



**OVERVIEW OF**  
*California Training Guidelines and  
Personnel Competencies for*  
**Infant-Family and  
Early Childhood Mental Health**



**RELATIONSHIPS MATTER**



*About Building Connections  
for young children and their families*

## Overview



It is essential that all professionals working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers are grounded in the core knowledge and relationship-based training necessary to enhance the capacity of parents and other primary caregivers to support the social and emotional well-being of their children.

The field of infant-family and early childhood mental health addresses a continuum of family-centered, culturally sensitive, and developmentally appropriate services that include:

- **Promotion** – Services and supports that recognize the central importance of early relationships on brain development, learning and social-emotional development of all children.
- **Preventive Intervention** – Services that mitigate effects of biological and psychosocial risks and that address potential early relationship challenges which have a documented impact on early development and the regulation of emotions and behavior.
- **Treatment** – Services that target infants, toddlers and young children in significant distress or with clear symptoms that indicate a mental health disorder. Services address attachment, relationship problems and the regulation of emotions and behavior. Specialized early mental health treatment services focus on the parent-child dyad, other primary child-caregiver relationships and the circumstances that influence the quality of the relationships.





## *Training Domains*

### **Knowledge Domains –**

Provide information and resources to build skills and knowledge and include:

- Parenting, Family Functioning, and Child-Parent Relationships
- Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Development
- Biological and Psychosocial Factors Impacting Outcomes
- Risk and Resilience
- Observations, Screening, and Assessment
- Diagnosis and Intervention
- Interdisciplinary/Multidisciplinary Collaboration
- Ethics



### **Experience Domain –**

- Clinical experience with families and children prenatal to age 3 and/or clinical experience with children 3 to 5 and their families.
- Reflective Practice Facilitation

The competencies outline a framework for building a coherent foundation of the knowledge and training necessary to work with very young children and their families with a focus on early relationships and early mental health.

***A copy of California Training Guidelines and Personnel Competencies for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health may be downloaded at [www.ecmhtraining-ca.org](http://www.ecmhtraining-ca.org).***



During the last 15 years, professionals in California have worked to clarify the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to provide effective infant-family and early childhood mental health services. In 2009, the Revised Training Guidelines and Personnel Competencies for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health was completed, endorsed by the California First 5 Association, and disseminated statewide.

Three concentration areas are addressed: core providers, infant-family mental health and early childhood mental health specialists, and reflective practice facilitators. For each concentration area, the Guidelines delineates key concepts, personnel competencies, and the hour requirements of didactic knowledge, clinical experience and reflective practice facilitated discussion. An Endorsement Process was instituted in 2010 through WestEd Center for Prevention and Early Intervention.

## *Competency Concentration Areas*

### **Core Providers**

Core Providers include professionals from multiple human development and education disciplines, including early intervention, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language pathology, special education, human development, audiology, social work, and pediatrics, who work with pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and their families, and who have achieved the core provider mental health competencies described in the Guidelines manual.

Core Providers are the professionals with the most frequent contact with infants and very young children and their families and are the most likely individuals to provide promotion and preventive mental health interventions and to partner with and make referrals to mental health specialists. Core Provider guidelines are also appropriate for infant and early childhood researchers, policy analysts, and advocates.





### **Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health Specialists**

Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health Specialists include individuals from relevant professional practice disciplines who have a Masters Degree or higher and/or a license/credential and who have achieved the mental health specialist competencies recommended in the Guidelines.

Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health Specialists include, but are not limited to, professionals in the mental health fields. They provide prenatal, infant-family, and early childhood mental health services within their scope of practice in the areas of promotion, preventive intervention, and treatment.

### **Reflective Practice Facilitators**

Reflective Practice Facilitation is an individual or small group integrative experience that supports the practitioner to explore ways to apply relevant theories and knowledge bases to clinical situations; to model an appreciation of the importance of relationships that are at the core of infant-family and early childhood mental health; to reflect the experiences, thoughts, and feelings involved in doing this work; to understand the family's culture and the parents' and infants' interpersonal perspective; and to explore possible approaches to working effectively with infants and families. It is acknowledged that the dynamics of the reflective practice facilitation relationship will in turn influence practitioner/family relationships, and thus the Reflective Practice Facilitator must embody ways of being that are considered best practice for infant-family and early childhood mental health practitioners.



Reflective Practice Facilitators are those who support the reflective practice of individuals working with infants, toddlers, and young children and their families, and who themselves have training and experience as infant mental health specialists or core providers, as well as an additional set of trainings and competencies focusing on the reflective practice facilitation process. This role is similar to that of a clinical supervisor, but does not necessarily involve the same set of responsibilities.





*About Building Connections  
for young children and their families*

[www.ProjectABC-LA.org](http://www.ProjectABC-LA.org)

Project ABC is designed to create change at the beginning of children's lives. Even as infants and toddlers, children need support to optimize their healthy social and emotional development. Our goal at Project ABC is to ensure that families, professionals and community organizations work together to support every child's healthy development through awareness of the central role that relationships play in building healthy lives.

Project ABC is a six-year federally funded project to help Los Angeles County design an integrated early childhood System of Care service network that is based on family needs and includes families as partners in planning and service delivery.

For more information on infant mental health and to download the California Training Guidelines, visit:  
[www.ecmhtraining-ca.org](http://www.ecmhtraining-ca.org)

### **Acknowledgments**

This brochure was developed by **Project ABC – About Building Connections for Young Children and Their Families**, under a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Content was adapted from the *Revised Training Guidelines and Personnel Competencies for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health* (2009). Created by California's Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Guidelines Workgroup. More information is available from the California Center on Infant-Family and Mental Health at WestEd, Center for Prevention and Early Intervention.

Project ABC is a collaboration of:

- Children's Institute, Inc. – [www.childrensinstitute.org](http://www.childrensinstitute.org)
- University of Southern California University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles – [www.uscucedd.org](http://www.uscucedd.org)
- USC School of Social Work – <http://sowkweb.usc.edu>
- Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services – <http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us>
- Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health – <http://dmh.lacounty.gov>

