

Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Infant and Early Childhood Consultation Messaging



THE CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR
Infant and Early Childhood
Mental Health Consultation

Contents

Elevator Speech	3
What is your 30-second message?.....	3
IECMHC Message Framework.....	3
What is the problem?	3
What is the solution?	4
What is the urgency?.....	5
Illustration: What do mental health consultants do?	6
Help caregivers connect with children and families.....	6
Strengthen home visitor skills to better support parents.	6
Equip parents to help children thrive.....	7
What are we asking?	7
Early childhood program administrators and state departments	7
State legislators and tribal communities	7
Advocacy groups.....	7
Local agencies.....	7



Elevator Speech

What is your 30-second message?

Too many kids never achieve their potential because they are labelled as having “problems” when they’re very young.

We can prevent this—if we understand what’s going on with kids and respond appropriately.

Mental health consultation equips parents and caregivers what they need to build stronger relationships with infants and young children so that they feel safe, supported, and valued.

Investing early in kids this way pays off: They are more likely to lead healthy, productive lives at a lower cost to society.

IECMHC Message Framework

What is the problem?

Too many kids never achieve their potential because they are labelled as having “problems” when they’re very young. This can happen when caregivers don’t understand what’s going on with kids and don’t know how to respond to challenging behaviors.

- ◆ *From the moment they’re born, kids develop at lightning speed. In the first few years of life, 700 to 1,000 new neurological connections form every second. This early brain development is critical to everything that follows.*
- ◆ *Children’s brains grow by processing everything and everyone around them. That’s why environment and relationships matter so much to their development.*
- ◆ *Kids need to feel safe, supported, and protected—consistently. This is true even for babies. It’s how they develop mechanisms for coping with stress, which is essential to their ability to thrive at school, in life, at work, and in relation to others. The earliest years are when it all starts.*
- ◆ *It can be difficult to consistently give kids the feeling of safety and support that they need.*
 - Child care workers typically are not trained or supported to address children’s social and emotional needs.
 - Expulsion rates among pre-school children are three times higher than for children in kindergarten through 12th grade—partly because of lack of attention to social and emotional needs.



- ◆ *Many families today are under constant stress.*
 - Parents often struggle with challenges like working multiple jobs, affording basic needs like housing and child care, and relying on public transportation.
 - Having to deal with these kinds of stresses makes it even harder for parents to focus on their children’s social and emotional needs.
 - Children pick up on the stress in their environments—and when they don’t know how to cope with stress, it affects their behavior.
- ◆ *Children of color are more likely to be perceived as problems and treated differently than white children.*
 - Black children are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended from preschool than white children. Black children account for roughly 19 percent of all preschoolers, but nearly half of all preschoolers who get suspended.

What is the solution?

We need to understand what’s going on with kids and build stronger relationships with them. That’s what mental health consultation does. It equips caregivers with the tools and insights they need to make infants and young children feel safe, supported, and valued wherever they are.

- ◆ *Mental health consultation works.*
 - Mental health consultation reduces caregivers’ stress, boosts caregivers’ confidence, keeps infants and young children in childcare, and keeps parents from missing work.
 - In one study, mental health consultation reduced pre-school expulsions by 50 percent.
- ◆ *Through mental health consultation, adults who interact with infants and children learn how to:*
 - Recognize every child’s strengths and potential.
 - Figure out what’s really going on when a kid “acts out.”
 - Respond to problem behaviors in an appropriate and positive manner.
 - Help children develop important skills, like sharing, getting along with others, and resolving conflict.
 - Connect with children in ways that promote their growth and development.



- Link families with supportive services and resources.
- ◆ *Mental health consultation is not about “fixing kids.” Nor is it therapy. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to facilitate healthy growth and development for infants and young children. Here’s how it works:*
 - Mental health consultation starts from the premise that all relationships in a child’s life matter—a lot—and works to promote both strong relationships and supportive environments for children.
 - Mental health consultation focuses on adults, so it helps children wherever they are: at home, in preschool, and in other child care settings.
 - Mental health consultation is available early—before preschool—to help new parents and caregivers understand babies’ needs.
 - Mental health consultants are highly trained. By sharing their expertise and insights with parents and caregivers, they essentially build the capacity of these adults to support healthy child development.
 - By supporting children AND parents, mental health consultation helps families thrive.

What is the urgency?

The best time to invest in putting children on a path for a healthy, productive life is NOW.

- ◆ *The earlier we act to support healthy environments for children, the more likely they are to do well in life.*
- ◆ *Mental health consultation raises the quality of child care programs and creates environments where children can thrive.*
- ◆ *Every dollar invested in early childhood development saves more than \$8 down the road.*
 - Kids who participate in quality early childhood development programs are more likely to succeed at school, and less likely to be a teen parent, drop out, abuse drugs, or be arrested for a violent crime.
- ◆ *Research shows that young children who are good at sharing, cooperating, and helping others are more likely to do well at school and go on to get jobs than kids who do not hone these skills early in life.*
 - Yet half of kids entering school are not socially and emotionally prepared to get along with others and learn.



- There's a lot at stake. Research shows that kids whose social and emotional needs aren't addressed early are at much higher risk for falling behind and getting off track, and even for developing serious health conditions, including cancer and heart disease, later in life.
 - It's on us to prepare infants and young children for success—not set them up for failure.
- ◆ *The early years are our best chance to get kids started on the right track. We have an approach that works. We need to make mental health consultation the norm for preschool and early childhood development programs.*

Illustration: What do mental health consultants do?

Help caregivers connect with children and families.

Example. A Head Start teacher was struggling with how to effectively manage the behavior of toddlers in her class who were fighting over toys, biting and hitting. The mental health consultant (MHC) worked with the teacher to create scripted stories to support development of social skills and help preschoolers learn how to get along and cope better in class. The MHC and caregiver worked collaboratively to produce a simple story, often about a problem the children are facing, and use puppets to act it out for kids. The caregiver and the MHC came up with a clear message to help kids address their anger and frustration and offered strategies to help mitigate more aggressive behaviors. The MHC modeled how to act out these stories with the kids and get them engaged, and the teacher took it from there.

Example. A child care center director needed help dealing with a 10-month old infant in her care. She was struggling with how to bond with the child, who seemed to arbitrarily cry and want to be held and other times would turn away from comfort. The director was not comfortable talking to the mother about some concerns she had about how the child was expressing feelings and interacting. The mother always seemed to be in a rush and they had not yet built a rapport. The mental health consultant was called in and she worked with the director and offered helpful hints on how to talk with parents and accentuate the positives about the child's abilities to build, climb and sit next to other children. The consultant also met directly with the parent at home and reassured the mother that the child care center wanted to work with parents to problem-solve issues together so the child would thrive while in child care. This step built trust between the teacher, the MHC, and the parent and helped strengthen an important relationship that benefitted the child.

Strengthen home visitor skills to better support parents.

Example: The MHC can help home visitors think through tough cases and reflect on why parents are behaving in certain ways that influence the child's growth and development. The MHC can help the home visitors find more effective ways to engage with parents, teach them how to read their children's cues and react in more positive ways, and improve their understanding of how the young human brain grows and develops.

Equip parents to help children thrive.

Example: Parents in Colorado said in video interviews that the MHC helped them:

1. Find resources to help their child better cope with change, frustration, anger, and disappointment;
2. Navigate ways to steer their child to behave in less aggressive ways or re-channel their child's energy;
3. Build confidence so that they felt equipped to handle challenges that before had seemed overwhelming.

What are we asking?

Early childhood program administrators and state departments

Mental health consultation works. Make mental health consultation the norm in all Early childhood and home visiting programs, and support it.

State legislators and tribal communities

Invest in kids now. Support mental health consultation for infants and children. You will strengthen all relationships that touch on young children and create better futures for them.

Advocacy groups

Spread the word: Mental health consultation strengthens young children's environments, creating better futures for them. Help us put mental health consultation in all early childhood and home visiting programs and education programs.

Local agencies

We all want the best for kids. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to do their best, so that kids are happy and stay on track. Find out how mental health consultation can help you improve your program.

