of activities include:

- One-on-one work with a staff member or caregiver to **gather information about the concern and assess behaviors**, including through observations, use of screening and assessment tools, that help shed light on what might be leading to behaviors that are causing concern, including potential health (physical or neurological) issues, family, cultural, or community context, and the child's or family's experiences and history.
- **Collaborating with staff (and families) to develop and implement a plan to address the presenting issue.** May include modeling and/or practicing new approaches with staff, and regular meetings to review use of new practices or techniques, reflect on how things are going, modify strategies as needed, and track progress in reaching desired goals.
- **Assisting staff and families with appropriate referrals** for additional needed services, including evaluation for developmental, behavioral health, or medical issues, community-based services and supports, and resources and materials.

2. **Classroom/Group-focused consultation** provides support to an individual provider (e.g., home visitor, ECI provider, ECCE teacher, or Pediatrician) or a group of providers (e.g., all home visitors in a program) as a way to address common concerns impacting more than one child or family. Offer staff new approaches and skills that can benefit and be applied to the many children and families they serve.

Examples of activities include:

- **Training workshops:** Provide training on topics related to early childhood mental health, such as early relational health, perinatal depression and anxiety, trauma-informed care, and positive behavioral supports.
- **Group reflective consultation:** Provide opportunities for staff to share challenges and gain insights in a supportive context that focuses on increasing self-awareness, including awareness of one's own values and biases and how these impact work with children and families. Opportunity for peer support and case consultation while building reflective skills.
- **Positive Behavior Management and Positive Behavior Support Strategies:** Help staff create developmentally appropriate approaches to behavior management, including understanding behaviors as communication and the role of factors such as temperament, family and cultural context, and trauma in shaping behaviors.

- **Family Engagement:** Support staff in building strong partnerships with families and create reflective space for understanding and learning from challenging communication and interactions with families.
- **Parent Education Groups:** Offer psychoeducational support to parents and caregivers on a variety of mental health-related topics.
- **Classroom Observations and Consultation:** Identify strengths and areas for improvement in the classroom environments considering the lens of early childhood mental health and development.

3. **Programmatic Consultation** focuses on improving overall program quality through addressing practices and/or policies that impact the well-being of the program staff, families, and children being served. In this type of consultation, the work is typically with program leadership or administration, and often involves program staff.

Examples of activities include:

- **Policy Review:** Evaluate program policies and procedures for their impact on child, family, and staff mental health and wellbeing.
- **Staff Wellness:** Support programs in creating a positive and supportive work environment for staff. Assess current climate, morale, perspectives, wellness-focused activities and opportunities to strengthen staff wellness. Could involve developing a staff wellness plan in partnership with leadership and staff.
- **Strengthen community collaborations** Help programs build partnerships with other systems serving infants, young children, and families, including facilitating interagency communication to improve coordination of care.
- **Strengthen program evaluation and disaggregated data collection:** Assist programs in collecting data that helps determine whether key goals are being met, particularly regarding child, family and staff wellness, including identifying and addressing disparities in practices and outcomes.
- **Sustainability Planning:** Assist programs in developing strategies to maintain positive changes after consultation ends.

***Please note:** This is not an exhaustive list, and specific services offered may vary depending on the consultant's expertise and the needs of the community.*

Menu of Services

For Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

The following is a list of some of the services that an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (IECMH Consultant) may be able to provide. Multiple services and activities can be offered at once. Unique service provision plans are developed between the IECMH Consultant and the organization to meet the specific agency needs. This is not an exhaustive list, and specific services offered may vary depending on the consultant's expertise and the needs of the community.

Consultation
Activities

Examples

Strengthening Staff Capacity	Child and Family Focused Consultation	Classroom and Group Consultation	Programmatic Consultation	Systems-Wide Orientation	Promoting Fairness and Access to Resources
Needs Assessments: Identify strengths and areas for improvement for staff working with infants, young children, and families.	Family-Centered Approach: Partner with adults in a specific child's life including their caregivers and community providers (teachers, child care providers, home visitors, ECI providers, pediatricians etc.) to understand their life experience to support their strengths and develop a plan to address the child's specific needs.	Classroom Observations: Identify strengths and areas for improvement in the classroom environment considering the lens of early childhood mental health and development.	Program Evaluation: Assess the overall social and emotional climate within a program or setting.	Community Collaboration: Build partnerships with other systems serving infants, young children, and families.	Training: Increase awareness of the diverse needs of children and families to create positive experiences for children and families from various backgrounds and circumstances.
Training Workshops: Provide training on topics related to infant mental and behavioral health, early childhood development, relational health, trauma-informed care, and positive behavioral support. Educate on the definitions of and best practices for reflective work and the impact on providers and families.	Mental Health Screening: Assist in identifying potential mental health concerns in infants, young children, and caregivers.	Positive Support Strategies: Help educators, and other early childhood providers create developmentally appropriate approaches to behavior management.	Sustainability Planning: Assist programs in developing strategies to maintain positive program-level changes after consultation ends.	Advocacy for Access: Work to increase access to mental health services for all children and families.	Data-Driven Initiatives: Support the use of data to identify and address disparities.

Strengthening Staff Capacity	Child and Family Focused Consultation	Classroom and Group Consultation	Programmatic Consultation	Systems-Wide Orientation	Promoting Fairness and Access to Resources
Reflective Practice: Facilitate self-reflection in providers and staff to support their own professional development, increase capacity for self-awareness, and consider their own values and biases as it impacts their work with children and families.	Facilitate Reflective Case Consultation: Encourage analysis of challenging situations from different perspectives and offer guidance and education on mental health related concerns to the early childhood provider.	Family-Centered Practices: Support programs in building strong partnerships with families. Integrate a family's background into classroom and home routines.	Facilitate Reflective Case Consultation: Encourage analysis of challenging situations from different perspectives and offer guidance and education on mental health related concerns to the early childhood program.	Interagency Communication: Facilitate communication and collaboration between different early childhood systems.	Community Partnerships: Connect programs to resources that can support families from all communities and backgrounds.
Collaboration: Work collaboratively with providers and program leaders to develop and implement policies that promote mental wellness and health.	Warm and Trusting Relationships: Support staff in building positive relationships with children and families.	Communication Support: Facilitate effective, positive, and nurturing communication between staff, families, and infants/young children.	Policy Review: Evaluate program policies and procedures for their impact on child and family mental health and wellbeing.	Resource Navigation: Help families access appropriate services across different systems building up the capacity of the in which program the IECMH Consultant is working.	Policy Development: Assist in creating policies that support positive experiences for all infants and young children.
Mentorship and Coaching: Offer ongoing support and guidance for staff as they implement new strategies.	Collaborate: Work with other child development specialists attending specifically to the child, family, and/or staff member's experience.	Parent Education Groups: Offer psychoeducational support to parents and caregivers on a variety of child mental and relational health topics.	Staff Wellness: Support programs in creating a positive and supportive work environment for staff.		
Data Analysis: Help programs track and address disparities and opportunities in program policies and procedures like disciplinary practices.	Resource Navigation: Connect families with appropriate mental health or other community resources.	Facilitate Reflective Case Consultation: Encourage analysis of challenging situations from different perspectives and offer guidance and education on mental health related concerns to the early childhood provider.	Disaggregated Data Collection: Assist programs in collecting data to determine whether key goals are being met, particularly regarding child, family, and staff well-being. Disaggregating data to identify and address disparities across groups.		