Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Programs
Acknowledgements

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• The Alabama Department of Mental Health
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• The Alabama Partnership for Children
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Adverse Childhood Experiences Can Impact Health Later On

Intervening early on is critical for achieving the best outcomes

Source: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, CDC ACE Study Infographic
Early Childhood is a Critical Time for Brain Development

Children’s brains grow by processing everything and everyone around them. That’s why environment and relationships matter so much to their development.

Investing in child development in the first five years of a child’s life builds a foundation for a more successful and viable society, according to brain science.

Brain development starts at conception into adulthood.

Brains are most flexible or “plastic” in the first few years.

Early experiences shape the foundation for learning, health and behavior later on.

Toxic stress is damaging to brain development and can lead to long-term problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

Epigenetics is an emerging area of scientific research that shows how environmental influences—children's experiences—actually affect the expression of their genes. ...This collection of chemical marks is known as the “epigenome.” The different experiences children have rearrange those chemical marks.

Sources: Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, National Conference of State Legislators, NGA Center for Best Practices
Families’ Stress Can Affect Infants and Young Children Too

Some parents struggle with juggling multiple responsibilities, affording basic needs, and relying on public transportation.

Dealing with these stresses can make it harder for parents, family members and communities to focus on children’s social and emotional needs.

Children pick up on stress, which affects behavior if they don’t know how to cope with stress.
Our Youngest Might Lack the Words to Express Their Needs

Some infants and young children lack the words to express when they feel overwhelmed.

Children who are labeled as defiant, too quiet, “naughty,” or overly clingy are telling us, through their behaviors, that they need our help.

It can be hard to know the best way to respond when they are having a hard time.
Caregivers Need Tools and Support for Our Little Ones

Childcare providers, EI and other Home Visitors, preschool teachers, families and communities could use more training and support to address infants and young children’s social and emotional needs. Yet for preschool teachers, for example, research shows that:

- **Only 1 in 5**
  Preschool teachers have received specific training on facilitating children’s social and emotional growth in the past year

- **Only 34%**
  Teachers believe they have the necessary skills to meet their students’ mental health needs

- **Only 23%**
  Preschool programs have onsite or scheduled visits from mental health professionals

A New Standard of Care for Infants and Young Children

Infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) consultants help caregivers support healthy growth and development in our young children.

It’s not about “fixing” children or providing therapy. Mental health consultants:

- Promote strong relationships and a supportive environment for caregivers, such as EI and Home Visitors, childcare professionals, along with families and communities.
- Partner with parents and caregivers to understand what babies and young children are telling us with their behaviors, and co-create solutions.
- Equip caregivers with the tools and insights to develop healthy emotional and social behaviors in infants and young children.
- Help our children feel safe, supported and valued.
DEFINITION OF INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation is a problem-solving and capacity-building intervention implemented within a collaborative relationship between a professional consultant with a mental health expertise and one or more individuals with other areas of expertise or parenting responsibilities.

It functions along the promotion – prevention – intervention continuum.
Consultant Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

- Child development theory and effective practices
- Developmental disabilities and early intervention/special education practices
- Effective communication and relationship building
- Adherence to ethical standards and professionalism
- Trauma-informed practice
- Reflective practice
Mental Health Consultants Support Providers and Families

• Provide support early on – before preschool – to help new parents and caregivers understand babies' needs and recognize that all relationships in a child's life matters.

• Promote trusting, respectful relationships with providers, families and communities to help children at home, in preschool, and in other childcare settings.

• Understand how culture (e.g., beliefs, values, attitudes, biases, and experiences), equity, and environment shape relationships and behaviors, and influence settings and communities in important and meaningful ways.

Everyone brings their wisdom to the circle and learns from one another.
IECMHC Services are Having a Real Impact

Positive Outcomes

- Providers who partner with IECMH services are more likely to implement positive strategies and less likely to leave their fields.
- Parents and caregivers involved with these services miss less work and report lower levels of stress.
- Nearly 90% of home visitors with IECMH support are more knowledgeable about children’s emotional and behavioral needs and follow-up services available for behavioral issues.
- Some studies have shown that expulsions are reduced by 47% when preschoolers are given access to mental health services.
- 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 children without these skills.
- Every dollar invested in early childhood development saves more than $8.00 down the road.

Sources: David Anderson, ADHD and Behavior Disorders Center at the Child Mind Institute, Infant Mental Health Journal, Michigan State University, home visiting study published in Pediatrics by Barbara Dillon Goodson, Mary Mackraine, Deborah F. Perry, Kevin O’Brien, Margaret K. Gwaltney
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Thank You