

**ENDORSEMENT FOR
CULTURALLY SENSITIVE,
RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSED
PRACTICE**



**Promoting
Infant & Early
Childhood
Mental Health**

WHY INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH IS SO IMPORTANT

Babies are born ready to form attachments. From their first breath, infants are forming connections, developing social responses and learning about themselves and the world around them. As the baby advances through toddlerhood and the early childhood years, each experience, positive or negative, becomes a building block for their future wellness.



The attachment relationship between infant and caregiver(s) is crucial to healthy development. A secure, warm, responsive and predictable relationship with at least one caregiver influences the formation of neural structures in the brain that lead to positive infant well-being.



Even in situations of stress, secure attachment relationships can help buffer the developing brain from significant harm. A sound social and emotional base is the launching pad for all other development – the physical, motor and cognitive development that prepares children for school and for eventual success in life.

<https://www.vaimh.org>

WHY INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH IS SO IMPORTANT

If those early relationships are highly stressful – through absence, poverty, unpredictability or violence – neuronal pathways more attuned to reactivity are forged. This puts children at greater risk for challenges in life, including school failure and social difficulties.



The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study shows that traumatic or abusive events in childhood are associated with depression, cardiovascular disease, cancer, alcoholism, and drug abuse in adult life.



When infants are in poor-quality childcare or parental care is compromised due to issues such as serious depression, the infant's responsiveness can be compromised. This can affect brain development and subsequent mental well-being.

<https://www.vaimh.org>

EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH ENDORSEMENT®

The Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement® serves to equip early childhood professionals with the tools that will support and promote the social-emotional development and mental health of young children (age 3-6) and their families.



ECMH Endorsees advocate for strong protective factors that can help to improve a family's ability to cope with stress, which leads to healthy child development and stronger family supports.



The ECMH-E® is for professionals in early care and education programs, family support programs, child welfare, social and behavioral health service systems, to name a few.

<https://www.vaimh.org>

IECMH Values

The primary focus of the IECMH Endorsement is on the **Relationship** between the parent/caregiver + the baby/young child + the professional. There are 7 values that form the basis of the Endorsement. Questions in your Application will ask you to document how you are applying these principles in your daily work with infants/young children and their families.

Values:

1. Importance of Relationships
2. Respect for Ethnicity, Race, Culture, Individuality, and Diversity
3. Commitment to Dismantling Inequities through Social and Racial Justice Work
4. Integrity
5. Confidentiality
6. Knowledge and Skill Building
7. Reflective Practice

INTRODUCTION TO THE VAIMH ENDORSEMENT®



The Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health (**MI-AIMH**) is an interdisciplinary, professional organization established to promote and support the optimal development of infants, very young children, and families through relationship-focused workforce development and advocacy efforts.

Incorporated in 1977, MI-AIMH has offered infant mental health training and education opportunities to individuals and groups for approximately 46 years.

By 2013, 13 AIMHs had licensed the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health Competency Guidelines® and Endorsement®. The oversight and quality assurance demands for a small MI-AIMH were considerable. The MI-AIMH leadership, and leaders in other member states, recognized that future strength and growth would require organizational change.

The MI-AIMH Board of Directors subsequently engaged in a strategic planning process with knowledge and support from non-MI-AIMH leaders and proposed the creation of a separate organization. In 2014, that organization was incorporated as the **Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health**.

The Virginia Association for Infant Mental Health (VAIMH) obtained legal authorization in 2010 to use Michigan's Competency and Endorsement for use in Virginia and began endorsing IMH professionals in 2014. VAIMH's first ECMH-E Cohort was accepted in 2023.

<https://www.vaimh.org>

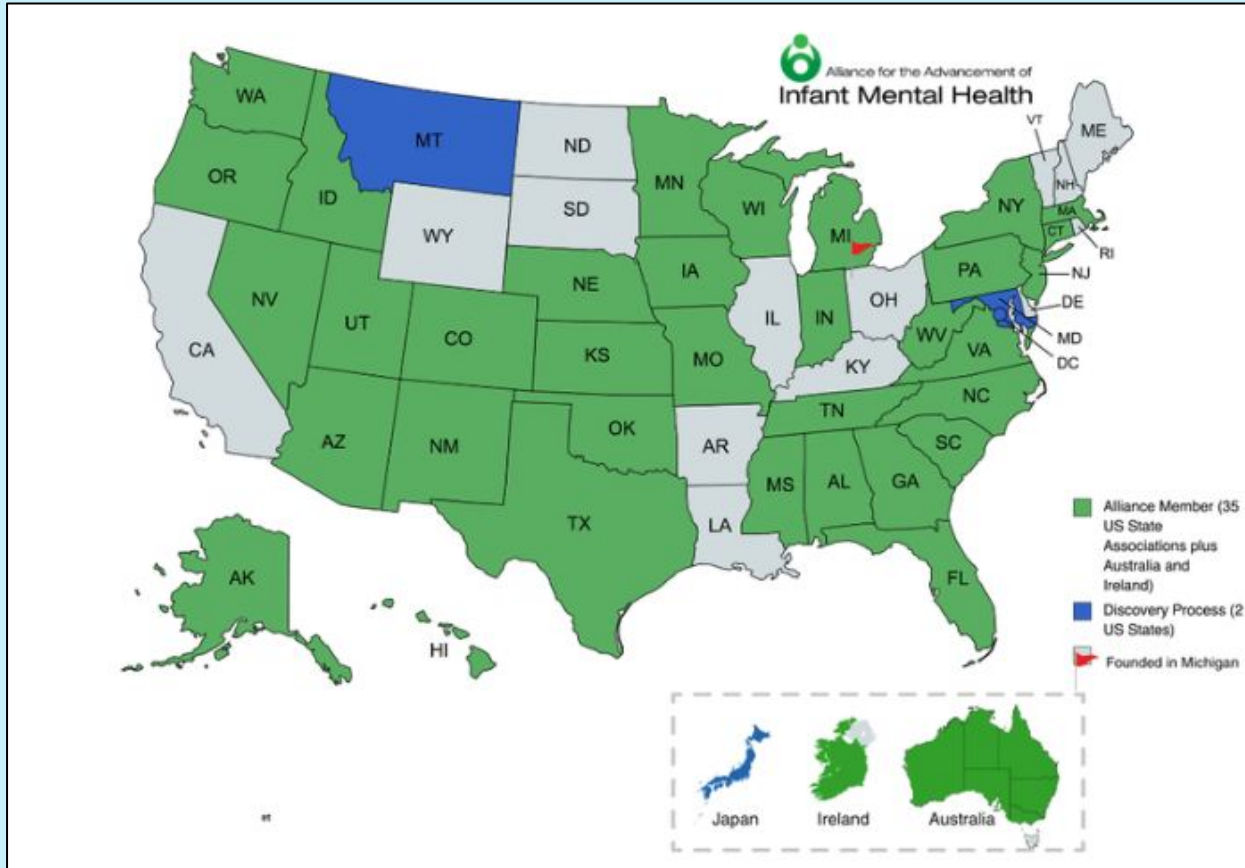


Alliance for the Advancement of
Infant Mental Health

VAIMH & THE ALLIANCE

The Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health is a global organization that now partners with 35 state associations of infant mental health (AIMHs) and 2 international associations to:

- Lead by providing expertise and partnership in preparing and supporting the workforce to provide relationship-focused IECMH-informed services
- Demonstrate and communicate the value and impact of a professional, IECMH-informed workforce to the broader public
- Partner with Associations for Infant Mental Health to build their capacity to support, grow, diversify, and advocate for the IECMH-informed workforce
- Continuously strive to become an anti-racist organization and support Associations for Infant Mental Health in their journeys toward social justice.



35 state associations and 2 international associations are members of the Alliance.

Over 5,296 professionals have obtained IMH Endorsement since 2002.

<https://www.allianceaimh.org>
<https://www.allianceaimh.org/reports>

Why Consider IECMH ENDORSEMENT®

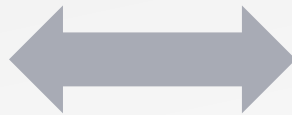
- **For you:** Earning Infant and/or Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement® enhances your credibility and confidence in working with or on behalf of infants, toddlers, young children, and their families. You will gain recognition and belong to a cross-systems, multi-disciplinary network of Endorsed professionals in Virginia through the [Virginia Association for Infant Mental Health](#) and across the nation through the [Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health](#).
- **For children and families:** Infants, toddlers, young children, and families receive culturally sensitive, relationship-based services provided by a workforce that demonstrates a common set of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health [values](#) and [competencies](#).
- **For your community:** IECMH-E® provides assurance to families, agencies, employers, and the public at large that infant and early childhood professionals meet high standards of care and have met the competencies needed to support the optimal development of infants, toddlers, young children, and their families.
- **For employers:** the IECMH Endorsement® provides a framework to guide agency hiring, professional development, and best practice standards to help ensure a qualified workforce.

INFANT OR EARLY CHILDHOOD ENDORSEMENT?

The Infant Mental Health Endorsement® is one of the first and most comprehensive efforts, nationally and internationally, to identify best practice competencies across disciplines and practice settings, offering multiple career pathways for professional development in the infant/early childhood and family field.

IMH-E®

Infant Mental Health Endorsed professionals work with or on behalf of pregnant people, infants, toddlers, and families under a credential that recognizes their specialized knowledge and skills in the infant-family field.
(Age 0-36 months)



ECMH-E®

Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsed professionals work with or on behalf of children and their families under a credential that recognizes their specialized knowledge and skills in the early childhood-family field.
(Age 3 up to 6)

<https://www.vaimh.org>

ENDORSEMENT® IS:

- ▶ cross-sector and multidisciplinary, including professionals from child and/or human development, education, nursing, pediatrics, psychiatry, psychology, social work, family day homes, and childcare centers.
- ▶ intended to recognize experiences that lead to competency in the infant-family field. It does not replace licensure or certification, but instead is meant as evidence of a specialization in this field.
- ▶ not a training program, license, or certification.
- ▶ a credential that indicates an individual's efforts to specialize in the promotion and practice of infant and early childhood mental health within his/her own chosen discipline is a result of having met certain competencies designed to support and enhance culturally sensitive, relationship-focused practice within IECMH.
- ▶ provides credibility for professionals engaged in the critical work of supporting young children's social-emotional health and well-being.
- ▶ administered by an AIMH (i.e., the Virginia Association for Infant Mental Health) (VAIMH)

INFANT & EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH IS:



It is the developing capacity from birth to age 6 to experience, regulate, and express emotions, form close relationships, explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children.

(ZERO TO THREE Infant Mental Health Task Force, 2011)

ENDORSEMENT® COMPETENCIES

Inspired by the work of Selma Fraiberg and her colleagues who coined the phrase infant mental health (Fraiberg, 1980), practitioners in Michigan designed services to identify and treat developmental and relationship disturbances in infancy and early parenthood. The pioneering infant mental health specialists were challenged to understand the emotional experiences and needs of infants while remaining curious and attuned to parental behavior and mental health needs within the context of developing parent-child relationships. Specialists worked with parents and infants together, most often in clients' homes but also in clinics and settings for assessment and service delivery. [Intervention and] treatment strategies varied, including concrete assistance, emotional support, developmental guidance, early relationship assessment and support, infant parent psychotherapy, and advocacy (Weatherston, 2001).

As infant mental health practice evolved in Michigan, clinicians, university faculty, and policymakers became increasingly concerned about the training needs of professionals for quality service in the infant mental health field. **Competency, as determined by expert consensus, required the development of a unique knowledge base, clinical assessment, and [intervention/]treatment skills specific to infancy and early parenthood, and [reflective] clinical supervisory experiences that would lead to best practice.** These basic components were approved by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental health (MI-AIMH) Board of Directors in **1983** and outlined in the MI-AIMH Training Guidelines (**1986**) to guide preservice, graduate, and in-service training of infant mental health specialist in institutes, colleges, universities, and work settings.

ENDORSEMENT COMPETENCY GUIDELINES

The Competency Guidelines for Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health® (Endorsement) are **internationally recognized credentials that support and recognize the development and proficiency of professionals who work with or on behalf of pregnant people, young children, birth up to 6-years-old, and their families.**

Both the Infant Mental Health Endorsement® (IMH-E®) and the Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement® (ECMH-E®) are based on a set of competencies designed to support and enhance culturally sensitive, relationship focused practice within the framework of infant and early childhood mental health. An Endorsement applicant demonstrates acquisition of these competencies through education, work, specialized training, and reflective supervision experiences.

Working with our youngest citizens requires specialized training and experience, and **IMH-E®** ensures professionals have attained a certain level of expertise with **0-3-year-olds and their families.**

ECMH-E® assures that professionals have attained a specific level of expertise with **3 up to 6-year-olds and their families.**

Both IMH-E® and ECMH-E® are relevant for professionals across disciplines including early care and education, prevention and early intervention, home visitation, medicine, child welfare, mental health, policy, academia, and others.

<https://voimh.myeasy.org/competency-guidelines>
<https://www.vaimh.org/competency-guidelines>

COMPETENCY GUIDELINES AT A GLANCE

Competency Guidelines® lay the foundation for the Endorsement.

They outline the requirements and define the experiences that a professional will have that will:

1. Lead to knowledge and skills that
2. Can be applied to work with or on behalf of pregnant women, infants, young children, and their families in a manner that is
3. Culturally sensitive, relationship-focused in the promotion and practice of infant and early childhood mental health.

The Competency Guidelines® are the framework. They describe both the **quantitative requirements** (e.g., level of education, number of training and Reflective Supervision hours, years of experience, etc.) and the **qualitative requirements** (e.g., knowledge and skill areas that drive best practice).

These guidelines promote professional and systems growth and change by inviting dialogue for collaborative practice, training, and evaluation. They are shared standards across disciplines and service delivery systems.

ENDORSEMENT COMPETENCY EXAMPLES

“The development of competence to work with infants, young children, and their families involves the emotions as well as the intellect. Awareness of powerful attitudes and feelings is as essential as the acquisition of scientific knowledge and therapeutic skill.” (ZERO TO THREE, 1990) [[Endorsement Competency Guidelines](#)]

- Pregnancy & Early Parenthood
- Infant/Young Child Development & Behavior
- Infant/Young Child/Family Centered Practice
- Relationship-focused Therapeutic Practice
- Family Relationships & Dynamics
- Attachment, Separation, Trauma, Grief, & Loss
- Cultural Humility
- Screening & Assessment
- Advocacy
- Empathy & Compassion
- Exercising Sound Judgment
- Maintaining Perspective
- Contemplation
- Self Awareness
- Curiosity

These guidelines provide a framework for identifying knowledge, skills, and reflective practice approaches that best support the development of competency across the disciplines and in multiple practice settings.

CATEGORIES OF INFANT & EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH ENDORSEMENT®

1. **Family Associate (IFA / ECFA): Promotion**

Typically, infant and toddler providers who work in childcare settings such as daycare center, family child care homes, preschools, or are administrators, case managers, child welfare staff, etc.

2. **Family Specialist (IFS / ECFS): Prevention/Early Intervention**

Typically, home visitors, case managers, service coordinators, center directors, OTs, PTs, SLPs, mental health consultants, etc.

3. **Mental Health Specialist (IMHS / ECMHS): Clinical Intervention/Treatment**

Typically, mental health providers with licensure (e.g., LCSW, MSW, Psychologists, Clinicians, etc.).

4. **Mental Health Mentor (IMHM / ECMHM): Leaders & Mentors in the I/EC-family field**

- a. **Clinical:** Professionals who provide treatment/clinical intervention to the infant/young child and their caregiver together when IECMH disorders exist or when a caregiver's mental or behavioral disorder affects their relationship with the infant/young child.
- a. **Policy:** Professionals who work to promote infant and early childhood-informed policy and program development.
- b. **Research/Faculty:** Professionals who work to promote what we know in the IECMH community through research and academia.

FAMILY ASSOCIATE & FAMILY SPECIALIST

- **Family Associates** typically work directly with the infant to **promote** healthy growth, development, and relationships. They use their IECMH expertise to support infants/young children, caregivers, systems, and other IECMH professionals through direct service and/or macro work.
 - Childcare Teacher
 - Preschool Teacher
 - Teacher's Assistant/Aide
 - Administration
 - Case Management
 - Child Welfare
- **Family Specialists** typically work in **prevention and early intervention** by working with the infant/young child and caregiver together using their IECMH expertise to assess social emotional needs, provide preventative support, and connect families to additional services.
 - Part C
 - Early Head Start
 - Home Visitors
 - Case Managers
 - Supervisors
 - Health Providers
 - Early Interventionists
 - OTs, PTs, SLPs

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST & MENTAL HEALTH MENTOR

- **Mental Health Specialists** are licensed professionals who provide mental health treatment and/or clinical intervention to the infant/young child and their caregiver (dyadic therapy) when IECMH disorders exist or when a caregiver's mental or behavioral disorder affects their relationship with the infant/young child.
- **Mental Health Mentors** are leaders and mentors in the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health-family field.
 - **Mentor-Clinical** professionals typically provide dyadic therapy/clinical intervention to the infant/young child and their caregiver when IECMH disorders exist. They are also providers of IECMH RS/C.
 - **Mentor-Policy** professionals typically work to promote infant and early childhood-informed policy and program development.
 - **Mentor-Research/Faculty** professionals typically work to promote IECMH through research and academia by informing students, professionals, programs, and systems.

SCOPE OF WORK FLOW CHART

When working with or on behalf of 0-6-year-olds, do you...

...provide direct service to:

...or support others as a:

Individuals/Others:
Caregiver, teacher, child, etc.

Caregiver-Child Dyads

Direct Service Supervisor

Program Administrator

State, Local, Gov't Advocate or Policy Maker

Researcher or University Educator

How do you support them?

Do you have direct service experience?

Mentor-Policy

Mentor-Research/Faculty

Prevention and/or Early Intervention

Treatment (e.g., infant-parent psychotherapy)

Prevention and/or Early Intervention

Treatment (e.g., infant-parent psychotherapy)

This tool is to help start your Endorsement experience. You may find that you don't "fit" perfectly in one track. Please consult with your Endorsement Coordinator for support.

Family Associate

Family Specialist

Mental Health Specialist

Family Specialist

Mentor-Clinical

Mental Health Specialist

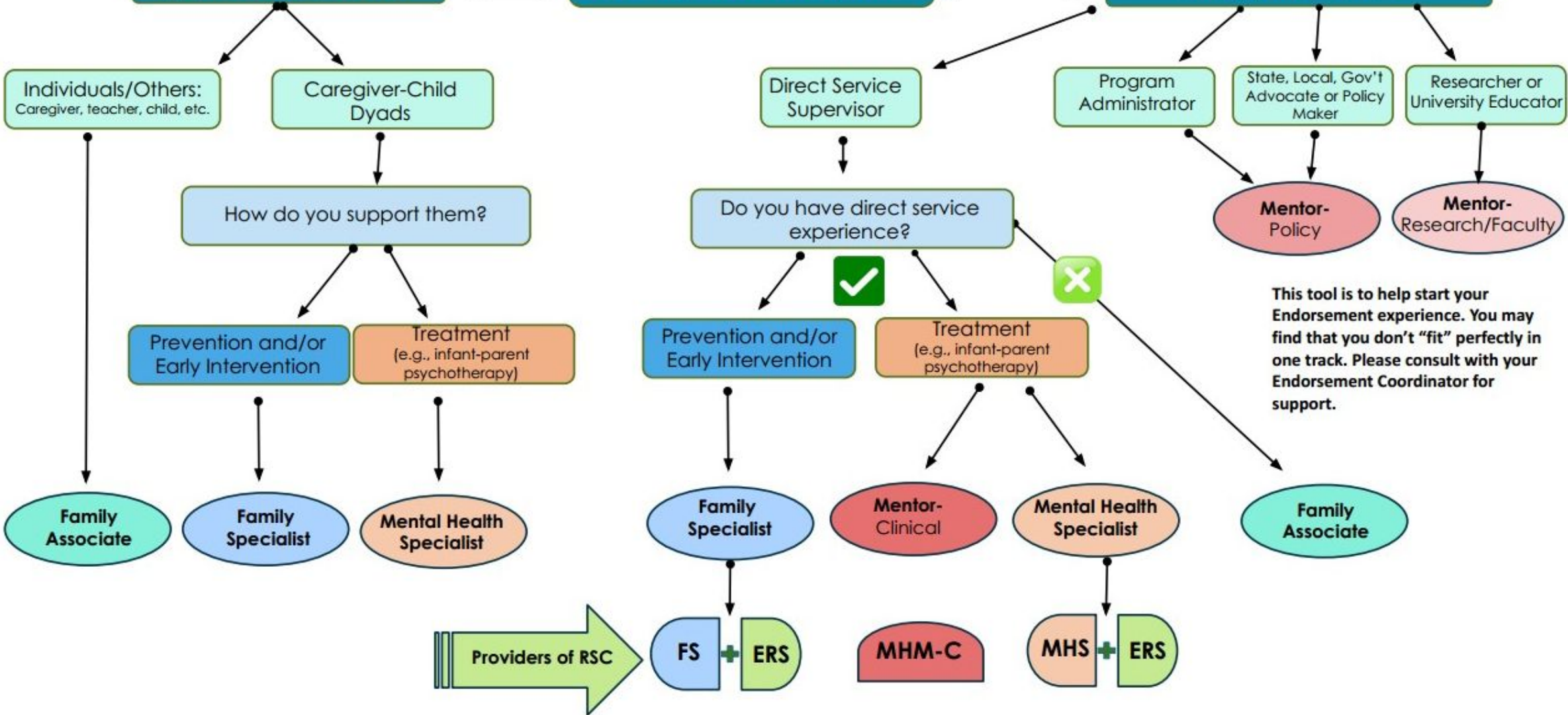
Family Associate

Providers of RSC

FS + ERS

MHM-C

MHS + ERS



Endorsement is for Every Infant & Early Childhood Professional

| FA | FS | MHS | MHM-C macro / systems Provider of RSC | MHM-P macro / systems | MHM-R/F macro / systems |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Family Associate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide direct services promoting healthy growth and development to infants/young children ages 0-6 • Provide program support to direct service workers who work with 0-6 year olds | <p>Family Specialist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily promotes social emotional wellbeing and works in prevention and EI to assess and identify needs to support dyads across multiple systems. • Works directly with children and/or primary caregivers & young children together (dyads) • May provide RSC with the ERS Add-On | <p>Mental Health Specialist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary role is providing direct clinical intervention to or on behalf of 0-6 year olds targeting specific, identified social emotional needs of the dyad through evidence based intervention modalities • May provide RSC with the ERS Add-On | <p>Mental Health Mentor - Clinical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a professional / leadership role and promotes IECMH principles and practices through macro systems • Provide(d) direct clinical intervention and reflective supervision /consultation to those who provide clinical intervention to 0-6 year olds | <p>Mental Health Mentor - Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a professional / leadership role and promotes IECMH principles and practices through macro systems • Provide IECMH policy support around programs, systems, and/or through government | <p>Mental Health Mentor - Research/Faculty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a professional / leadership role and promotes IECMH principles and practices through macro systems • Teach at an institution and/or conduct/publish research specific to IECMH and 0-6 year olds |

Pathway to Providing Reflective Supervision/Consultation

Endorsed As:

Family
Specialist

Mental Health
Specialist

Requirements for ERS Add-On

Requirements
not yet met

Emerging Status

Provide RSC for a minimum of 12 months to at least 1 person

Receive RSC from a qualified, endorsed provider on the provision of RSC you provide to others

Participate in a minimum of 15 training hours on the provision of RSC

Hold active VAIMH Membership and Endorsement

Emerging Status

If you haven't provided RSC for 1 year you may still apply for the ERS add-on and will need 5 additional hours of training on the Provision of RSC.

If approved for **Emerging** ERS, you have 2 years to provide, receive, and participate in 15 more hours of training to meet the full requirements.

Not Yet Endorsed

Connect with VAIMH's Endorsement Coordinator for guidance. (If you apply for FS or MHS, you can apply for ERS at the same time.)

| Endorsement Category | Receive RSC From: | Provide RSC To: |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| FS | ERS & MHM-C | N/A |
| FS-ERS | ERS & MHM-C | FS, MHS, & ERS |
| MHS | ERS & MHM-C | N/A |
| MHS-ERS | ERS & MHM-C | FS, MHS, & ERS |
| MHM-C | MHM-C | FS, MHS, ERS, & MHM-C |

WHAT IS REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION & CONSULTATION (RS/C)?

It is a specific type of supervision that is the standard of practice in the infant-early childhood and family field.



It is distinct due to the shared exploration of the parallel process.

All relationships are important.



RS/C attends to the emotional content of the work, and how reactions to that content affect the work.

By attending to the emotional content of the work, and how reactions to that content affect the work, RS/C relates to professional and personal development within one's own discipline.

Required for:

- Family Specialists
- Mental Health Specialists
- Mental Health Mentor-Clinical

COMPONENTS OF RS/C

- The formation of a trusting relationship between a **qualified (endorsed) provider** (e.g., Family Specialist-ERS, Mental Health Specialist-ERS, and Mental Health Mentor-Clinical) and practitioner of IECMH.
- Established consistent/predictable meetings and times.
- A safe space to ask questions that encourage details about the infant, parent, and emerging relationship.
- A space to remain emotionally present in a nurturing and supportive way.
- The integration of emotion and reason.
- The fostering of the reflective process to be internalized by the supervisee.
- The exploration of the parallel process and dedicated time for personal reflection.
- The contemplation of how reactions to the content of the work can affect the reflective process.

Family Specialists, Mental Health Specialists, and Mental Health Mentor-Clinical professionals are **required to document the receipt of ongoing reflective supervision and consultation for their annual Endorsement Renewals.**

IECMH categories that do not require the receipt of RS/C (i.e., Family Associates, Mental Health Mentor-Policy, and Mental Health Mentor-Research/Faculty) are strongly encouraged to receive RS/C for ongoing professional and personal growth.

IECMH RESOURCES

▶ **VAIMH Website:**

<https://www.vaimh.org/>

▶ **Early Childhood Mental Health VA (ECMHVA) Website:**

<https://ecmhva.partnership.vcu.edu/>

▶ **Endorsement Overview:**

<https://www.vaimh.org/endorsement-overview>

▶ **Endorsement Category Overview:**

<https://www.vaimh.org/endorsement-overview> (Category Requirements)

▶ **Steps to Apply for Endorsement:**

<https://www.vaimh.org/steps-to-apply>

▶ **Endorsement-related Fees:**

<https://www.vaimh.org/endorsement-fees>

Virginia's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement
Coordinator:

Kristen Stahr | khstahr@vcu.edu

Infant & Early Childhood Endorsement Funders

The Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement is supported by funds from:

- A. The **Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS)** - *Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia, State Part C Office*
 - Represented by: [Tracy Walters](mailto:tracy.walters@dbhds.virginia.gov), IMH-E®, IFS, Infant & Early Childhood State Coordinator (tracy.walters@dbhds.virginia.gov)
- B. The **Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)** - *Early Childhood Special Education & Head Start State Collaboration Office;*
- C. **Early Impact Virginia (EIVA)** - *Alliance of Home Visiting Programs in Virginia;* and
- D. The **Partnership for People with Disabilities** at *Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education*
 - Represented by: [Jackie Robinson Brock](mailto:robinsonjb3@vcu.edu), IMH-E®, IMHM-P, Early Childhood Mental Health Virginia ([ECMHVA](mailto:robinsonjb3@vcu.edu)) Initiative
 - Represented by: [Kristen Stahr](mailto:khstahr@vcu.edu), IMH-E®, IFA, IECMH Endorsement Coordinator, khstahr@vcu.edu

* The **ECMHVA Initiative** partners with the Virginia Association for Infant Mental Health (**VAIMH**) to implement the **Virginia Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant Mental Health**.

*The Endorsement is run through the [Partnership for People with Disabilities at VCU](#).

*[VAIMH](#) is a member of the [Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health](#) and holds the license for Endorsement.



Virginia's Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health System

