

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Information for Families

What is infant and early childhood mental health consultation?

Early childhood programs use infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IEC-MHC) to help staff, families, and children. A mental health consultant is trained to help the adults in young children's lives. They make sure all children have the skills to talk about and manage their feelings, make friends, and solve problems. These are important skills for doing well in school. When they work with mental health consultants, adults are better at helping children, and children do better in school.



Why would an infant, toddler, or preschool-age child need mental health consultation?

Mental health consultants help adults learn how to:

- Help children show, manage, and talk about many different feelings
- Help children build strong relationships with adults and other children
- Encourage children to explore their environments

Mental health consultants can support children who may struggle with worries, anger, problem-solving, sharing or controlling their feelings or behaviors, making friends, and difficulty in their environments. Mental health consultants help teachers and families learn how to handle these challenges and support positive behaviors.

How do mental health consultants work with families?

Family members are a child's first and most important teachers. If you are concerned about your child managing their emotions or behaviors, making friends, problem solving or adjusting to new environments, you can ask your child's teacher, program manager, or family service worker about getting help from a mental health consultant.

Mental health consultants can share strategies, tips, and ideas that families can try at home to help their child. These consultants can help teachers and families work together so that children are more successful when starting school.



National Center on

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Ashley's Story

Ashley's preschool teacher was worried about her behavior. Ashley wanted to play with her classmates, but playing with other kids was hard for Ashley and made her cry. After getting permission from Ashley's parents, her teacher had a mental health consultant come to the classroom to observe the relationship between the teachers and children in the classroom.

The mental health consultant and Ashley's teachers came up with a plan that had three new strategies to try. One was helping Ashley play with one or two other children with the teacher's help. Another strategy involved teaching Ashley how to calm her body and name her feelings when she felt sad and frustrated. The third strategy focused on helping the whole class in learning and practicing friendship skills as well as new ways to calm their bodies and minds. The teacher shared these ideas with Ashley's parents so they could practice at home and the local playground.

After helping Ashley in her play with other children for a few weeks, there were fewer meltdowns, and Ashley's teacher did not need to stay as long to help Ashley. The teacher was able to use some of the same strategies to support other children in the classroom too.



Adapted from: <https://www.iecmhc.org/2021/02/16/caregivers-for-iecmhc-graphic>



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