

# Understanding Reflective Practice and Reflective Supervision in the Context of Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

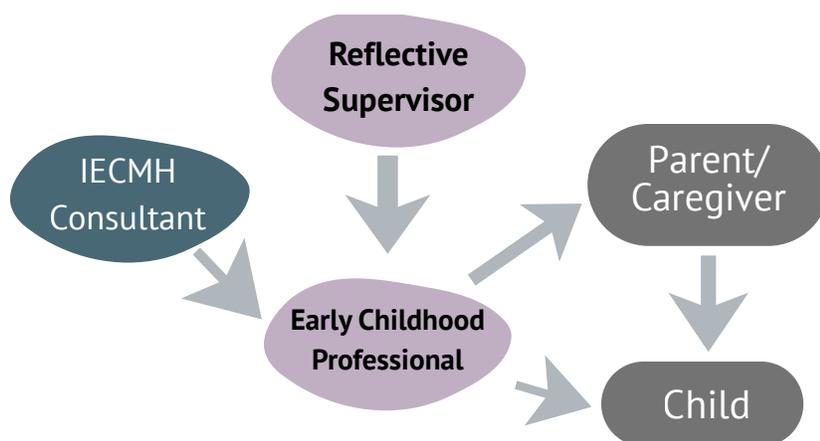
**Reflective practice is an early childhood professional's superpower.**

**Reflective Practice** is a process in which early childhood professionals<sup>1</sup> learn to pause and reflect in order to gain deeper insights and better manage challenging situations. Through reflective practice early childhood professionals become more aware of their own emotions and guiding beliefs and pause to consider different explanations of others' behaviors, often leading to more calm and intentional responses and decision-making. **Reflective practice builds professional resilience and reduces burnout and secondary traumatic stress.**

**Reflective Supervision helps early childhood professionals develop and strengthen reflective practice.**

Reflective supervision is a process in which a **trained supervisor** meets regularly with a supervisee (e.g., early childhood professional) and focuses not on evaluating performance or administrative tasks, but instead on enhancing emotional insight and reflective capacities – that is, developing and deepening reflective practice. **The context of a safe and trusting relationship** and the supervisor's own training create the opportunity for the early childhood professional to develop new knowledge and skills for problem-solving with children, families, and co-workers.

Reflective supervision and IECMHC are two avenues to help early childhood professionals develop and deepen their **reflective practice.**



**Reflective practice is at the heart of IECMHC and a strategy that mental health consultants use in their work with early childhood professionals.**

**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. The ultimate goal of IECMHC is to promote children's healthy social and emotional development and build a strong foundation for lifelong mental health and school success.

# Understanding Reflective Practice and Reflective Supervision in the Context of Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

This goal is achieved through supporting program improvements that create healthier environments; partnering with staff to deepen knowledge and skills that foster healthy relationships; and addressing developmental and behavioral concerns of children and families.

**IECMH consultants help early childhood professionals build their reflective practice skills.** The IECMH consultant creates a calm and non-judgmental space for the early childhood professional to reflect on their experiences and beliefs, recognize when situations lead them to become dysregulated or reactive, and discover new ways to respond. Early childhood professionals may seek advice because they feel they need help from someone more expert. The IECMH consultant listens, asks questions, and tries to communicate that the early childhood professional is the expert, and they have their own powerful wisdom and ability to create supportive, nurturing responses to children and families. These messages are reinforced in reflective supervision, which continues even after the consultation ends.

**Early childhood professionals who feel seen and heard and practice the skills of pausing and reflecting are more self-aware, empathic, and calm in their interactions with children and families.** This experience can even change how parents/caregivers interact with their children, a phenomenon also known as parallel practice. Reflective practice is “contagious!”



1. Early childhood professionals refers to home visiting program staff, child care center staff, Head Start staff, early intervention staff, primary care staff, etc.