

**Rooted Together: Renewing and Growing in IECMH Consultation**

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**Session Objectives**

After this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify and articulate the **core principles and values** that guide IECMH consultation across settings.
- Reflect on and strengthen their own **consultative stance** to enhance effectiveness with diverse partners.
- Apply strategies that support **reflective practice** and sustain the consultant's **well-being**.
- Integrate new **insights from peers** and current research to adapt consultation approaches to evolving challenges.
- Discover and evaluate new tools, frameworks, and **resources** to support IECMH consultation practice.
- **Build connections** with other consultants to foster ongoing professional support and shared learning.



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**Why This Training Matters Now**

- IECMH is complex and specialized
- Being able to clearly **name and align with core IECMHC values** helps consultants distinguish the role from adjacent roles
- The consultative stance enhances **trust, collaboration, and meaningful change** in the systems that serve young children.
- Using reflection helps process **emotional responses** and **avoid burnout**.
- Demand for trauma-informed, culturally responsive practice

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### Why This Matters Now

**Rising Levels of Provider Burnout**

- In 2022, the **American Psychological Association** found that **45% of psychologists** could not meet demand, and **60% reported burnout symptoms**.
- A 2023 survey of **behavioral health providers** (NIHCM Foundation) found **nearly half** described their burnout as "severe."

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### Why Does this Matter Now: Professional Learning as Prevention

**Training can:**

- Enhance knowledge and confidence
- Normalize reflective practice
- Reduce isolation
- Improve job satisfaction
- Protect against burnout and compassion fatigue

"Our sessions have given me the information I need to speak more confidently at my job about student mental health supports"

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### Activity

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**Activity: Let's Connect**  
**Have conversations with 2 different people (5-7 mins each)**

- Why did you choose IECMHC?
- Where do you receive mentorship and support for IECMHC?
- How have you learned about IECMHC (any favorite resources)?
- What do you know about how and why IECMHC was developed?

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**What is IECMHC?**

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**IECMHC – What is it? (in lay terms)**

- IECMHC is a **prevention-based** approach that pairs a mental health consultant with adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as child care, preschool, home visiting, early intervention, and their homes.
- Mental health consultation is not about “fixing kids.” Nor is it therapy. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to **facilitate** children’s **healthy social and emotional development**

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### IECMHC –What is it? (for mh people)

- The **indirect practice** pairs a mental health professional with other providers who offer services to young children & their families to promote, and when needed, enhance the social-emotional well-being of all involved participants.
- The **capacity building endeavor** is aimed at increasing **social-emotional awareness** & knowledge, enhancing **reflective confidence and competence**, and promoting **culturally and linguistically responsive and equity-informed practice** in the adults who support young children.

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### What IECMHC Is and Is Not

What IECMHC Is	What IECMHC Is Not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Indirect service that benefits young children</li> <li>■ Promotion-based and prevention-based</li> <li>■ Provided by a master’s-prepared mental health professional</li> <li>■ Service that builds the capacity of families and professionals</li> <li>■ Service that supports and sustains healthy social and emotional development of young children</li> <li>■ Delivered in a variety of child-serving systems (early childhood education, home visiting, etc.)</li> <li>■ Delivered in a natural or community setting</li> <li>■ Focused on staff well-being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Direct service and/or therapy</li> <li>■ Focused solely on families</li> <li>■ Always provided in a center-based setting</li> <li>■ Group therapy</li> <li>■ Psychological treatment for staff, families, or children</li> <li>■ Training</li> </ul>

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### IECMHC –Where is it Being Implemented

- Early Care and Education
- Early Intervention
- Home Visiting
- Child Welfare
- Hospital Settings – Perinatal programs, NICU
- Primary Care
- Homeless Shelter
- Infant Toddler Court Programs

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### IECMHC - History

- Where did it come from?
- What do you know about the history of IECMHC?



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### IECMHC History

- Developed out of necessity by Gerald Caplan in 1949.
- Inability to provide therapy to all who were referred gave rise to the indirect method of providing mental health services.
- Focused on improving the functioning of caregivers, which in turn improved outcomes for children

Kadija Johnston, 2024

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### IECMHC History Key Points

- Rooted in primary **prevention** - preventing mental illness and promoting mental health in the population at large
- **Voluntary, nonhierarchical & collaborative** (Caplan, 1964)
- "not only in order to help the consultee with *his* current professional problem in relation to a specific client or program, but also in order to add to his knowledge and to lessen areas of misunderstanding, **so that he may be able in the future to deal more effectively on his own with this category of problem.**" (Caplan, 1962)

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### IECMHC- History (last slide 😊)

Caplan emphasized:

- "Lack of understanding
- Lack of skill
- Lack of objectivity ("simulates in *his* personal sensitivity")
- Lack of confidence and self-esteem ("illness, fatigue, inexperience, infirmity")"

Caplan (1962)

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### Limitations – Early Mental Health Consultation

- Deficit focused
- What was lacking resided within the consultee



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### Caplan Noticed - Critical Importance of Attending to Caregivers

Caregiver well-being is **fundamental** to supporting children's mental health. When caregivers—such as parents, teachers, and early childhood providers—are emotionally regulated, supported, and mentally healthy, they are better able to form **nurturing, responsive relationships** with children. These relationships are the foundation for healthy brain development, emotional regulation, and resilience in early childhood.

- Emotional regulation
- Stress transmission
- Model healthy coping
- Reduces burnout and turnover

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**Let's Reflect:**

Consider where we came from and why it matters

- What is something that resonates with you about the history of IECMHC?
- What is part of the history that is still a challenge or barrier of IECMHC?

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**Core Values of IECMHC and Processes of IECMHC**

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**Enter IECMH- Core Values**

- Strength-based
- Relational framework
- Cultural context
- Brain science and development
- Importance of attachment



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**IECMHC – What do I do?  
(Activities/Processes – CoE IECMHC)**

Build the consultant/consultee relationship (ongoing)  
Structure the process for consultation

- Clarify role and orient to consultation
- Identify the central issue(s) or challenge(s) to be addressed in consultation
- Initially, and repeatedly, gather information and explore context to develop a shared understanding
- Collaboratively develop a shared vision and plan for consultation
- Consider observation, problem-solving, offering resources/ ideas

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**IECMHC – What do I do?  
(Processes/Activities – CoE IECMHC)**

- Support consultees as they implement the vision/plan
- Recommend and/or facilitate linkages for children, families, and/or consultees to supplemental services or supports that are contextually, culturally, and linguistically appropriate whenever possible
- Monitor progress, make adjustments, and address new issues as needed
- Support and empower consultees through staff transitions, shifts in the focus of consultation, or case closures (in time-limited consultation)

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**What is Unique about IECMHC?  
How is it Different from Coaching and Therapy?**

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Coaching	IECMHC
Building skills, implementing effective teaching strategies to improve child outcomes in learning and development	Strengthen the <b>social-emotional well-being of children</b> by enhancing the <b>capacity of caregivers and systems</b> to promote healthy relationships and emotional development.
Skill development, instructional practice, and fidelity to a model or curriculum	Focus on the <b>mental health and emotional climate</b> of the caregiving relationship and environment Supporting <b>reflective practice, emotional insight, and systemic change</b> rather than direct instruction
Emphasis on what the adult does to promote child learning and behavior	Works at the <b>child, classroom, program, and system levels</b> Primary Lens: <b>Relational and mental health</b> Focused on <i>how</i> the adult feels and connects in relation to the child and others

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Aspect	IECMH Consultation	IECMH Therapy
Primary Focus	Caregiver/program capacity	Child-caregiver relationship
Goal	Promote mental health and prevent problems	Treat mental health or relational disorders
Client	Adult(s) or system serving the child	Child-caregiver dyad/family
Setting	Early childhood programs, childcare, home visiting	Clinical or home-based therapy sessions
Nature	Preventive, systems-level	Clinical, treatment-oriented

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**IECMHC Research- Does it Work?**

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**IECMHC – Latest Research**

- Increase in protective factors and fewer behavioral concerns over the course of the consultation period
- Most notable among children initially assessed as having fewer protective factors or higher behavioral concerns at the beginning of the consultation period
- Teachers' improved classroom practices, with notable effect sizes, as well as perceptions of children's behavioral difficulties

Kadik FZ, Eng E, Pappas K, Berger S. (2025)

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**IECMHC – Latest Research**

- Reduced programmatic rates of expulsion, as well as reduced expulsion risk for individual children
- Improved teacher self-efficacy
- Reduced child externalizing behaviors
- Improved social-emotional competencies
- More positive teacher-child relationships

Silver HC, Davis Schoch AE, Loomis AM, Park CE, Zinsler KM, 2022

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**But, Wait...**

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**Sometimes I Feel like an Imposter**

- Normalize the discomfort
- Remind yourself of what you know and the positive feedback you have received
- Embrace “not knowing”

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**Sometimes I Feel Like an Imposter**

- Focus on relationships over expertise
- You don't need to be an expert on everything
- Build a reflective practice
- Remind yourself you have 8,000-15,000 hours of training and practice 😊

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**Activity: How do I describe it to others (so they understand)?**

- Highlight the uniqueness of IECMHC – how is it different than therapy, how is it different than coaching (are there coaches in your setting?), how does it draw on your mental health experience and training, part of a multi-disciplinary team
- What is your pitch to your audience – need to be able to articulate/frame what it is, how it helps, and why someone would want it

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### Which Capacities are Crucial to the Care of Young Children

- Reflection, curiosity
- Empathy
- Family engagement
- Co-regulation/ self-regulation
- Wellness
- Trauma-informed care
- Diversity-informed practice
- Knowledge and skill about social-emotional development, behavior change, classroom management, etc.

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### What Happens When We Rush to Fix

• Add picture



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### What Happens When We Rush to Fix

- Miss the Chance to Understand the "Why" Behind the Behavior
- Can Feel Disempowering
- Limits Learning and Reflection
- Misses Opportunities to
  - Collaborate and Honor the Consultee's Expertise
  - Seek Buy-In
  - Understand the Complexity of the Situation

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**How do you Build these Capacities**

- **Reflection**
  - Pause
  - Reflect on your own reaction
  - Create safety
  - Open-ended questions, curiosity: "What do you notice about your reaction? What do you guess the child is trying to communicate?"
  - Focus on feelings, not just behaviors. "I notice you are frustrated. I wonder how that impacts the child's sense of safety."
  - Reflect on the child, on yourself, and on the relationship
  - Inward, outward, together
  - Problem solving
  - Encouraging strength and growth

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**How do you Build these Capacities**

**Reflection**

How do your questions and reflections encourage **curiosity**?

"How might the director feel?"

"How might the parent feel?" "What do you think the parent believes about this situation?" "How do you think the parent understands this?"

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**How do you Build these Capacities**

**Empathy**

- Model empathy- offer empathy to the consultee: "That sounds really hard. What was it like for you in that moment?"
- When people *experience* empathy, they're more likely to *offer* it to others.
- Normalize and name barriers to empathy- "it is so hard to feel empathetic to a child/family/co-worker when you are exhausted yourself."

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### How do you Build these Capacities

#### Family Engagement

- Supporting staff to know families
- Model reflective, curious questions
- Focus on the strengths of a family (and explore context, challenges, culture)
- Focus on the child (strengths, interests, observations, using non-judgement/ non-blaming)
- Create space for reflection on emotions and biases

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### How do you Build these Capacities

#### Co-regulation/ Regulation (it's not just for kids)

- Pay attention to your own regulation
- Be a calm presence (try not to inhale the emotion)
- Validate their emotion (even when you disagree- this can be hard)
- Slow down the conversation
- Ask permission – "Is it most



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### How do you Build these Capacities

#### Staff Wellness



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## Let's Move – Attention to our Own Wellness



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## How do you build these Capacities?

### Trauma Informed Care

<b>REALIZING</b>	<b>RECOGNIZING</b>	<b>RESPONDING</b>	<b>RESISTING RE-TRAUMATIZATION</b>
Understanding how trauma impacts children, families, staff, and communities	Seeing a person's behavior struggles and saying, "This makes sense based on what I know about brain science."	Implementing systems that build adult skills and mindsets so they can respond to children in ways that heal.	Implementing systems that support staff in their programs by teaching them skills to manage stress, to self-regulate, and to become self- and socially aware.
Understanding growth and healing are possible	Asking "What happened to this person?" instead of asking "What is wrong with this person?"		

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## How do you Build these Capacities

### Diversity Informed Care

- How adults interpret a child's behavior depends on their beliefs about emotion, discipline, and development.
- IECMHC can either **reinforce inequities** (if it ignores these dynamics) or **interrupt them** (if it explicitly names and addresses them).
- Self-Reflection
- Culture Humility
- Explore Power and Privilege
- Elevate and Partner with Families
- Address Systemic Barriers

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### How do you Build these Capacities?

#### Social Emotional Development & Classroom Strategies

- What do you lean into most?
- What strategies are most needed?
- What strategies are teachers & families most interested in?

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### Case Discussion– Let’s Practice Reflecting and Building Capacity

- At your table together, read the case and answer the related questions
- If time allows, choose a second case and answer the related questions
- Choose a recorder and reporter for your group



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## RESOURCES

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### Center of Excellence IECMHC Resources

- Consultative Stance resource brief
  - IECMHC Foundational Modules
  - IECMHC conference and webinar materials
- <https://www.iecmhc.org/>




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### CoE – IECMHC Resource

Competencies  
Self Assessments- IECMHC Competencies

- Assessment 1: Consultant Role
- Assessment 2: Foundational Knowledge
- Assessment 3: Equity and Cultural Sensitivity
- Assessment 4: Reflective Practice
- Assessment 5: Child- and Family-Focused
- Assessment 6: Classroom- and Home-Focused Consultation
- Assessment 7: Programmatic Consultation
- Assessment 8: Systems Orientation

[https://www.iecmhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IECMHC-competencies\\_w-copyright-updated.pdf](https://www.iecmhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IECMHC-competencies_w-copyright-updated.pdf)

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### Mental Health Consultation Monthly Office Hours

4<sup>th</sup> Monday of every month|  
1:00 pm–2:30 pm ET  
Hosted by: OHS National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety  
Location: Online  
Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation National Office Hours

This series of national office hours highlights components of successful infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) in Head Start programs. Join this monthly forum to ask questions about IECMHC. Kadja Johnston, LICSW, and Amy Hunter, LICSW, from the National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety (NCHBHS) answer questions from participants and offer in-depth information on a variety of topics related to IECMHC.

Register under **Coming Events** on [Headstart.gov](https://www.headstart.gov)

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### Mental Health Consultation in Your Program

Explore these resources to learn about MHC, how to choose a consultant, and how to offer effective consultation services.

<https://headstart.gov/mental-health/article/mental-health-consultation-your-program>



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THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (iPD) PORTFOLIO COURSE CATALOG



### MHC iPD Course

<https://headstart.gov/professional-development/individualized-professional-development-ipd-portfolio/course-catalog>

National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Early Learning

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### IECMHC: Pyramid Model Resources

- What is IECMHC? (fact sheet)
- Understanding IECMHC and the Pyramid Model (fact sheet)
- All Hands on Deck: Partnering with Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants to Implement the Pyramid Model (fact sheet)
- Partnering with IECMHC Consultants to Implement the Pyramid Model (webinar)
- Integrating IECMHC and the Pyramid Model (webinar)



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### Compassion Fatigue & Burnout – Signs to Watch For- in Yourself

- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced sense of accomplishment
- Depersonalization / cynicism
- Withdrawal from clients or teams

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### Discussion Prompt

What is one thing you learned or that you will take away today?



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### Final Takeaways

- Investing in people = investing in better outcomes for families
- Practice reflection (slow down to speed up)
- Try to refrain from “fix-it” mode
- Remember what you know about building capacity in others- you know what works

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### Reviewing our Time Together

- ✓ Discussed the core principles and values that guide IECMH consultation across settings.
- ✓ Reflected on the consultative stance to enhance effectiveness.
- ✓ Applied strategies that support reflective practice and sustain the consultant's well-being.
- ✓ Integrated new insights from peers and current research to adapt consultation approaches to evolving challenges.
- ✓ Explored new tools, frameworks, and resources to support IECMH consultation practice.
- ✓ Built connections with other consultants to foster ongoing professional support and shared learning.

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### Thank You / Contact Info

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