



## **Texas Association for Infant Mental Health**

### Competency Guidelines

### **LEVEL 3, INFANT MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Level 3 Competency Guidelines were developed by the Texas Association for Infant Mental Health to clearly describe the areas of expertise, responsibilities, and behaviors that demonstrate competency at this level.



## COMPETENCY DETAIL

### Area of Expertise

#### **Theoretical Foundations**

##### Knowledge Areas

*pregnancy & early parenthood  
infant & young child development  
& behavior  
Infant/young child & family-centered  
practice  
relationship-based, therapeutic practice  
family relationships & dynamics  
attachment, separation & loss  
psychotherapeutic & behavioral theories  
of change  
disorders of infancy/early childhood  
mental and behavioral disorders in  
adults  
cultural competence*

### As Demonstrated By

*For infants, young children, and families referred and enrolled for services:*

- Supports and reinforces parent's capacity to seek appropriate care during pregnancy
- Identifies both typical and atypical development during pregnancy, infancy and early childhood, through formal observation, assessment, and in day-to-day interactions with the infant/young child and family
- Provides information, guidance and support to families related to the development and care of infants/young children to further develop their parenting capabilities and the parent-infant/young child relationship; ensures that the information is provided in the family's language
- Develops service plans that take into account each infant's/young child's and family's unique needs, desires, history, lifestyle, concerns, strengths, resources, cultural community and priorities
- During observations and assessments, identifies emerging competencies of the infant and young child within a relationship context
- Supports and reinforces each parent's strengths, emerging parenting competencies, and positive parent-infant/young child interactions and relationships
- Helps parents to:
- "See" the infant/young child as a person, as well as all the factors (playing, holding, teaching, etc.) that constitute effective parenting of that child
- Derive pleasure from daily activities with their children
- Shares with families realistic expectations for the development of their infants/young children and strategies that support those expectations
- Demonstrates familiarity with conditions that optimize early infant brain development
- Recognizes risks and disorders of infancy/early childhood conditions which require treatment and/or the assistance of other professionals from health, mental health, education, and child welfare systems
- Shares with families an understanding and appreciation of family relationship development
- Applies understanding of cultural competence to communicate effectively, establish positive relationships with families, and demonstrate respect for the uniqueness of each client family's culture
- Accurately interprets information from informal and formal observations and assessments to identify capacities and strengths, as well as developmental delays and/or emotional disturbance in infants and young children served
- Accurately interprets information from informal and formal observations and assessments to identify capacities and strengths, as well as relationship disturbances, disorders, and risks in early childhood families
- Develops service plans that take into account each infant's/young child's and family's unique needs, desires, history, lifestyle, concerns, strengths, resources, and priorities
- Provides services that reinforce and nurture the caregiver-infant/young child relationship
- Engages in parent-infant/young child psychotherapy to explore issues (including attachment, separation, loss) that affect the development and care of the infant/young child.



## COMPETENCY DETAIL

### Area of Expertise

#### **Law, Regulation & Agency Policy**

##### Knowledge Areas

*ethical practice  
government, law & regulation  
agency policy*

#### **Systems Expertise**

##### Knowledge Areas

*service delivery systems  
community resources*

### As Demonstrated By

- Exchanges complete and unbiased information in a supportive manner with families and other team members
- Practices confidentiality of each family's information in all contexts with exception only when making necessary reports to protect the safety of a family member (e.g., Children's Protective Services, Duty to Warn, etc.)
- Maintains appropriate personal boundaries with infants/young children and families served, as established by the employing agency
- Promptly and appropriately reports harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare to Protective Services
- 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, child care licensing rules and regulations) to families, child or foster care staff, community-based programs
- Shares information with non-citizen families and service agencies about the rights of citizen children of non-citizen parents
- Personally works within the requirements of:
  - Federal and state law
  - Agency policies and practices
  - Professional code of conduct
- Assists families to anticipate, obtain, and advocate for concrete needs & other services from public agencies and community resources
- Actively seeks resources to address child and family needs
- Works collaboratively with and makes referrals to 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 parents build the skills they need to access social support from extended family, neighbors, and friends needed and as available in the community
- Makes families and service providers/agencies aware of community resources available to families



## COMPETENCY DETAIL

### Area of Expertise

### As Demonstrated By

#### **Direct Service Skills**

Knowledge Areas  
 observation & listening  
 screening & assessment  
 responding with empathy  
 treatment planning  
 developmental guidance  
 supportive counseling  
 parent-infant/toddler  
 psychotherapy  
 advocacy  
 life skills  
 safety

*For infants, young children, and families referred and enrolled for services:*

- Establishes trusting relationship that supports the parent(s) and infant/young child in their relationship with each other and facilitates change
- Works with the parent(s) and the infant/young child together, often in the home, in accordance with accepted practice
- Observes the parent(s) or caregiver(s) and infant/young child together to understand the nature of their relationship, developmental strengths, and capacities for change
- Conducts observations, discussions, and formal and informal assessments of infant/young child development, in accordance with established practice
- Observes and articulates the infant's and parent's perspectives within a relationship context
- Recognizes and holds multiple viewpoints, e.g., the infant, the parent, the service provider
- Interprets and synthesizes information (including family perceptions and priorities) from observations, discussions, and formal and informal assessments to:
  - Identify and feed back to the parent(s) or caregiver(s) the strengths, capacities, needs, and progress of the infant/young child and family/caregiver(s)
  - Develop mutually agreed upon service plans incorporating explicit objectives and goals
  - Formulate clinical recommendations that guide best practice
  - Effectively implements relationship-based, therapeutic parent-infant/young child interventions that enhance the capacities of parents and infants/young children
- Helps parents identify goals and activities that encourage interaction and that can be woven into the infant's/young child's and family's daily routines
- Uses multiple strategies to help parents or caregivers:
  - 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
  - Promotes parental competence in:
    - Facing challenges
    - Resolving crises and reducing the likelihood of future crises
    - Solving problems of basic needs and familial conflict
  - Uses toys, books, media, etc., as appropriate to support developmental guidance
- Diagnoses disturbances or disorders of infancy and mental illness in family members, as appropriate, using available diagnostic tools (e.g., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, *Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood (DC-0 to 3R)*)
- Attends and responds to parental histories of loss as they affect the care of the infant/young child, the parent's development, the emotional health of the infant/young child, and the developing relationship
- Recognizes environmental and care giving threats to the health and safety of the infant/young child and parents, and takes appropriate action
- Secures literature/brochures in families' language(s)



## COMPETENCY DETAIL

### Area of Expertise

#### **Working with Others**

##### Skill Areas

*building & maintaining relationships  
supporting others/mentoring  
collaborating  
resolving conflict  
empathy & compassion*

### As Demonstrated By

- Builds and maintains effective interpersonal relationships with families and professional colleagues by:
  - Respecting and promoting the decision-making authority of families
  - Understanding and respecting the beliefs and practices of the family's culture
  - Following the parents' lead
  - Following through consistently on commitments and promises
  - Providing regular communications and updates
  - Works with and responds to families & colleagues in a tactful and understanding manner
  - Provides positive, specific feedback to encourage and reinforce desired behaviors and interactions in families
  - Encourages parents to share with other parents (e.g., through nurturing programs, parent-child interaction groups, etc.)
  - Provides emotional support to parents/caregivers and children when sad, distressed, etc.
  - Assists families to develop the skills they need to become their own advocates
  - Models appropriate behavior and interventions for new staff as they observe home visits
  - Collaborates and shares information with staff of child care, foster care, community-based programs, and other service agencies to ensure effective, coordinated services
  - Works constructively to find "win-win" solutions to conflicts with colleagues (e.g., interagency, peer-peer, and/or supervisor-supervisee conflicts)
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- Actively listens to others; asks questions for clarification
  - Uses appropriate non-verbal behavior and correctly interprets others' non-verbal behavior
  - Communicates honestly, sensitively, and empathetically with families, using non-technical language
  - Obtains translation services as necessary to ensure effective communication with families who do not speak English
  - Writes clearly, concisely, and with the appropriate style (business, conversational, etc.) in creating notes, reports and correspondence

#### **Communicating**

##### Skill Areas

*listening  
speaking  
writing*



## COMPETENCY DETAIL

### Area of Expertise

### As Demonstrated By

#### **Thinking**

##### Skill Areas

*analyzing information  
solving problems  
exercising sound judgment  
maintaining perspective  
planning & organizing*

- Sees and can explain the “big picture” when analyzing situations
- Sees and can explain the interactions of various factors
- Assigns priorities to needs, goals, and actions
- Considers difficult situations carefully
- Evaluates alternatives prior to making decisions
- Integrates all available information and consults with others when making important decisions
- Generates new insights and workable solutions to issues related to effective relationship-based, family-centered care
- Defines, creates a sequence for, and prioritizes tasks necessary to perform role and meet the needs of families
- Employs effective systems for tracking individual progress, for assuring follow up, and for monitoring the effectiveness of service delivery as a whole

#### **Reflection**

##### Skill Areas

*contemplation  
self awareness  
curiosity  
professional/personal development  
emotional response  
parallel process*

- Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths, and growth areas; discusses issues, concerns, actions to take with supervisor, consultants or peers
- Consults regularly with supervisor, consultants, peers to understand own capacities and needs, as well as the capacities and needs of families
- Seeks a high degree of agreement between self-perceptions and the way others perceive him/her
- Remains open and curious
- Identifies and participates in learning activities related to the promotion of infant mental health
- Keeps up-to-date on current and future trends in child development and relationship-based practice
- Uses reflective practice throughout work with infants/young children and families to understand own emotional response to infant/family work and to recognize areas for professional and/or personal development

# Infant Mental Health Specialist (Level 3) Impact Map

