

Competency Guidelines

MI-AIMH Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health®.

03/18/2025

Early Childhood Family Associate

The EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY ASSOCIATE Competency Guidelines were developed by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health to clearly describe the areas of expertise, responsibilities, and behaviors that demonstrate competency for this category.

Guidelines

Theoretical Foundations

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Pregnancy and Early Parenthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports and reinforces parent’s/primary caregiver’s ability to seek appropriate care during pregnancy
Infant/Young Child Development & Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrates awareness of conditions that optimize early infant brain development
Infant/Young Child/Family Centered Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informally (and in some cases, formally) observes and assesses the infant or young child, parent/primary caregiver, and their relationship to identify landmarks of typical child development; behavior; and healthy, secure relationships• Recognizes conditions that require the assistance of other service providers and refers these situations to the supervisor
Relationship-focused Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports and reinforces parent’s/primary caregiver’s strengths, emerging caregiving competencies, and positive caregiver-infant/young child interactions
Family Relationships and Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shares with families an understanding of infant/young child and family relationship development

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Attachment, Separation, Trauma, Grief & Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports emerging competencies of the infant/toddler within an attachment relationship context; recognizes risks related to histories of separation, trauma and/or grief/loss that may require assistance of other professionals
Cultural Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies understanding of cultural humility to communicate effectively, establish positive relationships with families, and demonstrate respect for the uniqueness of each family's culture

Law, Regulation & Policy

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Ethical Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchanges complete and unbiased information in a supportive manner with families and other team members • Practices confidentiality with each family's information in all contexts, with the only exception being when making necessary reports to protect the safety of a family member (e.g., Children's Protective Services, Duty to Warn)
Government, Law & Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personally works within the requirements of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Federal and state law ◦ Agency policies and practices ◦ Agency code of conduct • Promptly and appropriately reports harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare to Children's Protective Services after discussion with supervisor • Accurately and clearly explains the provisions and requirements of federal, state, and local laws affecting infants/young children and families (e.g., Part C of IDEA, child protection, early care and education licensing rules and regulations) to families • Is knowledgeable about the rights of citizen children of non-citizen parent/primary caregiver(s)
Agency Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains appropriate personal boundaries with infants/young children and families served, as established by the employing agency

Systems Expertise

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Service Delivery Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborates and communicates with other service agencies to ensure that the child(ren) and family receives services for which they are eligible and that the services are coordinated. • Helps parent/primary caregiver build the skills they need to access social support from extended family, neighbors, and friends as needed and as available in the community
Community Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes families and service providers/agencies aware of community resources available to families during pregnancy, the newborn period, and the early years • Assists families to anticipate and obtain the basic requirements of living and other needed services from public agencies and community resources

Direct Service Skills

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Life Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -Promotes caregiver competence in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Facing challenges o Resolving crises and reducing the likelihood of future crises o Solving problems of basic needs and familial conflict -Provides direct care and teaching/developmental activities to infant, young children, and families with multiple, complex risk factors to help ensure healthy pregnancy outcomes and the optimal development of the child in all domains (physical, social, emotional, cognitive)
Observation and Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally and informally observes the parent/primary caregiver(s) and infant/young child to understand the nature of their relationship, developmental strengths, and capacities for change
Screening and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participates in formal and informal assessments of the development of the infant's/young child, in accordance with standard practice

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Responding with Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes trusting relationship that supports the parent/primary caregiver(s) and infant/young child in their relationship with each other and that facilitates needed change Uses example, encouragement, and, when appropriate, own life experience to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower families to become socially and emotionally self-sufficient Create nurturing, stable infant/young child-caregiver relationships
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information and assistance to parent/primary caregiver(s) to help them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand their role in the social and emotional development of infants/young children Understand what they can do to promote health, language, and cognitive development in infancy and early childhood Find pleasure in caring for their infants/young children Advocates for services needed by infants, child(ren), and families with the supervisor, agencies, and programs
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes environmental and caregiving risks to the health and safety of the infant/young child and parent/primary caregiver(s) and takes appropriate action

Working With Others

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Supporting Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works as a partner/team member within program by modeling appropriate behavior and interventions
Building & Maintaining Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds and maintains effective interpersonal relationships with families and professional colleagues by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respecting and promoting the decision-making authority of families Understanding and respecting the beliefs and practices of the family's culture Following the parent's/primary caregiver's/primary caregiver's lead Following through consistently on commitments and promises Providing regular communications and updates

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborates and shares information with other service providers and agencies to ensure the safety of the infant/young child, to coordinate services, and to promote awareness of relationship-focused approaches to working with children
Resolving Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works constructively to find “win-win” solutions to conflicts with colleagues (e.g., interagency, peer-peer, and/or supervisor-supervisee conflicts)
Empathy & Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works with and responds to families and colleagues in a tactful and understanding manner

Communicating

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively listens to others and asks questions for clarification Obtains translation services as necessary to ensure effective communication with families who may experience a communication barrier
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses appropriate non-verbal behavior and correctly interprets others' non-verbal behavior Communicates honestly, sensitively, and empathically with families, using non-technical language
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writes clearly, concisely, and with the appropriate style (e.g., business, conversational, etc.) in creating notes, reports, and correspondence

Thinking

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Analyzing Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sees and can explain the “big picture” when analyzing situations

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Solving Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considers difficult situations carefully • Integrates all available information and consults with others when making important decisions • Generates new insights and workable solutions to issues related to effective relationship-focused, family-centered care
Exercising Sound Judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluates alternatives prior to making decisions
Maintaining Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sees and can explain the interaction of multiple factors and perspectives
Planning & Organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigns priorities to needs, goals, and actions • Employs effective systems for tracking individual progress, ensuring follow-up, and monitoring the effectiveness of service delivery as a whole • Defines, creates a sequence for, and prioritizes tasks necessary to perform role and meet the needs of families

Reflection

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Contemplation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks a high degree of agreement between self-perception and the way others perceive them
Self Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths, and growth areas • Seeks the ongoing support and guidance of their supervisor to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ensure that families' progress and issues are communicated and addressed ◦ Determine actions to take ◦ Help maintain appropriate boundaries between self and families
Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remains open and curious • Understands capacity of families to change

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Professional/Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognizes areas for professional and/or personal development• Keeps up to date on current and future trends in child development, behavior, and relationship-focused practice• Identifies and participates in appropriate learning activities
Emotional Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses reflective practice throughout work with infants/young children and families to understand own emotional response to infant/family work

Requirements

Documentation of Competencies

Application will document most competencies have been adequately met through course work, in-service training and work/volunteer experiences and professional references.

Professional Membership

Membership in an association for infant mental health

Endorsement Agreement

Signed

Code of Ethics

Signed

Education

Any academic coursework including Associates, Bachelors, Masters, and/or Doctorate degrees

OR

Child Development Associate (CDA) program

OR

Two years of early childhood -related paid work experience

Work

Any academic coursework including Associates, Bachelors, Masters, and/or Doctorate degrees

OR

Child Development Associate (CDA) program

OR

Two years of early childhood -related paid work experience

Training

Minimum 33 clock hours of trainings must pertain to the promotion of social-emotional development of children (prenatal to 6 years) and/or other relationship-based principles and practices of infant/early childhood mental health.

Reflective Supervision

All endorsed professionals are encouraged to seek reflective supervision/consultation

Professional Reference Ratings

Total of three ratings:

1. One must come from a current supervisor
2. At least one must come from an individual who is endorsed OR is familiar with the Competency Guidelines and verified by Endorsement Coordinator
3. One can come from a colleague, teacher, CDA mentor, or Board member who is familiar with the applicant's knowledge of infant and early childhood mental health principles

Renewal

Training

A minimum of 45 clock hours of training is required over the 3-year cycle, focused on the promotion of social-emotional development of children (prenatal to 6 years) and/or other relationship-based principles of infant/early childhood mental health.

Endorsed Mid-Cycle Adjustment: Endorsed for 2 years at time renewal, complete 30 hours; Endorsed for 1 year at time of renewal, complete 15 hours; If not endorsed for 1 year exempt from renewal.

Professional Membership

Membership in an association for infant mental health.

Mid-Cycle Adjustment: No change – active membership applies regardless of years of Endorsement.

Reflective Supervision

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