

Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Getting Started with Evaluation of IECMHC: How the Toolbox can Support Early Implementers Podcast

Narrator: You are listening to a podcast from the Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. Established by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, in 2015, the Center of Excellence is a combined effort of SAMHSA, the Health Resources and Services Administration, HRSA, and the Administration for Children and Families, ACF.

The Center of Excellence's mission is to support states, tribes and communities in using Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, or IECMHC, as a tool for promoting mental health and school readiness.

Cairone: I'm Karen Cairone, Technical Assistance Manager with the Center of Excellence. Today, we are talking with Dr. Deborah Perry, Director of Research and Evaluation at Georgetown University's Center for Child and Human Development. Deborah also co-authored the Research and Evaluation section of the IECMHC Toolbox and serves as an expert mentor and technical assistance specialist for the Center of Excellence.

We will be talking to Deborah about the Research and Evaluation section of the Toolbox and how you may get started with IECMHC, including setting up a plan for evaluation, choosing measures, setting benchmarks and deciding on data collection and analysis process.

Thank you for joining me today and thank you, Deborah, for being with us.

Perry: Oh, thank you for having me, Karen.

Cairone: So, can you provide a little bit of an overview of the Center of Excellence and the IECMHC Toolbox?

Perry: Sure. So the Center of Excellence was funded by SAMHSA, with their sister agencies, HRSA and ACF, and the Center of Excellence really serves as a hub nationally for all of the work that is going on around Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. The Toolbox was the culmination of a year's worth of work, during which time the Center was initially formed, and reflects the expertise of people all around the country who have been working in this field for many, many years.

Cairone: Great. So you give a little bit of an overview of how the Toolbox itself came to be. Can you briefly explain how the Research and Evaluation section of the Toolbox was conceptualized?

Perry: Absolutely. So, we have always, as a Center, believed that it's very important to ground the work in mental health consultation in a strong evidence base, and so I think the Research and Evaluation section of the Toolbox really builds from that foundation. It also, I think, reflects the Center's commitment to ensuring that equity is really infused throughout our efforts. And, as you know, Karen, some of this work in mental health consultation was really mobilized around some very significant disparities that we saw in rates of expulsion for young children of color, and so I think those are some of the sort of founding principles of the Research and Evaluation section.

Cairone: Excellent. Well, thank you. What would you say would be some typical challenges to somebody brand new to IECMHC? What would they face when they are embarking and designing their implementation and evaluation?

Perry: Yeah, it's a great question. I mean, I think one of the things that everybody faces when they are starting an implementation evaluation is really starting with their theory of change. So whether you are doing mental health consultation in early care and education, or in home visiting, in a tribal community or in a rural or an urban community, each of those contexts poses specific kinds of challenges and so it's really important for the evaluators to really partner with the program folks to articulate their theory of change. And, you know, your theory of change is really how you think mental health consultation is going to lead to the outcomes that you and policymakers and other stakeholders are interested in. So, I think that's often something that people don't pause to reflect on collectively as a program and evaluation team, and really can then lead to challenges down the road.

Cairone: Absolutely. How would you think the Toolbox would particularly be able to help with these challenges? Are there specific sections or resources that you might suggest to folks that are just getting started with the theory of change?

Perry: Yes, definitely. We actually spent a lot of time thinking about this when we were conceptualizing the Toolbox and so we have a section on theory of change, and we have some examples of theories of change that other programs have articulated around mental health consultation. We also have a section on logic models and sometimes people who just starting out don't really understand the difference between a logic model and a theory of change, so we have some really good examples of logic models. And we actually have a logic model interactive module that people can go through and kind of learn about the different components of a logic model, and how a theory of change fits into a logic model structure so I would definitely encourage people to kind of start with that if they were just getting started with the Research and Evaluation section.

Cairone: Excellent. Those are great suggestions. What advice would you share with others about just the Center of Excellent Toolbox resources in general?

Perry: Well, I think that the Toolbox really represents a culmination of a lot of work of the Expert Work Group that was pulled together, as well as states and communities that have been doing this work many years, and I think what's most important from my perspective about the Toolbox is it has something for everybody. So somebody who is just coming to mental health consultation for the first time, there are resources that can help orient them and help them get familiar with approaches and different models. For people who have been in the field for a long time, there are other resources that can help them think more deeply about different aspects of the work, whether it's research and evaluation or professional development, competencies and -- and certainly the equity issues, I think are really important.

Cairone: I like how you said that there is something in there for everyone and I think just to shift gears a little bit, talk a little bit about the specific needs within the Research and Evaluation section related to home visiting. Anything you can share with us there that you think would be helpful for the home visiting population?

Perry: Yeah. You know, the evidence base for mental health consultation has substantially been formed in early care and education, specifically childcare and, to a lesser extent, Head Start. And so the implementation of mental health consultation in Home visiting is relatively new and there hasn't been as much rigorous evaluation around mental health consultation in Home visiting, so I think that reflects sort of a leading edge in the Research and Evaluation section. That being said, we do have some examples of a logic model specifically for mental health consultation in Home visiting that came from a LAUNCH grantee in Multnomah County, Oregon, and there are some other descriptions of work that has been done in the Home visiting settings that folks can draw upon to inform their research evaluation efforts.

Cairone: That's great. You answered my next question, it was going to be "Are there Toolbox resources that can help with this?" so I think that's -- that's excellent. It's good to know that there is a lot in here and, like you said, something for everyone.

Could you share with us just a little bit -- I know you know we have pilot sites throughout the country that we are working with now, territories and states who are using Toolbox resources and I'm just wondering if you would share a little bit about how they might be able to design and refine their own Research and Evaluation plans as a pilot site?

Perry: Yeah. I think that the Toolbox overall offers a lot of opportunities for folks who are thinking about Research and Evaluation and designing a Research and Evaluation plan, and one of the things that I think isn't in the Research and Evaluation section that can really help pilot sites get off on a good start is the Models Interactive. So, that really helps folks walk through the specific parts of their program, whether it's the target population or the settings that they are going to be implementing mental health consultation in, or the specific vision they have for their program. All of those things map very closely to different aspects of a logic model and can help people articulate their theory of change, so I think the combination of the models interactive with the logic models interactive are a really good place for pilot sites to start using the Toolbox to design and refine their Research and Evaluation plans.

Cairone: That's excellent. Thanks, Deborah. The feedback that we are collecting from the pilot sites, how do you see this continuing to shape the field of research and evaluation as it's relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation?

Perry: I think one of the exciting things about the work of the Center of Excellence is our work with pilot sites and we've selected pilot sites that include tribal sites, places where they are going to be implementing mental health consultation in home visiting, as well as early care and education and Head Start settings. And so the variety, the diversity of sites -- tribal sites and rural sites, urban sites, means that we are going to be building up the evidence base for what works and for whom in what kinds of settings. And -- and I think in particular, one of the unanswered questions that we have in the field right now has to do with dosage, so how often do we need mental health consultants working with their consultees to see the kinds of outcomes that policymakers and program managers are interested in. So as pilot sites continue to implement and learn from the Toolbox, we'll be able to feed information like that back into the Toolbox, particularly in Research and Evaluation.

Cairone: And then, finally, just a user listening to this podcast today had just five minutes to go dig into the Research and Eval section of the Toolbox and get started, where would you suggest somebody start with that amount of time?

Perry: You know, if I only had five minutes I might actually start with grounding myself in the evidence base. There's a number of resources that we have available to folks to kind of let them know what the state of the evidence is, and that can be a good way to kind of get a good frame on the work to really understand that often with mental health consultation we are measuring outcomes at multiple levels, and to help people sort of get ready to think about their theory of change.

Cairone: Well, thank you Deborah for your time today. You went through a lot of good information for those beginning and just getting started with Research and Eval in IECMHC covering theories of change and talking about developing your logic model and also just working through some of the tools and model interactive resources that we have within the Toolbox as well, so I just want to really thank you for your time to share with us and share your expertise, both as a developer of the Toolbox and as someone out there working with others in the field as well.

Perry: Oh, thank you so much, Karen, for the opportunity to get people excited about the work that's being done.

Narrator: Thank you for listening to the podcast. For more on Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, including the Center of Excellence Toolbox, which is a collection of over sixty original resources put together by the Center with experts in the field. Please visit us at our website, www.samhsa.gov/iecmhc. That's www.samhsa.gov/iecmhc.

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