

Infant Mental Health Consultant¹ Competencies

General Guidelines

MI-AIMH recommends that each consultant who is hired to provide reflective supervision or consultation to an individual or group on behalf of the promotion of infant mental health be:

- Knowledgeable about the community in which the individual/group provides service;
- Fully informed and respectful of agency policies, regulations, protocols and rules that govern the individual's or group's services, as well as program standards and specific components of those services;
- Knowledgeable and respectful of leadership roles within the agency;
- Able to establish positive working relationships with agency personnel.

MI-AIMH recommends that each consultant is knowledgeable about:

- Early development, from pregnancy through labor/delivery and the first 3 years of life, typical and atypical, complex and in multiple domains
- Attachment theory and the importance of early relationships to development
- Families, their importance to each child's development, their differences, cultural norms and values
- Developmental competence and psychopathology, identification of strengths and risks
- Situations specific to risk: prematurity, birth of a baby with special needs, the death of an infant, adolescent parenthood, alcohol and drug abuse, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, homelessness, poverty, grief and loss
- Assessment approaches, sensitive to understanding the infant or toddler within the context of each caregiving relationship, and assessment "tools"
- Service or intervention models, techniques and principles appropriate to the program
- Principles and practices promoting infant mental health
- Relationship-based services
- Reflective practice

¹ For the purposes of this document, the term "consultant" refers to the provider of reflective supervision/consultation.

MI-AIMH recommends that each consultant demonstrate the following skills:

- Ability to meet regularly and consistently as agreed upon by the individual/group.
- Ability to create a place where individual/group feels safe in describing and exploring their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the work with infants, very young children and families.
- Ability to enter into and sustain trusting relationships with individual/group.
- Ability to model and encourage nurturing behavior.
- Ability to provide meaningful support, being careful to enhance competency and self-worth.
- Ability to provide developmental guidance as appropriate, following individual/group's lead.
- Ability to reduce sense of isolation or loneliness that often accompanies work with infants, toddlers and families referred for services.
- Ability to observe, listen, wonder and respond.
- Ability to pay attention to the emotional state of each individual/group.
- Ability to facilitate the expression of thoughts and feelings awakened by the work, talk about them, contain them, and offer comfort and support.
- Ability to have and express empathy in response to the experiences, thoughts and feelings shared individually and within the group; nurture empathy in others.
- Ability to attend to both the content (that is, what is happening with a particular infant or toddler and family, program or center) and the process underlying these events, including the feelings evoked by both the content and the process.
- Ability to give the individual/group the opportunity to experience his/her feelings consciously, and to understand them in the light of the infant or toddler's development, parent-child relationship needs, parental history and current challenges.
- Ability to ask questions that encourage reflective practice.
- Ability to help individual/group to explore the parallel process, using feelings to inform understanding of the infant, the parent, the early developing relationship and self.

Of additional importance, MI-AIMH recommends that each consultant follow the “Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision/Consultation” (www.mi-aimh.org), specifically:

- Remains culturally aware and sensitive to each individual/group
- Recognizes and responds to individual/group's thoughts, feelings of vulnerability and confusion, as well as strengths
- Encourages the exploration of thoughts, feelings and strengths, as appropriate to the individual/group
- Remains open, emotionally available and curious
- Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths and issues of concern with a trusted supervisor/mentor