

STATE OF IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
Health AND **Human**
SERVICES

Early Childhood Iowa Professional
Development Funds (Infant and Early
Childhood Mental Health)

December, 2022

Submitted by Rhonda Rairden-Nelson
Rhonda.Rairden-Nelson@idph.iowa.gov
P: 515-201-6204

Connections Matter in Early Childhood

Connections Matter in Early Childhood is a curriculum developed specifically to support professionals working in Early Care and Education (ECE) settings to understand the importance of safe, secure attachments with primary and alternative caregivers. The presence of a safe, secure adult relationship serves as a protective factor for mental wellbeing, and has a positive impact on future health outcomes. Six training sessions were held this year, with 167 early childhood professionals participating. In the evaluation survey, participants were asked to describe how this training will impact their work with young children. Feedback included the following statements:

- An in-home provider stated, “I will be more attentive and have a plan to comfort children when they are overwhelmed.”
- A preschool teacher shared, “With the children that are going through a tough time at home, showing more empathy.”
- An in-home provider stated, “I will try to spend more time just talking to the kids about how they are doing, feeling, making them feel better.”
- A center staff member shared, “I will be able to step back and think about the kids' situations in life more when they are acting out or becoming withdrawn or different than they're usual self.”
- A center staff member stated “By always remembering that my actions will have a deep impact into the development of the brain of the kids I care for.”

Facilitated by staff from Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, this virtual training was offered during non-traditional times (evenings and weekends) to accommodate the schedule of ECE professionals.

How We Grow Brains in Early Childhood

This training was also developed to support professionals working in the field of ECE, with an emphasis on how trauma impacts brain development, behavior and mental health. Each training was four hours in length and delivered virtually. A total of three training sessions were held this reporting period, with 65 ECE professionals participating. Data from the training evaluation survey includes the following:

- 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “After participating in this training, I have a better understanding of how trauma impacts brain development and child behavior”.
- 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “After participating in this training, I can describe how secure attachment and healthy relationships support young children's mental health.”
- 94% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “This training provided me with strategies I can use to foster children's healthy mental development.”

Developed and facilitated by two independent mental health professionals, this virtual training was offered twice during traditional hours (weekday afternoons) and once on a Saturday morning to accommodate the schedule of ECE professionals.

Reflective Supervision/Consultation (RSC)

Working with (or on behalf of) young children is both rewarding and challenging. Reflective Supervision/Consultation (RSC) is a form of regularly scheduled support designed to provide professionals with a space they can safely talk about the challenges of their work. It is a place where they can explore the thoughts, feelings and experiences related to their jobs, helping them to be their best as they support children, their caregivers, and their partners in the workplace.

ECI Professional Development funds were used this reporting period in multiple ways to support this type of reflective practice, with the goal of increasing professional competencies and improving the quality of services provided. Supports that were offered to foster reflection among early childhood professionals included regular RSC groups, and two separate training opportunities.

- **RSC Groups:**
 - Regular two-hour monthly RSC groups were held this reporting period, led by three seasoned Infant Mental Health facilitators. A total of 144 hours of RSC were provided to 32 early childhood professionals from across the state.
- **Foundations of RSC:**
 - An 18-hour training session titled “Foundations of Reflective Supervision/Consultation” was offered virtually to early childhood professionals interested in providing RSC to staff, with priority given to those applying for Endorsement. This training supported individuals in developing the skills needed to begin creating and providing a space of reflection for those they supervise. Topics covered include the development of relationships, parallel process, use of self, and how to honor and support cultural humility in reflection. This training meets requirements for specific categories of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement.
- **Sitting at the Feet of Storytellers:**
 - This 3-hour virtual training was designed for individuals with experience facilitating RSC. It explored the concept of storytelling in the context of facilitating RSC. This training included discussion and exploration of both the logistical and qualitative aspects of RSC, while holding in mind the three pillars of high-quality RSC (regularity, reflection, and collaboration).

Endorsement Coordination

Infant Mental Health Endorsement® (IMH-E®) and Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement® (ECMH-E®) are separate credentials that can be earned by anyone working with, or on behalf of, very

young children and their families, with a focus on strengthening and supporting early relationships that are crucial to a child’s social and emotional development. Endorsement® demonstrates that an early childhood professional has acquired knowledge and skills to promote the delivery of high quality, culturally sensitive, relationship-focused services to infants, toddlers, parents, other caregivers and families. This year, ECI Professional Development funds were used to support 360 hours of Endorsement Coordination (30 hours per month) to assist early childhood professionals as they explore the benefits and process of becoming Endorsed, and complete applications for both the Infant Mental Health Endorsement as well as the Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement.

Additional Training to Support Endorsement

The additional training opportunities listed below were offered to early childhood professionals across the state this reporting period. Each training was offered virtually to reduce barriers to participation. Trainings that were offered support the professional competencies recognized within Endorsement, with an emphasis on identified training gaps. They include:

Title of Training:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Zero to Three DC:0-5 Diagnostic Classification Crosswalk (Stakeholder overview)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant Orientation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diversity Informed Tenets for Work with Infants, Children and Families (2 separate trainings held)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflection: What Is It and Why Do We Do It?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developmental Trauma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stress Management Techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fostering Resilience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation for Home Visitors?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brain Injury and How it Impacts Behavior, Development and Mental Health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Outcomes and Activities of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation for Home Visiting Supervisors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Impact of Context, Community and Caregiving on Brain Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shifting the Paradigm of “Normal”; Supporting Neurodiverse Children and Families