



All Hands on Deck

Partnering with Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultants to Implement the Pyramid Framework

IECMH Consultant Qualifications

- ◀ Master's degree and a license in a mental health field
- ◀ Multiple years of experience in infant, child and family mental health
- ◀ Experience in the field of early childhood

IECMH consultants are valuable partners in supporting CA Teaching Pyramid Framework implementation. IECMH consultants bring a unique set of qualifications and skills to support young children's social emotional development by building the capacity of early childhood leaders and staff.

IECMH Consultants Can Directly Support Teaching Pyramid Framework Implementation

An IECMH consultant can directly support CA Teaching Pyramid Framework implementation by: serving on the program leadership team to help to guide program-wide CA Teaching Pyramid Framework implementation; providing training in Teaching Pyramid practices; coaching the program leadership team in Teaching Pyramid implementation; and supporting Teaching Pyramid coaches including the use of Teaching Pyramid tools such as the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (T-POT) or the Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPIITOS) measurement tools.

Contributing to the Teaching Pyramid Program Leadership Team

An IECMH consultant can join the team of program leaders to make decisions, share resources and facilitate implementation of the CA Teaching Pyramid practices. An IECMH consultant can contribute valuable knowledge about child development and strategies for supporting adults and children to make behavior changes.

Providing Teaching Pyramid Training and Serving as a Teaching Pyramid Program Coach

An IECMH consultant who is authorized as a CA Teaching Pyramid trainer and/or coach can coach the leadership team to implement the CA Teaching Pyramid to fidelity. An IECMH consultant can guide the implementation of the critical elements of program-wide implementation and the implementation of procedures, supports, and collaboration with services that will address the needs of children and families in the program.

Supporting Teaching Pyramid Authorized Coaches

CA Teaching Pyramid authorized coaches support teachers to implement CA Teaching Pyramid practices. They work with staff to select goals related to implementing specific strategies and practices. Occasionally, authorized coaches may feel challenged if staff are not working towards implementing the goals they've selected. An IECMH consultant can work with coaches to understand some of the factors that may contribute or get in the way of teachers implementing Teaching Pyramid practices.

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IECMH Consultants use Teaching Pyramid Practice Measures

IECMH consultants trained in the use of TPOT and TPITOS can conduct observations in the classroom and summarize data for use by the authorized coach or leadership team.

IECMH Consultants Supplement Teaching Pyramid Implementation

An IECMH consultant can also supplement CA Teaching Pyramid implementation in a number of ways including building the capacity of staff and leadership in programs to support: family engagement; exploring issues related to equity and disparity; a reduction in suspensions and expulsions by guiding the use of appropriate interventions; mental health related needs of children and families (e.g., trauma, anxiety, or family conflict); comprehensive services; the design and implementation of social, emotional, and behavioral screening and assessment activities; and staff wellness. An IECMH consultant brings a mental health perspective to understanding of a child and family's behaviors and relationships.

Engaging Families

The IECMHC can support early childhood program leadership to explore their program policies and practices related to how they welcome and engage all families. Building positive relationships with each family is an essential component of any early childhood program that promotes social emotional development of young children and the first tier of the CA Teaching Pyramid. IECMH consultants can also support staff and program leaders to explore how they engage a particular family that they may be concerned about. An IECMH can help an early childhood program and a family connect around their common mutual interest – the child in the program.

Exploring Issues Related to Equity and Disparity

IECMH Consultants help staff develop their capacity to recognize and assess their own implicit biases and implement culturally responsive practices. IECMH consultants assist staff and leaders to explore how biases may inadvertently influence perceptions and behavior. IECMH consultants support the capacity of others to work cross-culturally with the goal of positively influencing practice, policymaking, administrative functioning, and service delivery. They help programs to systematically involve families, key stakeholders, and communities in these efforts.

Reducing Suspension and Expulsion

IECMH Consultants can help programs reduce expulsions and suspensions. Consultants help programs build program leaders' and staff's capacity to support children exhibiting challenging behaviors. Consultants help staff understand children's behavior and gain confidence and competence to respond effectively to children's challenging behavior. When IECMH consultants understand the CA Teaching Pyramid practices, they can help teachers individualize those practices to support children with challenging behavior.



Trauma and Early Childhood

Early childhood educators are likely to encounter children and families who have experienced significant trauma. Twenty-six percent of children witness or experience trauma before age 4¹. Young children who have experienced trauma may have difficulty controlling their impulses, regulating their emotions, and engaging appropriately with peers and adults. IECMH consultants can help classrooms and programs to become more trauma informed to ensure staff understand the impact of trauma in the lives of children and families and work to create safe, nurturing, responsive and predictable environments for children.

Supporting Children and Families' Mental Health or Other Social Service Needs

An IECMH consultant brings expertise related to mental health. For example, an IECMH consultant can help programs and staff to:

- understand the impact of trauma on a child, family or early childhood center;
- explore and develop strategies for a child experiencing mental health concerns such as anxiety or depression;
- support families and staff in the aftermath of a community or natural disaster;
- assist staff understand adult mental health concerns such as depression and how depression or other mental health concerns may impact teaching, caregiving and parenting; and
- make referrals for families needing additional support services such as counseling, substance use treatment, parenting support, crisis intervention services, or other services.

Support the Program in the Design and Implementation of Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Screening and Assessment

The routine use of social, emotional, and behavioral screening and assessment is critically important to the early identification of children with developmental needs and the delivery of intervention. The IECMH can assist the program in the design of procedures for informing families about screening and assessment activities, collaborating with families during screening and assessment, the selection of screening and assessment tools, assist with conducting screening and assessment, and establishing a process for referrals for intervention services.

Supporting Staff Wellness

Supporting young children's social and emotional development depends largely on staff's ability to form nurturing and responsive relationships with children and their families, regulate their own emotions, and implement evidenced based teaching strategies. Staff's ability to engage in these practices is significantly related to their own physical and mental well-being. IECMH consultants can assist program leaders and staff to explore strategies for supporting and enhancing staff well-being. IECMH consultants can assist staff in adopting strategies such as mindfulness or other stress reducing strategies that have been found to improve the quality of teachers' relationships with young children.²

Challenging Situations Require all Hands on Deck

The Teaching Pyramid and IECMH consultation can work together to support early childhood programs to develop a comprehensive understanding of a child's social and emotional needs. Children's challenging behavior can cause significant stress for teachers and families. Children's behaviors are at times related to a complex set of challenging life circumstances. Often teachers and parents feel they have exhausted their capacities and "tried everything"—they find themselves unsure of what to do and how to help. The benefit of having a team of professionals with multiple perspectives (i.e., mental health, early childhood, special education, family service, etc.) provides the most comprehensive approach to address a child's and family's needs.

¹ Briggs-Gowan, M.J., J.D. Ford, L. Fraleigh, K. McCarthy, & A.S. Carter. 2010. "Prevalence of Exposure to Potentially Traumatic Events in a Healthy Birth Cohort of Very Young Children in the Northeastern United States." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 23 (6): 725–33.

² Becker, B., Gallagher, K., & Whitaker, R. (2017). Teachers' dispositional mindfulness and the quality of their relationships with children in Head Start classrooms. *School Psychology*, 65, 40-53. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2017.06.004>