

# All Hands on Deck: Pyramid Model Coaches, Mental Health Consultants, and Mental Health Therapists

## Who is Who and What Do They Do?

### Pyramid Model Coach

Pyramid Model coaching is a promotion and prevention-based support that provides coaching to early childhood educators and programs (including early intervention practitioners) to implement the Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social and Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Pyramid Model) with fidelity. There are two types of coaches that support the implementation of the Pyramid Model: 1) program implementation coaches and 2) practitioner coaches.

**Program implementation coaches** might also be referred to as an external coach, program coach, or systems coach. These professionals are trained Pyramid Model experts who support program leadership teams that establish the implementation infrastructure for practitioners to implement Pyramid Model practices. They guide the program leadership team to implement family engagement strategies, provide professional development and coaching, establish procedures for responding to challenging behavior, and collect and analyze program implementation and outcome data. Program implementation coaches might also provide state or local professional development events.

**Practitioner coaches** use practice-based coaching (PBC) to guide practitioners to implement Pyramid Model practices with fidelity. PBC is an evidence-based approach for coaching that is cyclical and involves the following components: collaborative partnership; shared goals and action planning; focused observation; reflection and feedback. Coaching can also include support for intervention when a behavior support plan is needed.

### Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC)

IECMHC is a prevention-based, indirect service that builds the capacity of caregivers to help support and sustain healthy social and emotional development of infants and young children in the natural settings where they learn and grow, such as early care and education (ECE), home visiting, and primary care.

IECMH consultants are master's-prepared, license-eligible mental health professionals; they bring a depth of knowledge of mental health topics that support young children's social-emotional development including early relational health, child development, attachment, trauma, and staff mental health and wellness.

IECMHC is based on the theory that change occurs within the context of the relationships that consultants build with teachers, home visitors, early interventionists, families, and/or administrators. Effective consultants understand strategies for supporting children's social-emotional development and focus on relationship-building activities with consultees that facilitate the adoption of new practices.

IECMH consultants flexibly use the following phases to guide their work: initiation (explores expectations and aligns philosophies); exploration (explores concerns, priorities, and interests); plan development (collaboratively develops goals and strategies); plan implementation (provides emotional and instrumental support in implementing strategies); and revisiting plans and goals (reviews progress and determines needs for sustainability). Evidence supports the effectiveness of IECMHC in reducing staff turnover and challenging behaviors among children. Additionally, early evidence indicates IECMHC can be an interrupter of implicit bias.

IECMH consultants often help programs to implement a trauma-informed approach as well as focus on supporting staff wellness.

## Mental Health Therapist/Clinician

A mental health therapist/clinician is a licensed mental health professional, with a master's or doctorate degree, who provides treatment (also referred to as therapy or counseling) to children, families, individuals, couples, or groups. Therapists work with others to assist them in making changes in behaviors, thoughts, emotions, and how they see and understand themselves and others. Therapists work directly with children and families and often provide consultation to teachers as part of their direct work with child clients. Mental health treatment typically requires a diagnosis and is a billable service.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Is an IECMH consultant ever a Pyramid Model coach?

Yes, an IECMH consultant may be trained to serve as a program implementation coach or a practitioner coach for Pyramid Model implementation. In some programs, an IECMH consultant and Pyramid Model program implementation or practitioner coach might be the same person. In other programs, the roles may be provided by different people.

### Is the Pyramid Model and IECMHC the same thing?

No, the Pyramid Model and IECMHC are not the same. They are two distinct approaches for promoting young children's social-emotional development. They have a great deal in common and can be used together. However, the Pyramid Model is a framework of evidence-based practices for promoting young children's healthy social and emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. IECMHC is an evidence-based mental health service that pairs a mental health professional with adults who work with infants and young children. Mental health consultation supports caregivers to facilitate children's healthy social and emotional development in a variety of ways including, but not limited to: supporting their own ability to manage stress, regulating their own emotions, understanding the impact of trauma, recognizing when children may need additional mental health support, and enhancing family engagement. Consultants trained in the Pyramid Model may use it as a set of evidence-based practices to share with early childhood providers and families.

### What are the settings where IECMHC, Pyramid Model coaching, and mental health services are provided?

IECMHC is often provided in early childhood education settings (see IECMHC Crosswalk [https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/IECMHC\\_crosswalk.pdf](https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/IECMHC_crosswalk.pdf) for more information), however, it is also provided in other child- and family-serving settings such as primary care, homeless shelters, WIC programs, early intervention, child welfare, and home visiting. Pyramid Model coaching similarly is often provided in ECE programs such as community early childhood programs, family childcare homes, Head Start and Early Head Start, public preschool programs, and early intervention programs. A therapist or clinician typically provides therapy in an office setting such as a mental health or medical setting; however, therapists also may provide therapy in homes, schools, shelters, or other child- and family-serving programs. All infant/early childhood mental health services (including services to promote young children's social-emotional development) include working with and supporting the adults who provide care for young children.

## A Case Study of the Pyramid Model and IECMHC

The ABC childcare center staff has been trained in the Pyramid Model. The administrators and the teaching staff use the Pyramid Model's evidence-based practices for promoting children's social-emotional skill development. The staff in the program understand the importance of each level of the Pyramid (i.e., providing nurturing and responsive relationships, high quality environments, targeted social-emotional supports, and intensive interventions). ABC has Pyramid Model coaches (an external program implementation coach who guides the leadership team and a practitioner coach internal to the program) who help them implement the critical implementation elements and specific practices associated with the Pyramid Model. ABC childcare is also fortunate to have access to a mental health consultant. The consultant is trained in the Pyramid Model and ensures that her collaborative work with staff and the program leadership team aligns with the Pyramid Model approaches. The childcare director has asked the consultant to help them address two overarching program concerns. First, the director has been concerned about low staff morale for a while. However, she has been unsure how to address it. Additionally, last week the community had a hurricane that resulted in many of the program's families losing their homes. The consultant, director, and coaches see how the recent disaster is affecting the teachers, children, and families. The consultant works with ABC's director, leadership team, Pyramid Model coaches, and staff to explore the concerns and come up with ideas for supporting the program, staff, children, and families. The consultant uses their mental health training and skills to guide discussions with staff related to morale and appropriate remedies, as well as to normalize reactions to the traumatic event and help staff and families to identify effective short and long-term coping strategies.

### Are all IECMH consultants mental health therapists?

It is recommended that all IECMH consultants have an advanced mental health degree and experience providing therapeutic services to young children and their families. **Some IECMH consultants serve as therapists/clinicians; however, that is a distinct service from consultation.**

### What is reflective supervision and how does it relate to IECMHC\*?

Reflective supervision is a professional development activity designed to enhance the knowledge and capacity of service providers. It is defined by regular meetings between a supervisor and supervisee to collaborate and reflect together on the supervisee's thoughts, feelings, and values related to the provision of services. Reflective supervision focuses on relationships, the meaning of interactions, and the personal and professional responses to professional interactions with those the supervisee is working with. Reflective supervision is broad in scope and is not exclusively focused on early childhood social-emotional development (i.e., Some organizations also use the term reflective consultation. In reflective consultation the consultant does not have supervisory responsibilities in the relationship with the consultee).

### Who can provide reflective supervision?

Many fields such as the medical, mental health, and education fields use reflective supervision to enhance a practitioner's capacity for self-reflection in their work. There are no national regulations about who can provide reflective supervision. Anyone providing reflective supervision should have training and experience in reflective supervision. Qualifications of a reflective supervisor are largely dependent on one's field and to whom the supervisor is providing reflective supervision.

## What is an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement® and how is it related to the Pyramid Model and IECMHC?

There are several Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) endorsement programs across the United States. An IECMH endorsement establishes a standard of excellence that professionals can use to document their knowledge and professional experience. Employers can incorporate an endorsement in their hiring decisions and consumers can use the endorsement as a guide to making decisions about providers.

The Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement® offered through the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health is one of multiple endorsements that provide recognition of specialized knowledge and expertise in professionals working with or on behalf of pregnant women, children aged birth through six, and their families. The Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement® is not a license but an overlay that complements one's professional license and/or other credentials. There are four categories of endorsement representing different levels of education and expertise.\* States purchase a license for the endorsement system. Approximately 30 states have purchased the endorsement. Some states have developed their own similar competency guidelines. The IECMH endorsement is not specifically connected to IECMHC or the Pyramid Model. For more information on the alignment of Pyramid Model training and the IECMH endorsement see the *Crosswalk Between Pyramid Model Training Modules and Competency Guidelines for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health* (<http://www.iecmhc.org/documents/IECMHC-competencies.pdf>).

\*IECMH consultants, endorsed infant and early childhood mental health professionals, reflective supervisors, and mental health clinicians all receive reflective supervision as part of their professional development.



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