

# Frequently Asked Questions about Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

## What is Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC)?

ECMHC is a preventative, strength-based, culturally responsive approach that pairs a mental health consultant with adult caregivers (parents, teachers, child-care providers, etc.) to help enhance their ability to address behavior that may be challenging or concerning. ECMHC emphasizes strengthening relationships between early learning and care providers, families, children, and representatives of the community. This collaborative relationship allows all adults caring for a child to respond effectively to the child's emotional needs.

## Define Early Childhood Mental Health

Early Childhood Mental Health is the developing capacity of a child from birth to age five to:

- Experience, regulate, and express emotions
- Form close and secure interpersonal relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

...all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children (Zero To Three, 2018)

## What ECMHC is NOT!

ECMHC is NOT therapy! Consultation does not include assessment or diagnosis of specific children. Consultants may observe your child in the classroom, at home, or in other settings and they may ask you to complete questionnaires - but they do not provide standardized assessments for diagnostic purposes. Consultants may refer the child and family to a mental health service provider if needed.

<p><b>What ECMHC is:</b></p> <p><b>Promotion &amp; prevention focused</b> - access to support BEFORE a crisis</p> <p><b>Indirect</b> - primarily working with program staff and primary caregivers</p> <p><b>Relationship-based</b> - working in collaboration with staff and primary caregivers</p> <p><b>Capacity building</b> - helping staff and primary caregivers build self-efficacy</p> <p><b>Big Picture</b> - exploring common themes across program/setting</p>	<p><b>What ECMHC Is NOT:</b></p> <p><b>Therapy</b> - we do NOT provide standardized assessments, diagnoses, or clinical treatment</p> <p><b>"Fixing the child"</b> - creating a behavioral modification plan</p> <p><b>Coaching</b> - classroom management/environment, child development, learning/pedagogy</p> <p><b>Supervision</b> - monitoring and managing staff performance</p> <p><b>Special Education expert</b> - assist in writing IEP, answer questions about IEP</p>
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## What are the benefits of ECMHC?

Benefits of ECMHC include improved classroom or early learning environments, reduced incidents of behaviors adults find challenging, increased adult understanding of typical child development, improved school readiness, reduced caregiver stress and teacher turnover, and reduced likelihood that a child will leave a program.

## Who is eligible for ECMHC?

ECMHC is a FREE resource for all children enrolled in First Class Pre-K. Children are eligible for ECMHC through a partnership between the ADECE and the ADMH. More information may be found on the ADECE website and through your FCPK program.

If you are the parent/caregiver or provider of a child aged birth - 6y who is NOT enrolled in FCPK and would like to connect with an ECMH Consultant, please reach out to First 5 Alabama using this request link: <https://www.first5alabama.org/iecmhcrequest>

## How will ECMHC support my program?

Mental health consultants provide an opportunity for reflection with administrators, directors, teachers, and staff to take a deeper dive into challenging situations through collaborative exploration to come up with strategies needed to take next steps toward solutions.

## When should I work with an ECMH Consultant?

The best time to begin working with a consultant is as soon as you notice signs of emotional distress, behavioral changes, developmental concerns, mood changes, or social withdrawal. Consultants may also be available to assist in supporting children and families after a natural disaster, man-made disaster, or other traumatic event.

### Positive social and emotional development is supported by:

- Responsive relationships with primary caregivers
- Understanding/adapting to individual temperaments
- Encouraging social and emotional learning in everyday routines (PLAY, exploring interests and environment)
- Teaching words to understand emotions
- Recognizing culture/family traditions to shape identity

### Potential mental health concerns in young children:

- Changes in feeding/eating, toileting, sleeping habits
- Externalizing behavior, like excessive crying, clinging, biting, tantrums, aggression
- Internalizing behavior, like social withdrawal and fearfulness
- Regressions to earlier stages of development
- Known child welfare system involvement
- Adverse events such as death, illness, disasters