

Infant & Toddler Mental Health Project in New York State



Essentials for Childhood

Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments can “make a difference for children as they grow and develop” (p.6). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies quality care and education in early life as a key strategy, where we can look to prevent early childhood adversity, including child abuse and neglect, to mitigate impacts of negative experiences, and to assure that all children reach their full potential, by focusing on relationships and environments with these qualities. By definition, safety, stability, and nurturing means¹:



➤ Safety

The extent to which a child is free from fear and secure from physical or psychological harm within their social and physical environment.



➤ Nurturing

The extent to which children’s physical, emotional, and developmental needs are sensitively and consistently met.

➤ Stability

The degree of predictability and consistency in a child’s social, emotional, and physical environment.

New York State’s Infant & Toddler Resource Network continues to grow exponentially. The network is comprised of 60 Infant & Toddler Specialists (ITS) and 26 Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultants (ITMHCs). Growth continues across the state, with hopes to fill the network with close to 100 Infant & Toddler professionals working collaboratively to provide childcare providers with the tools to high-quality care for New York’s infants and toddlers. Using the 10 Components as a framework to guide services, the IT Network provides child care workers with the following strategies as a guide.

10 Components of Quality Infant & Toddler Care

Foundations

1
SAFE & HEALTHY PROGRAM PRACTICES

Quality infant and toddler programs ensure the health and safety of children.

2
STAFF WELL-TRAINED

Programs train and support staff to meet the specialized needs of infants and toddlers.

3
ENVIRONMENTS FOR LEARNING

Nurturing environments promote feelings of security and competence for children during interactive caregiving routines and play.

Relationships

4
SMALL GROUPS WITH OPTIMAL RATIOS

Low ratios and small groups enable teachers to devote more individual attention to children, thereby promoting secure attachments and intimate relationships.

5
PRIMARY CAREGIVING & CONTINUITY OF CARE

Teachers are assigned responsibility for primary caregiving and establish nurturing relationships with each child and family from infancy to age three.

6
ACTIVE & RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING

Responsive teachers provide a secure base for infants and toddlers to develop emotional regulation and a healthy sense of self.

Language & Learning

7
CURRICULUM & INDIVIDUALIZATION

Curriculum for infants and toddlers happens within the context of relationships and individualized daily care routines and play.

8
EMERGING LANGUAGE & LITERACY

Language acquisition and the development of literacy for infants and toddlers develop through frequent interactions, language-rich routines, and daily experiences with books.

Family Supports

9
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT & CULTURAL CONTINUITY

Programs value families and their cultures as integral partners in guiding their child’s development and future school readiness.

10
COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

Infants, toddlers, and their families are strengthened when programs help link them to needed community supports.

ITS & ITMHC in the Infant Toddler Resource Network

People in the ITS and ITMHC roles are a part of a team. Both the ITS and the ITMHC are focused on building the understanding and skills of adult caregivers in early care and education settings to better respond to the needs of the children and families in their settings. People in these roles work closely with center-based and home-based care providers. People in both roles may work with concerns related to relationships, social, emotional, and/or physical health, however, there are concerns that they may help with that are unique to their specific roles and areas of expertise. Your local Child Care Resource & Referral Agency will work with you to determine which role can best meet the need that you may be describing.

Infant Toddler Specialist

- Focuses on building and maintaining strong foundations consistent with infant and toddler development by using the 10 components of quality care, curriculum, environment, teaching practices, continuity of care, etc.
- Utilizes assessments including the ITERS, CLASS, TPITOS, ASQ and ASQ S/E. Technical assistance around use of tool and analyzing data.
- Assists programs in building family engagement strategies and policies.
- Assists programs in creating policy and guidelines around best practices.
- Providing provider professional development opportunities.
- Can refer child/family/provider to MHC for additional follow up.
- Coordination and collaboration with related infant toddler service organization
- Coordination and collaboration with higher education
- Parent Training

Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultant

- Focuses on building relationship and reflective skills with caregivers to help infants and toddlers in their care to “form close and secure adult and peer relationships, express and manage a full range of emotions, and explore the environment and learn, all in the context of family, community and culture”
- Utilizes assessments including the CLASS, DECA, ITERS and FCCRS which help the child care providers and ITMH Consultants in identifying data-driven goals and developing action plans.
- Engaging families in work with providers and children.
- Supports child care providers in building connections with community organizations to support the needs of individual children and families.
- Provide parent training and psychoeducational workgroups.
- Provide provider professional development relating to social and emotional development, responsive caregiving, and self-care practices.

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Voices from the Field: Collaboration

“For any organization to thrive, I believe authentic collaborations with colleagues are important. It’s been a delight to speak with [my agency’s ITMHC] on issues that affect the communities we serve and best practices during these challenging times. It is nice to discuss infant toddler work as it relates to mental health and family childcare.

While we come from different cultural backgrounds, we do share similarities; we respect, learn from one another’s perspectives.

Our conversations are often open-ended, stimulating, and thought-provoking. We do our best to listen, validate our ideas and thoughts.”

- Lisa Plaskett, Infant and Toddler Specialist, Child Development Support Corporation



“Having the roles as both an ITMHC and an ITS has provided myself a very unique opportunity and insight to direct and modern childcare frameworks. In this situation, providing support across all domains of childcare settings (both large and small) establishes solid relationships and consultation regarding: attachment, appropriate developmental milestones, and social-emotional skill capacity... As we move forward through unprecedented and often unsettling times, the evolving and expanding relationships and consultation allows the teachers to be heard and know that their work is immeasurable.”

- Steve Tedone, Infant and Toddler Mental Health Consultant/Specialist, Child Care Aware® of Steuben and Schuyler, a department of Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc.

References

1. CDC National Center for Injury and Prevention Control. Essentials for Childhood. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/essentials-for-childhood-framework508.pdf>