



CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION
FOR INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

CT Association of Infant Mental Health Competencies Guidelines for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practices Promoting Infant Mental Health®

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is “Infant Mental Health?”

Within the context of one’s family, community and cultural background, it is the child’s developing capacity to:

- Experience and regulate emotions,
- Form Secure relationships and
- Explore and learn (adapted from Zero to Three).

Q. Why is infant mental health important?

According to the work of Dr. Jack Shonkoff’s (Harvard’s Center for the Developing Child) "Neurons to Neighborhoods," social emotional wellness in young children is the cornerstone of school readiness. Spending dollars on prevention early in life amasses significant savings later in life. Research has shown that positive relationships early in life may reduce the risk for: dependency on the welfare system, teen parenthood, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Early warm, responsive, and sensitive relationships protect the young child against “toxic” stress.

Q. Is infant mental health even on the radar screen?

Yes! President Obama has made a commitment to early childhood in his stimulus package and has released a preliminary budget featuring "the President's Zero to Five Plan." National organizations like Zero to Three and the Harvard Center for the Study of the Developing Child have released groundbreaking research that will drive decision makers to address the social emotional as well as the educational needs of children zero to five in public policy.

In Connecticut there are several infant/toddler initiatives that are aimed at increasing the knowledge of the workforce for young children: Infant/Toddler credential, Infant/Toddler strategic plan, Infant/Toddler Guidelines, Infant/Toddler modules in the Multidisciplinary Consultation training. The Competencies for infant mental health provide the foundational knowledge for the workforce for young children and some are included in many of the Connecticut initiatives.

Q. What are the Competency Guidelines Promoting Infant Mental Health?

The Competency Guidelines were developed over a 10-year period by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, a professional organization with over 450 members. The guidelines provide a comprehensive set of standards for persons offering services at multiple levels and in many systems to infants, very young children and their families.

The standards in the guidelines include knowledge, skills and reflective practice support, building capacity in the infant and family field, leading to best practice and promoting social and emotional well-being or infant mental health.

The MI-AIMH Endorsement (based on these competencies) received a national award from the Annapolis Coalition on Behavioral Health Workforce Education for innovative educational practice in the area of Child and Adolescent workforce education.

Q. Why is it important to meet the Infant/Young Child Mental Health Competencies?

The competencies provide a set of standards for professional development in the infant and family field.

Those who meet the competencies demonstrate their commitment to continuing education and training as they provide services that promote infant mental health with a high level of quality and integrity.

Q. If I work primarily with preschool children are the Competencies relevant?

The Competencies are very relevant even though they focus on the earliest relationships and emotional well being of very young children. To understand the behaviors and interactions and emotions of preschool children it is important to know how to evaluate the quality and dynamics of their earliest experiences and relationships.

Your work with preschool children and their families will be enhanced and facilitated by meeting the infant mental health competencies.

Q. What do I get after meeting the Infant Mental Health Competencies?

The Competencies can lead to an endorsement for Infant Mental Health. CT AIMH is considering adding the endorsement process to the Competencies. To keep posted on the current status of Competencies and Endorsement please go to <http://www.ct-aimh.org>

Q. Why would I want to pursue an Infant Mental Health Endorsement?

Consider the following:

- To enhance your professional profile as a specialist in the infant and family field
- To affirm the specialized knowledge and skills you have acquired through formal education experience and in-service training
- To validate the work that you have done under the guidance and supervision of experienced mentors in the infant and family field
- To link your professional growth and development to competency standards that reflect best practice
- To be identified as a competent professional with specialized training in infant and early childhood mental health

An Infant Mental Health endorsement could potentially advance your career track in the future because it reflects mastery of a specialized set of skills that makes a candidate more competitive in the job market, especially in the fields of early childhood and mental health.