

# INFANT/EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION: Illinois Guidelines for a Coordinated Approach

## WHAT IS THE ILLINOIS MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION INITIATIVE?

Illinois is designing a sustainable, universally effective IECMHC Model that will strengthen the capacity of early childhood professionals, families, programs and systems to prevent, identify, treat and reduce the impact of mental health issues in infants and young children.

### Staff receiving I/ECMHC report:

- Increased understanding of infant/early childhood mental health
- Feeling supported
- Having a place to address cases with which they are struggling
- Learning new ways to approach families

Source: Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership

## WHAT IS INFANT/EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION?

**I**nfant 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.



# INFANT/EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION: cont'd.

## Illinois Guidelines for a Coordinated Approach



### MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION INITIATIVE MODEL DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Caregiver Connections/Chaddock  
City of Chicago Dept. of Family  
and Support Services—Head  
Start/Early Head Start

Governor's Office of  
Early Childhood Development  
Illinois Association of Infant  
Mental Health

Illinois Children's Mental Health  
Partnership

Illinois Department of Human  
Services: Child Care and  
Early Intervention

Illinois Department  
of Public Health

Illinois Department of Children  
and Family Services

Illinois State Board of Education  
Ounce of Prevention Fund

Virginia Frank Center

**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.