

GROWING IDEAS

Partnering with an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant

What is Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation?

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is a collaborative relationship between a mental health consultant and families, care and education professionals, and/or early care and education teachers. ECMHC strives to improve the ability of families, teachers, and care and education professionals to promote, sustain and restore healthy social and emotional development for all children.

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation approaches challenging situations with children from a problem solving perspective. ECMHC is not a therapeutic intervention: it occurs in the children's natural settings — child care, home, and school.

What kind of support can an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant offer?

ECMHCs can partner with you to accomplish any or all of the following:

- Support healthy social and emotional development of all children in your program by finding and sharing resources like books, articles and videos.
- Provide training for you and families on social-emotional development and mental health topics.
- Work with you to build and maintain positive working relationships with families.
- Offer resources and support around self-care and wellness.
- Collaborate with you to identify areas of strengths and challenges within your program related to intentional social-emotional teaching practices.
- Develop collaborative intervention plans with you and families when you have specific concerns about a child.
- Access community resources, early intervention/special education services and mental health supports when needed.

"They listen to our concerns and see us as PARTNERS and not JUST the teachers and respect our knowledge of children and families."



Questions for care and education professionals to consider when partnering with an ECMHC.

For Administrators/Owners:

- Do I understand what mental health consultation is and what it is not?
- Have I considered the time commitment on my part and the part of the staff/teachers to make the most of the consultation?
- What are our goals for seeking this assistance, and are they a good fit with mental health consultation?
- Do we embrace a program philosophy of mental health/healthy social-emotional development and inclusion?

"When you don't have all the answers and you know your staff is frustrated, ECMHCs are very helpful."

For Care and Education Professionals:

- How do I feel about a consultant working along side of me in the classroom/program?
- Am I open to suggestions on new knowledge, new practices, and new ideas?
- Do I see this as a learning opportunity or a judgment of me as a "bad teacher?"

"Our consultant is very supportive of our teachers. She gets right in with the children to model pro-social behaviors and gives children and teachers scripts to guide behavior and understanding."

Questions for families to consider when an ECMHC is working with your child's program.

- Has my provider shared information about what the consultant will be doing in my child's class/program?
- Am I concerned that the mental health consultant will be assessing and diagnosing my child with a mental health disorder?

- Am I concerned that the consultant will be judging my ability to parent my child?
- Do I want to meet and/or talk with the consultant directly?

"The ECMHC was really good about giving ideas to families on how to work with stressful and difficult situations."

"They (ECMHC) suggest strategies that have not occurred to us and present information about why certain behaviors occur."

Where to learn more:

Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation.
<http://www.ecmhc.org>.

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Paul R. LePage, Governor

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

This update and expansion of the Growing Ideas Resources for Guiding Early Childhood Practices was completed by the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies with funding from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child and Family Services, Early Childhood Division. © 2011

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