

How Mental Health Consultants Support Child Care Programs

What is infant and early childhood mental health consultation?

Infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) is a powerful tool to promote mental health awareness, prevention, early identification, and referrals for treatment of children and families with mental health concerns. Mental health consultants help develop a culture of mental health in child care programs by building the adults' capacity to strengthen and support the healthy social and emotional development of young children.

Mental health consultants support the needs of all children by giving information to the adults who care for them on topics such as typical development, social and emotional skills, problem solving, and preventing or managing challenging behaviors.



How can a mental health consultant support my child care program?

Mental health consultants can work across all levels in a child care program:

- **Child- and Family-Focused Consultation:** The consultant builds relationships and collaborates respectfully with families and staff to understand and respond to the mental health needs of infants, young children, and families. They provide support for children with behavioral difficulties or developmental challenges. The consultant helps support the overall well-being of children and families.



- **Consultation in Classrooms and Family Child Care Homes:** The consultant partners with families and staff to promote equitable, warm, and trusting relationships. They help children and adults build strong relationships by suggesting approaches like safe environments, consistent schedules and routines, and age-appropriate social and emotional strategies.
- **Consultation in Programs:** The consultant works with administrators and staff on the program's social and emotional climate, culture of wellness, and focus on equity for infants, young children, and families.
- **Professional Development Needs of Staff:** The consultant assesses the training needs and interests of a program to provide tailored professional development for staff. The consultant may help to develop or facilitate communities of learning, which provide opportunities for self-reflection and peer-to-peer support in programs.



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What can a mental health consultant do to help staff, families, and children who are feeling stress?

Most child care staff, families, and children experience periods of stress at some point. Research tells us that predictable, collaborative interactions lead to positive outcomes for children and families, and staff. Mental health consultants can provide the following services to help reduce stress:

- Supporting parents and staff through check-ins (virtual and in person)
- Facilitating live, virtual, or recorded trainings
- Leading staff wellness activities in person or virtually
- Sharing online resources on mindfulness or stress reduction, and supporting programs in practicing the strategies and techniques
- Helping to organize in-person or virtual parent cafés for peer-to-peer support
- Sharing resources to promote the mental health of children and families

How can a mental health consultant connect my program to resources in the community?

Mental health consultants can recommend local resources, including parenting and support groups, spiritually oriented services, yoga and meditation spaces, and providers who offer mental health treatment to children and adults. Mental health resources vary from community to community, but mental health consultants are skilled in identifying formal and informal sources of support for staff, families, and children.

More Resources

- [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Your Program](#)
- [SAMHSA: About Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation \(IECMHC\)](#)
- [Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#)
- [Equity](#)
- [Key Resources for Promoting Equity and Reducing Disparities](#)
- [COVID-19 and Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation \(IECMHC\): How to Provide Services When Everything Is Different](#)
- [Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Engaging with Families](#)



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