

# Competency Guidelines

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

03/18/2025

## Infant Family Associate

The INFANT 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"><li>• Supports and reinforces parent’s/primary caregiver’s ability to seek appropriate care during pregnancy</li></ul>
Infant/Young Child Development & Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrates awareness of conditions that optimize early infant brain development</li></ul>
Infant/Young Child/Family Centered Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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</li><li>• Recognizes conditions that require the assistance of other service providers and refers these situations to the supervisor</li></ul>
Relationship-focused Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supports and reinforces parent’s/primary caregiver’s strengths, emerging caregiving competencies, and positive caregiver-infant/young child interactions</li></ul>
Family Relationships and Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shares with families an understanding of infant/young child and family relationship development</li></ul>

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Attachment, Separation, Trauma, Grief & Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>
Cultural Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applies understanding of cultural humility to communicate effectively, establish positive relationships with families, and demonstrate respect for the uniqueness of each family's culture</li> </ul>

## Law, Regulation & Policy

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Ethical Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchanges complete and unbiased information in a supportive manner with families and other team members</li> <li>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)</li> </ul>
Government, Law & Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personally works within the requirements of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal and state law</li> <li>Agency policies and practices</li> <li>Agency code of conduct</li> </ul> </li> <li>Promptly and appropriately reports harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare to Children's Protective Services after discussion with supervisor</li> <li>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)</li> </ul>
Agency Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintains appropriate personal boundaries with infants/young children and families served, as established by the employing agency</li> </ul>

## Systems Expertise

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
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Service Delivery Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>
Community Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes families and service providers/agencies aware of community resources available to families during pregnancy, the newborn period, and the early years</li> <li>• Assists families to anticipate and obtain the basic requirements of living and other needed services from public agencies and community resources</li> </ul>

## Direct Service Skills

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Life Skills	<p>-Promotes caregiver competence in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Facing challenges</li> <li>o Resolving crises and reducing the likelihood of future crises</li> <li>o Solving problems of basic needs and familial conflict</li> </ul> <p>-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)</p>
Observation and Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>
Screening and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participates in formal and informal assessments of the development of the infant's/young child, in accordance with standard practice</li> </ul>
Responding with Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Uses example, encouragement, and, when appropriate, own life experience to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Empower families to become socially and emotionally self-sufficient</li> <li>o Create nurturing, stable infant/young child-caregiver relationships</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides information and assistance to parent/primary caregiver(s) to help them:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Understand their role in the social and emotional development of infants/young children</li> <li>◦ Understand what they can do to promote health, language, and cognitive development in infancy and early childhood</li> <li>◦ Find pleasure in caring for their infants/young children</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advocates for services needed by infants, child(ren), and families with the supervisor, agencies, and programs</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes environmental and caregiving risks to the health and safety of the infant/young child and parent/primary caregiver(s) and takes appropriate action</li> </ul>

## Working With Others

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Supporting Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works as a partner/team member within program by modeling appropriate behavior and interventions</li> </ul>
Building & Maintaining Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds and maintains effective interpersonal relationships with families and professional colleagues by:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Respecting and promoting the decision-making authority of families</li> <li>◦ Understanding and respecting the beliefs and practices of the family's culture</li> <li>◦ Following the parent's/primary caregiver's lead</li> <li>◦ Following through consistently on commitments and promises</li> <li>◦ Providing regular communications and updates</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Collaborating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>
Resolving Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works constructively to find “win-win” solutions to conflicts with colleagues (e.g., interagency, peer-peer, and/or supervisor-supervisee conflicts)</li> </ul>

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Empathy & Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works with and responds to families and colleagues in a tactful and understanding manner</li> </ul>

## Communicating

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

## Thinking

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Analyzing Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees and can explain the “big picture” when analyzing situations</li> </ul>
Solving Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers difficult situations carefully Integrates all available information and consults with others when making important decisions</li> <li>• Generates new insights and workable solutions to issues related to effective relationship-focused, family-centered care</li> </ul>
Exercising Sound Judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluates alternatives prior to making decisions</li> </ul>
Maintaining Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees and can explain the interaction of multiple factors and perspectives</li> </ul>

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Planning & Organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assigns priorities to needs, goals, and actions</li><li>• Employs effective systems for tracking individual progress, ensuring follow-up, and monitoring the effectiveness of service delivery as a whole</li><li>• Defines, creates a sequence for, and prioritizes tasks necessary to perform role and meet the needs of families</li></ul>

Reflection

Knowledge areas	As demonstrated by
Contemplation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seeks a high degree of agreement between self-perception and the way others perceive them</li></ul>
Self Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths, and growth areas</li><li>• Seeks the ongoing support and guidance of their supervisor to:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Ensure that families’ progress and issues are communicated and addressed</li><li>◦ Determine actions to take</li><li>◦ Help maintain appropriate boundaries between self and families</li></ul></li></ul>
Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remains open and curious Understands capacity of families to change</li></ul>
Professional/Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognizes areas for professional and/or personal development</li><li>• Keeps up to date on current and future trends in child development, behavior, and relationship-focused practice</li><li>• Identifies and participates in appropriate learning activities</li></ul>
Emotional Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uses reflective practice throughout work with infants/young children and families to understand own emotional response to infant/family work</li></ul>

Requirements

# Documentation of Competencies

Application will document that 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 degree including Associates, Bachelors, Masters, and/or Doctorate degrees

OR

Child Development Associate (CDA) program

OR

Two years of infant -related paid work experience

## Work

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

OR

Child Development Associate (CDA) program

OR

Two years of infant -related paid work experience

## Training

Minimum 33 clock hours of trainings must pertain to the promotion of social-emotional development of children from prenatal to the age of 36 months old and/or other relationship-based principles and practices of infant mental health.

## Reflective Supervision

All Endorsement applicants 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, or a parent/recipient of services (paid or volunteer), teacher, CDA mentor, or Board member
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### 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 36 months) and/or other relationship-based principles of infant 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

All endorsement applicants are encouraged to seek reflective supervision/consultation



