

Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Considerations

Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health (I/ECMH) consultants are an essential element to quality early childhood programming and can be reflective thought partners for program supervisors and staff as they navigate and deepen their work with families. I/ECMH consultants have a particular focus on reflective practice, supporting the parent-child relationship and helping professionals to step back and consider how their working relationships with families, as well as supervisors' relationships with staff, ultimately impact the family and child.

If you are considering hiring an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health consultant to work with your program team, the following role information may help with your consultant selection process.

The Illinois Model for Infant/Early Childhood Consultation recommends that the consultant:

- Holds an advanced degree in child development (specifically early childhood), social work, counseling, psychology, family and marriage therapy, psychiatry, or nursing
- Holds a minimum of Master's Degree (licensure optional)
- Has a minimum of 5 years of experience in areas related to infant and early childhood development and mental health
- Shows a demonstrated ability to engage in reflective practice and maintain a consultative stance

The Illinois Model includes seven competencies to be demonstrated by I/ECMH Consultants:

1. Knowledge of early childhood development, mental health, and early care and education
2. Ability to build relationships and collaboratively engage with families, providers, programs and systems
3. Ability to work effectively throughout diverse cultures and communities
4. Ability to effectively and sensitively gather information
5. Ability to collaboratively develop a plan and shared measures of success
6. Knowledge of community systems and resources and ability to develop partnerships
7. A commitment to ethical behavior and reflective practice

The consultant's own continuing education and professional development contributes a great deal to insuring the ongoing fidelity and effectiveness of their work with individuals and programs. The parallel process makes evident the need for consultants to commit to the process of stepping back and reflecting on their work with individuals and programs. With this knowledge, there is a commitment to provide consultants with the following continuous learning opportunities and it is worth keeping in mind the time needed for consultant professional development as you negotiate contracts and services with consultants: (recommended minimum frequency in parentheses)

- Reflective Consultation – Group and/or Individual (monthly)
- I/ECMH Consultant Professional Development and Training (quarterly or as needed)
- Infant Mental Health Learning Group (quarterly)