

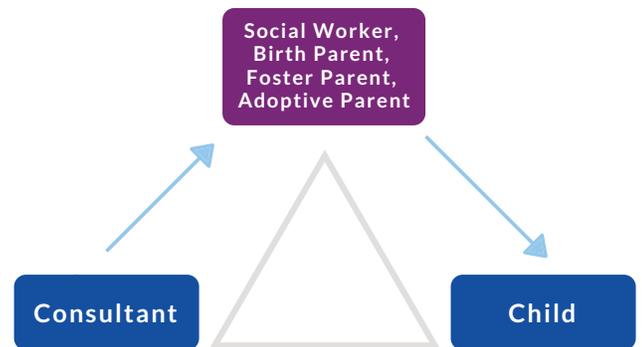


# HELPING ADULTS HELP CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE SUCCEED

*Mental Health Consultation Belongs in all Early Childhood Settings to Create Healthier, Stronger Communities in Wisconsin*

## What is Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation?

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) is a collaborative intervention, provided by a professional with mental health expertise, that improves outcomes for children. IECMH consultants can help foster case workers, families, and foster placements support healthy growth and development of young children. The goal is to help children maintain foster placement, reduce caseworker stress and turnover, increase parenting skills and reduce stress to increase likelihood of reunification, and support children's transitions.



## Why it Matters:



Over half of children in foster care suffer from **chronic health problems** and experience **developmental delays four to five times** that of the general population.

(Dicker, Gordon, and Knitzer, 2001)



Early childhood presents an unparalleled opportunity to **improve the mental health and developmental outcomes of high-risk infants.**

(Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)



Caseworker turnover has **negative outcomes for children in the child welfare system**, including placement disruptions and increased time in out-of-home care

(Strolin-Goltzman, J., Kollar, S., & Trinkle, J., 2009)



# How Does it Work?

Consultants help foster caseworkers, families, and foster placements support healthy growth and development of young children that helps to:

## APPROACHES

Increase parenting skills and reduce parent stress.

Partnering with caseworkers to reduce stress.

Helping all children feel safe, supported and valued during transitions and reunification.

## OUTCOMES



**Increase likelihood of reunification.**



**Decrease caseworker turnover rates.**



**Prevent expulsion from early care and education settings.**



## An Example of Mental Health Consultation

*David, a county foster caseworker is working with Amir, a nine-month-old child, who has been living in a foster home for two weeks. The foster parents have begun to notice that Amir is having difficulty sleeping, being unresponsive when his name is called, and lacking interest in play. Dave and the foster parents are becoming concerned that the placement isn't a good fit. Dave decides to ask a mental health consultant to assess the situation. Through the assessment, the mental health consultant determines that the reaction Amir is having is likely due to a previous trauma that is interrupting his development. The mental health consultant refers Amir to a therapist experienced in Child Parent Psychotherapy. The therapist helps the foster parents understand ways to help Amir. The infant mental health consultant continues to stay involved, providing monthly group meetings for the foster care workers to help understand the social emotional needs of children.*

# Keys to Success

**1. The Right Supports at the Right Time:** Consultants provide strategies for social workers and foster/kin/adoptive parents to enhance children's well-being.

**2. Infrastructure:** Child welfare workers and foster/kin/adoptive parents have access to consultants for understanding the social and emotional development of young children.

**3. Help the Helpers:** Consultants partner with the social workers to build their ability to recognize, interpret and support individual mental health needs of the families they serve, as well as support foster families who are caring for young children with complex needs.

**4. Links to Community Resources:** Consultants have a network of services and resources to refer families for further support if needed.

### References:

(Strolin-Goltzman, J., Kollar, S., & Trinkle, J. (2009). [CJL-D] Listening to the voices of children in foster care: Youths speak out about child welfare workforce turnover and selection. *Social Work, 55*(1), 47-53.) [CJL-D] This is good if we can clearly connect to consultation helping with burnout and caseload demands.