

ECCP® Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Competencies



“The best way to help young children is to help parents and other adults closest to them.”

- Dr. Jane Knitzer

Overview

Consultation, in its simplest form, is supporting an individual client or system in progressing from one point to another. The goal of consultation is change. In the consultation process, the consultant functions as the agent of change. An experienced and effective consultant will have a knowledge base, skill set, and personal attributes that enable an ability to fully engage with a client (system) while maintaining objectivity. Otherwise regarded as competencies, these serve as a critical guide to the consultant’s work.

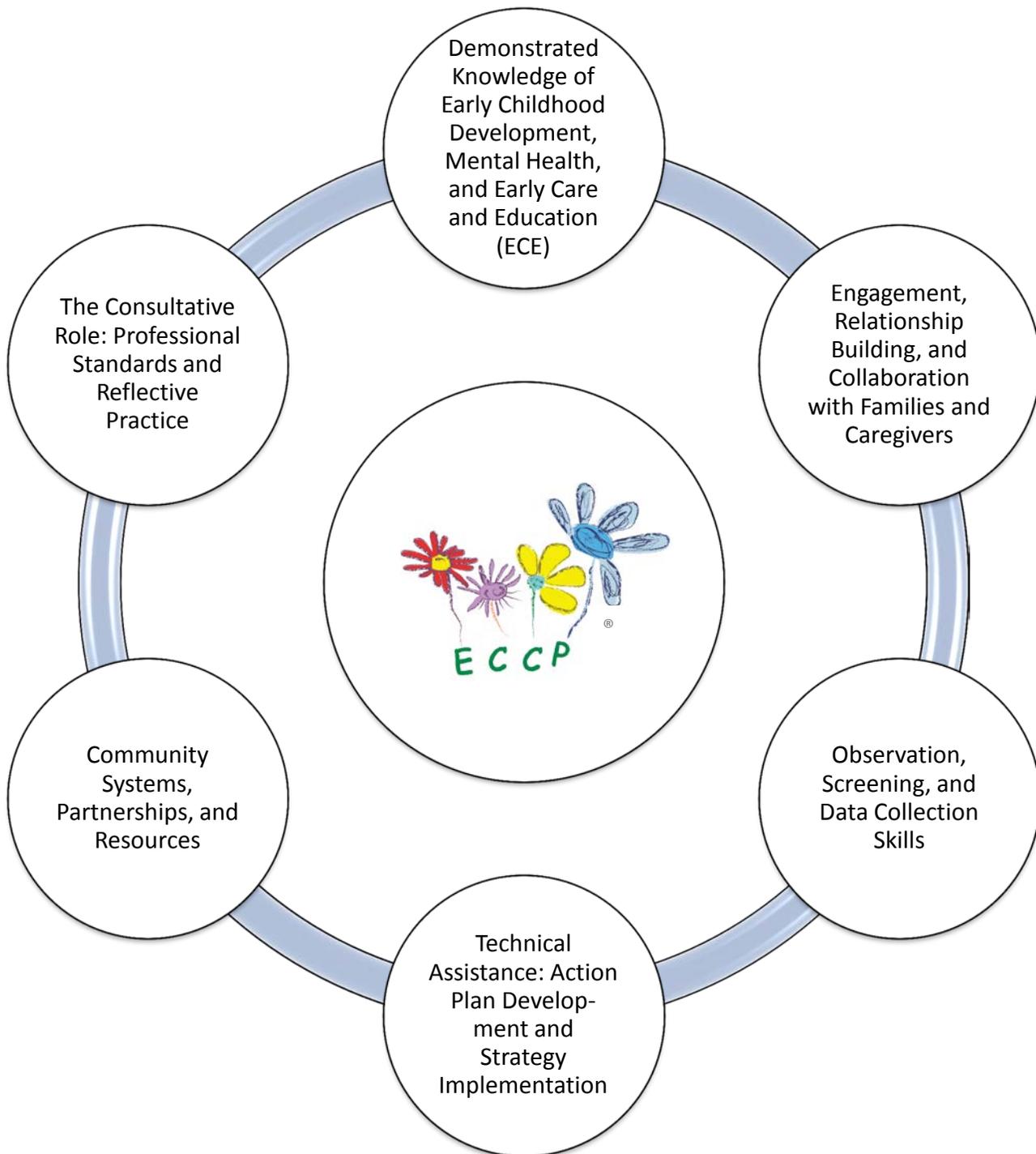
The consultant’s role is to build a relationship with the client that facilitates collaborative problem solving and personal empowerment in the client (system). The consultant’s work is to gather and interpret information that can be used to design and implement an action plan. The consultant develops and crafts an action plan with goals and strategies that meet the client’s level of motivation and abilities. Overall, the success of the consultant’s work lies in the ability to move the client towards their goals through a series of demonstrated outcomes.

Early childhood mental health consultation is unique in that it integrates several areas of expertise into a specialized systems approach. The consultant navigates through complex systems while integrating principles of mental health, early childhood development, and early care and education. The approach involves an understanding of prevention and early intervention, as well as consultative methods. Early childhood mental health consultation is grounded in relationships and keeps a focus on the common goal of improving the social emotional health of young children.

The essential knowledge base, skills and attributes required of successful Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultants are comprised in a set of six competencies each of which includes a working definition and core indicators. These reflect the diverse and interrelated groundwork necessary for consultation. In addition, it is important to recognize that the most critical aspect of the consultation lies within the consultants ability to embody these competencies while remaining open and responsive to the subtleties and unique characteristics and needs of each client (system).

Competency Structure:

- Title
- Definition
- Core Indicators
- References



Early Childhood Consultation Partnership® Competencies

Competencies Defined

1. Demonstrated Knowledge of Early Childhood Development, Mental Health, and Early Care and Education (ECE)

Definition: Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultants have foundational knowledge of child development, with a solid grounding in children’s mental health, and experience in working with young children and their families. They are able to assist early childhood staff and families in understanding typical development, addressing challenging behaviors in young children, and maintaining environments that foster healthy development and relationships.

2. Engagement, Relationship Building, and Collaboration with Families and Caregivers

Definition: ECMH Consultants are able to successfully engage children, families (including foster parents), caregivers (including family childcare homes), early childhood educators, and other service providers in genuine and collaborative relationships. They are aware of the factors that influence relationships, as they work to achieve and maintain collaborative relationships. Consultants use an approach that is culturally sensitive, strengths-based and client-centered, emphasizing capacity building and creating partnerships that support the social emotional health of young children. In the consultation process, the consultant fosters a sense of trust and openness among all of the partners.

3. Observation, Screening and Data Collection Skills

Definition: ECMH Consultants are proficient in observing behavior, interviewing adults, utilizing social and emotional screening tools, and collecting accurate and applicable information about children and their environments. Consultants are unbiased and objective in their practices of documentation, summarizing data, and reporting information. These skills are essential in collaborating and supporting families and ECE staff.

- A. Knowledge Foundation
- B. Gathering and Documenting
- C. Summarizing, Reporting and Recording

4. Technical Assistance: Action Plan Development and Strategy Implementation

Definition: ECMH Consultants work to build capacity within the client (children, families, and ECE staff) through intentional action plan development and implementation support. Initially,

consultants gather information that provides a strength-based foundation from which to create strategies and recommendations that are culturally competent, client-centered and client driven. Consultants provide technical assistance, using various consultation methods (coaching, modeling, wondering, and reflecting) to support the implementation of the action plan.

A. Child-Family Centered Consultation

Child-Family Centered Consultation addresses the needs of the individual child who is exhibiting challenging behaviors or whose social and emotional well-being may be at risk due to factors associated with the family, social environment, and/or their ECE environment. Typically child-family centered consultation is provided to the child's teacher(s) and parent(s) or primary caregiver(s) and focuses on helping these adults support the child more effectively. (Research Synthesis ECMHC CSEFEL)

B. Classroom Level Consultation

Classroom level consultation considers the whole classroom and teaching staff in its consultation approach. At this level, consultation focuses on enhancing the general social emotional environment of the classroom and seeks to build capacity of the teaching staff by providing support through technical assistance that promotes healthy social emotional development, behavior management, and overall classroom enhancement. In addition, classroom-based consultation aims to help the teaching staff improve their collaborative functioning by encouraging definition of roles, healthy communication amongst staff, and identifying outside supports and resources.

C. Program Level Consultation

Programmatic consultation takes a more systemic approach focusing on improving the overall quality of the program and/or assisting the program to solve a specific issue that affects more than one child, staff member, and/or family. This type of consultation is usually provided to ECE program administrators and staff and is intended to have a more widespread impact. (Research Synthesis ECMHC CSEFEL)

5. Community Systems, Partnerships and Resources

Definition: It is critical for ECMH Consultants to have a strong connection with the communities in which they do their consultation work. They develop this connection by understanding local, regional and state community systems and protocols. Through their professionalism and adherence to best practices, consultants create partnerships by collaborating and integrating with existing systems, services, and community resources. Mutual resource sharing, service linkage, and connecting clients to appropriate services are the results of these partnerships. Whether providing direct services or connecting clients to community resources, consultants are considered by their communities as reliable and knowledgeable experts in early childhood mental health.

6. The Consultative Role: Professional Standards and Reflective Practice

Definition: The ECMH Consultants' approach to every aspect of their work is done with professionalism, whether it pertains to direct services and community presentations, or processing phone referrals and writing action plans. Consultants' adherence to their own professional practice standards, coupled with an awareness of the standards that guide their community partners, helps to define the boundaries of their position and highlights the need to appropriately integrate their work. Their ability to engage in reflective practice assists consultants in their role while encouraging their growth in the field. The manner of which consultants conduct their work in the community is a direct reflection of their understanding and adherence to best practices and standards within their respective disciplines.

A. Professional Practice Standards

B. Reflective Practice

Core Indicators

Each of the six competencies is accompanied by a set of core indicators. The indicators provide a comprehensive guide for the work of the Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultant within the ECCP program. Current literature and research in the field has helped to guide the creation of the competencies and the direct consultation experiences of the ECCP program have been instrumental to the development and articulation of the core indicators.

The ECCP program utilizes the core indicators in a variety of ways. They provide an in depth description of the ECMH Consultants role within the program. This helps to guide the hiring and orientation processes, as well as providing a clear definition of the consultant's role within the early care/education and mental health service communities. The indicators are also used to support the growth and development of the consultant. They are essential to the consultant's supervision and in the selection and development of workforce development opportunities such as trainings. Overall, the core indicators support the fidelity to the role of the consultant and to the design of the ECCP program.

1. Demonstrated Knowledge of Early Childhood Development, Mental Health, and Early Care and Education (ECE)
2. Engagement, Relationship Building, and Collaboration with Families and Caregivers
3. Observation, Screening, and Data Collection Skills
4. Technical Assistance: Action Plan Development and Strategy Implementation
5. Community Systems, Partnerships, and Resources
6. The Consultative Role: Professional Standards and Reflective Practice



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