

Development of the Center of Excellence IECMHC Toolbox: Purpose, Process, and Contributors

Goal of the CoE

SAMHSA, in partnership with HRSA and ACF, established the Center of Excellence (CoE) for IECMHC in September 2015. A primary goal of the CoE is to support states, tribes, and communities in the use of IECMHC to support young children's social emotional development, understand and address challenging behavior and strengthen the capacity of staff, families, programs and systems to meet the relational needs of infants, toddlers and young children.

Focus on Infants and Toddlers

Science supports the importance of nurturing interactions between infants and adults. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child¹ says safe, strong and healthy relationships help to activate connections in the developing brain that enable communication among neurons that specialize in different kinds of brain functions. This developing brain architecture provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health, the Council reports. Relational health is a key driver in brain building. The earlier in a child's life we focus on mental health, the better.

Equity

Present day societal dynamics and issues of disparity and privilege are critically important to consider and reflect upon during the planning, implementation and evaluation of IECMHC. These conversations can feel difficult to have yet they are the medium of change. To support intentional dialogue and programmatic self-reflection, recommendations and resources are found throughout the Toolbox, and are gathered together in the Equity section as well.

Tribal Considerations

A community's story (including both historical trauma and cultural resiliency) provides the context within which a collaborative consultative process exists. In recognition of the unique characteristics of tribal communities, each section of the toolbox contains strategies and recommendations which may be helpful to tribes, a consortia of tribes, a tribal organization or an urban Indian organization engaged in the process of IECMHC.

¹ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (n.d.). A Decade of Science Informing Policy: The Story of the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. Retrieved from <http://46y5eh11fhqw3ve3ytpwxt9r.w.penguin.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/A-Decade-of-Science-Informing-Policy.pdf>



Purpose of the Toolbox

The IECMHC toolbox was created to (1) synthesize existing information about the latest research and best practices for IECMHC in home visiting and early care and education programs, and (2) develop resources and/or strategies to fill gaps in key areas of knowledge, for example, addressing racial disparities, building the workforce, and implementing IECMHC within home visiting programs and tribal communities.

The toolbox provides states, tribes, and communities with the best ideas and practices of national experts. It is an active resource for a broad audience of interested policymakers, administrators, and practitioners, who can help facilitate widespread awareness and implementation of IECMHC. It also serves as a foundation for the intensive training and technical assistance that will be provided by CoE staff to a select number of states and tribes to support them in successfully implementing, funding, evaluating, and sustaining IECMHC.

Once states, tribes and communities begin using the toolbox, the Center will harness their successes, challenges, and innovations to continue to drive the field forward. The Center will share lessons learned and case examples through useful products and online learning events for broad national audiences.

Process of Toolbox Development

The IECMHC toolbox was developed by leaders in the field of early childhood development and early childhood mental health consultation along with experts in health and education disparities. To help assure that the toolbox would meet the needs of the field and support infants, toddlers, young children, and their caregivers, the CoE conducted a gap analysis at the onset of the toolbox creation. Through this process, the team identified what existed in the IECMHC field in regard to peer-reviewed articles, briefs and white papers, videos, online learning modules and webcasts, books and chapters, toolkits, and manuals. These resources can be found throughout the toolbox.

Through the gap analysis, the team identified the core content areas that the toolbox should address. An Expert Work Group was then established, comprising 13 national experts with deep knowledge, experience, and involvement in research on and implementation of these core content areas. Together with the CoE's federal partners, the CoE team and Expert Work Group began the process of creating the toolbox.

This group was expanded to include nearly 20 additional experts, and Small Work Groups (SWGs) were established with CoE staff in the lead to develop each core content area. Throughout the year-long process, from conceptualization to delivery of the toolbox, the Expert Work Group and federal partners conducted multiple reviews of all products. More than 30 final products (PDFs, interactive products, and videos) are now included in the toolbox and posted on SAMHSA's website for widespread dissemination.

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