

# WHAT WORKS? A Study of Effective Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Programs



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## About the Study

Early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) is emerging as an effective strategy for supporting young children's social/emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors in early care and education (ECE) settings (e.g., child care centers, Early Head Start/Head Start programs, and family child care homes). Growing evidence supports its efficacy in reducing problem behaviors and the risk of preschool expulsion, as well as improving provider skills and ECE program quality (Brennan et al., 2008; Perry et al., 2009). As a result, more and more states and communities are investing in ECMHC programs, underscoring the need for accurate, data-driven information about the central features of effective consultation.

To attend to this need, the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (GUCCHD) embarked on this study, exploring the following key questions:

1. What are the essential components of effective mental health consultation programs?
2. What are the skills, competencies, and credentials of effective consultants?
3. What are the training, supervision and support needs of consultants?
4. What level of intervention intensity (i.e., frequency and duration) is needed to produce good outcomes?
5. Which outcomes should be targeted and how should they be measured?

## WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION?

A problem-solving and capacity-building intervention implemented within a collaborative relationship between a professional consultant with mental health expertise and one or more caregivers, typically an early care and education provider and/or family member. Early childhood mental health consultation aims to improve the ability of staff, families, programs, and systems to prevent, identify, treat and reduce the impact of mental health problems among children from birth to age 6 and their families (adapted from Cohen & Kaufmann, 2000).



These questions were investigated through two-day site visits to six consultation programs that have demonstrated positive child, family, ECE provider and/or ECE program outcomes:

- Child Care Expulsion Prevention (Michigan)
- Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (Connecticut)
- Early Intervention Program/Instituto Familiar de la Raza (San Francisco, CA)
- Early Intervention Project (Baltimore City, MD)
- Kid Connects (Boulder, CO)
- Together for Kids (Central Massachusetts)

Further, to gain a better understanding of the extent to which consultation efforts are occurring nationally, the study incorporated a brief online scan to assess current ECMHC activities across states and territories. Finally, the study culminated in a series of recommendations based on study findings and generated by experts in the field.

## What's Inside the Study Report?

- An executive summary (also available in hard copy)
- A framework for designing and implementing effective ECMHC programs
- Brief and detailed summaries of each of the six ECMHC study programs
- Matrices on outcome and service planning/delivery measures used across study sites
- A snapshot on the status of ECMHC activities nationally
- Findings on:
  - skills, competencies and credentials of effective consultants
  - training, supervision and support needs of consultants
  - frequency and duration of consultation services
  - core values and practices of effective ECMHC programs
- Tips for:
  - serving unique settings and populations (e.g., family child care, children in foster care)
  - fostering positive relationships with families and ECE providers
  - delivering high-quality services
- Recommendations for:
  - policymakers/funders
  - ECMHC providers
  - ECE program administrators
  - researchers/evaluators
- Numerous examples and resources to support state and community ECMHC efforts

To **access the study report** as well as a compendium of resources to assist in designing, implementing and evaluating early childhood mental health consultation programs, visit <http://gucchd.georgetown.edu>

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