

**What is Mental Health Consultation (MHC)?** In Missouri pieces of mental health consultation already exist. This document builds on assets in the existing early childhood system and adds components to address sustainability and positive outcomes. To accomplish this we have defined mental health consultation along a continuum from prevention to early intervention to treatment (public health model) to shape the work. Below is a list of core competencies for MHC at any level:

- Ability to form and maintain collaborative relationships
- Acute observation skills
- Ability to work as a member of a team
- Flexibility
- Excellent communication skills
- Ability to build consensus
- Knowledge of social and emotional development of young children
- Knowledge of typical child development
- Knowledge of community resources
- Cultural and linguistic sensitivity

A problem-solving and capacity-building intervention implemented within a **collaborative** relationship between a professional consultant with **mental health training** and one or more caregivers, typically an early care or education provider, health practitioner and/or family member. Early childhood mental health consultation aims to build the capacity (improve the ability) of staff, families, programs, and systems to prevent, identify, treat and reduce the impact of mental health problems among children from birth to age 6 and their families. (Adapted from Cohen & Kaufmann, 2000). Those providing mental health consultation should have knowledge of assessment processes and resources as well as information about evidence based therapeutic interventions.<sup>1</sup>

MHC is not an individual acting as the sole expert or primary source of direct therapy for the child and family. Mental Health Consultation IS NOT the provision of diagnostic evaluations, therapies, support groups, crisis intervention, case management, Employee Assistance services or one on one support to a child or family. If a geographic area has a limited number of mental health professionals and the same individual must provide mental health consultation and direct therapy interventions, clear delineation of the roles must occur with the client and any organizations through which MHC is provided.

<sup>1</sup> Nothing in this document should be assumed to supersede any current professional licensure, regulatory or ethical guidelines. All Mental Health Consultants must practice within the requirements of their profession.

## **Foundations of Early Social and Emotional Development**

Mental Health Consultation in the early childhood system is dependent upon a universal knowledge of social and emotional development. Early Childhood programs, whether in childcare, education, health or other areas, need to be grounded and knowledgeable in factors that promote healthy social and emotional development to be effective and supportive of all children.

Knowledge in this area would include but not be limited to understanding of typical development, creating supportive environments, and use of social and/or emotional screening tools, curriculum or activities that support social and emotional development and staff awareness of their own social and emotional capacities. This knowledge is applicable to all children and is a universal approach to social and emotional development that can help prevent children from needing a higher level of care and/or consultation.

Prior to requesting MHC services early childhood providers may wish to assess their programs knowledge in these areas. If needs are identified, the program may wish to focus on growing capacities in staff's skill level in supporting healthy social and emotional development and recognizing early risk factors or warning signs.

## **TARGETED MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION**

A child is identified with specific concerns that increase the risk of developing problems in their social and emotional development.

Site: Family homes, group home care, center based, health practitioner office

Description – This level of MHC focuses on a child or children who may be at risk due to child, family or environmental characteristics. More targeted environmental or behavioral interventions may be necessary to address and ameliorate the risk factors for a specific child or group of children. The goal is to ideally prevent the child or children from needing a higher level of care and/or consultation.

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood, Special Education, Psychology, Social Work, Education, or Nursing, and;
- 12 clock hours annually specific to early childhood social and emotional development and/or mental health, and
- A formal relationship with a licensed mental health practitioner to provide specialized consultation/supervision and support to the provider of Mental Health Consultation; OR Licensed mental health practitioner with training and experience in early childhood (preferred)

Activity/Services provided are designed to support problem solving and capacity building of the providers through the following activities:

- Child Observation
- Screening of social and emotional development
- Ensure developmental screening has been completed
- Review of development screening results
- Consultation to EC provider and/or family member on environmental interventions for the child
- Development of child specific written plan identifying environmental, teacher and family interventions as needed
- Provision of written feedback on observations and intervention strategies
- Facilitated referrals for children with potential diagnosis, serious emotional and/or social problems and/or family issues that impact the child
- Consultation with health practitioner, family members, and/or service providers
- Training of early childhood providers, families, and/or healthcare providers on pertinent subjects (e.g. behavior management strategies)

#### **SELECTIVE MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION**

Child with a mental health diagnosis or suspected diagnosis and guidance on management is needed

Sites: Family home, home based childcare, center based childcare, health practitioner office

Description: This level of MHC addresses the individualized needs of a specific child that has or is suspected of having a mental illness or emotional disorder. This level does not provide direct therapy to the child or family but provides guidance and assistance to caregivers in regards to relational or environmental supports. Often the main goal is to prevent disruptions in the child's natural environments due to maladaptive behaviors and/or to provide tools to the natural caregivers to support the child's positive functioning across different environments. Qualifications: Licensed mental health professional with early childhood training and experience

#### Activity/Services Provided

- Services/Activities included in Targeted MHC
- Child Observation
- Development of a specific plan for an individual child that addresses environmental, early childhood provider and family interventions
- Design and implement program practices to address behavioral, emotional and social issues
- Modeling of prescriptive behavioral interventions and coaching for staff and/or family members
- Monitoring impact of interventions

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- Provision of written feedback on observations and intervention strategies
- Facilitated referrals for children with serious social and emotional problems and/or family issues that impact the child
- Consultation with health practitioner, family members, and/or service providers
- Collaboration with systems involved with the child (health practitioner, school/early learning, Children's Division)

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## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**At- Risk-** experiences or behaviors that are known to be correlated/connected with a negative outcome. A child “at-risk” may not yet be experiencing the negative outcome but supports/interventions are needed to reduce the probability that the negative outcome will occur

**Collaborative Relationship** – an association between two professionals in which there are common goals addressed through shared commitment and responsibilities

**Early care or education provider-** an organization or an individual that provides childcare and/or educational supports to children from 0-6 years of age OR home visiting programs in which the focus is on educating the parent in regards to child development including social and emotional functioning.

**Facilitated Referrals** - a process through which an individual/organization identifies the need for a referral and provides assistance and support to the caregiver/guardian in making an appointment to another individual/organization to meet an identified need of a child and family. This may include directly assisting the guardian while they make an appointment and/or following up with the parent/guardian on whether an appointment was made, obtaining signed release of information forms to allow communication regarding outcomes and need for future collaboration; and following up to provide continued coordination of care.

**Formal Relationship** – An association between a caregiver and a mental health consultant with responsibilities for each party outlined in a written agreement.

**Health Practitioner** – an individual who is licensed in the state of Missouri to provide physical and/or behavioral health services to individuals. This includes but is not limited to physicians, advance practice nurses, nurses, clinical social workers, professional counselors and psychologists.

**Mental Health Training** – The following is a list of known trainings that would meet the criteria for the 12 clock hours for social and emotional development. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Center for Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning
- Social and Emotional Foundations for Learning: All Inclusive
- Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect Modules
- College level courses that are specific around social and emotional development of young children
- Trainings endorsed by state licensing boards that address social and emotional development of young children
- Dept. of Mental Health sponsored trainings on early childhood