

# Infant and Early Mental Health Competencies Checklist

## FOUNDATION: Knowledge and Skills

### Child Development

#### Knowledge

- Typical development from preconception to five years of age
- Developmental theories of infant and early childhood development
- Key developmental theories and constructs:
  - o Attachment
  - o Resilience
  - o Temperament
  - o Emotional and attention regulation
  - o Emotional expression of a child
- Developmental domains: gross motor, fine motor, communication, personal, social, emotional, problem solving/cognition
- Social-emotional behavioural areas: self-regulation, compliance, affect, social interaction, autonomy, social communication, adaptive functioning
- Connection between development and mental health and how primary relationships drive development

#### Skills

- Recognize typical development through observations
- Identify when development is not progressing as expected and respond
- Recognize individual characteristics of the child and caregiver(s) (e.g. temperament, adult mental health) which may contribute, positively or negatively, to development
- Support healthy development from a strengths-based perspective
- Promote parent/caregiver-child interactions that supports healthy development
- Promote healthy relationships
- Recognize risks to healthy development
- Clearly communicate specifically about child development
- Clearly communicate about developmentally appropriate behavior
- Provide mentorship and guidance



## Brain Development

### Knowledge

- Critical periods and the significance of brain development during the prenatal, infancy, and toddlerhood stages
- Executive functioning
- Development of resilience
- 'Serve and return' process of interactions in parent/child relationships which promotes or stimulates brain development
- Impact of stress on development and how the stress response system functions

### Skills

- Promote and model positive serve and return interactions between child and parent/caregiver that support optimal brain development
- Promote interactions that strengthen neural connections



## Attachment and Relationships

### Knowledge

- Foundational principles of attachment theory
- Classifications and patterns of attachment
- How the attachment relationship forms
- Attachment-promoting behaviors and cues
- What can promote and derail a secure attachment
- Relationship between attachment and other developmental constructs
- Attachment relationship and culture

### Skills

- Observe and recognize the nature of the attachment relationship (e.g. child's behaviour when in distress and the parent/caregiver response)
- Support parents/caregivers and other professionals to understand the importance of secure attachment as a foundational milestone
- Promote secure attachment relationships
- Encourage positive attachment behaviours
- Support parents/caregivers to recognize and interpret their child's cues

## Family-Centred Approach

### Knowledge

- Be aware of Ecological theory and how it applies to working with children and families
- Recognize the impact and role of families on children
- Importance of caregiving relationships to child development and mental health outcomes
- Transactional nature of the relationships between the child, their family, environment, community and the broader systems
- Engage families in supportive relationships

### Skills

- Undertake the ethical obligation to respond to families in need
- Recognize, respect, and incorporate family strengths into practice
- Validate that the parent/caregiver is the expert on their child
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the communication and learning styles of parents/caregivers and children
- Adapt to the emerging needs of families
- Promote empathy and attunement (help parents/caregivers understand their child's needs, perspective and world)
- Effectively use professional role as a change-agent to influence change for the child, parent/caregiver, and their relationship

## Risk and Protective Factors

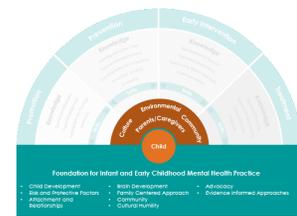
### Knowledge

- Know how risk and protective factors contribute to development
- Understand how the social determinants of health influence the presence of risk and protective factors and child development.
- Recognize how a parent/caregiver's history can influence their child
- Recognize what can cause stress for children
- Recognize early caregiving experiences will vary depending on the child and their context

- Be aware of the three levels of stress (positive, tolerable, and toxic) and how affect a child's development

### Skills

- Advocate and provide support to reduce risk factors families may be experiencing
- Advocate and provide support for access to resources and services to reduce risk factors
- Leverage protective factors (buffers)



## Understand the impact of the following factors on development and mental health outcomes:

### Child Factors:

- Pre- and postnatal experiences and circumstances
- Epigenetics (nature and nurture)
- Trauma and adverse childhood experiences
- Response to stress
- Developmental trajectory
- Behaviours
- Sensory and regulation
- Temperament
- Attachment and cueing
- Feeding and sleep patterns
- Nutrition
- Physical health challenges

### Sociodemographic & Societal Factors (Determinants of Health):

- Socio-cultural influences
- Determinants of health
- Social safety network / social connectedness
- Race
- Gender
- Indigenous status
- Age of parent/caregiver
- Employment
- Education
- Level of income
- Housing
- Family composition
- Community/ environment
- Stressors
- Family/ intimate partner/ community violence

### Parental/Caregiver Attitudes, Behaviours, & Interactions:

- Preconception, prenatal and postnatal experiences and circumstances
- Knowledge of child development and care
- Attunement, quality of interactions, and perception of the child
- Consistency, predictability, and structure in the family
- Parenting attitudes and style

### Parent/Caregiver History and Current Setting:

- Abuse, neglect, trauma, and/or unresolved loss from childhood
- Adverse childhood experiences
- Intergenerational trauma
- Migration history and experiences
- Experience in the child welfare system
- Perception of self
- Social/interpersonal, problem solving, and coping capacity
- Physical and mental health
- Support network (family and beyond)
- Involvement in the legal system
- Substance use
- Family violence
- Participation in community activities/community connections

## Community

### Knowledge

- Have an awareness of community resources, services and programs
- Understand the roles and capacities of other practitioners
- Understand one's scope of practice
- Understand the impact of systemic barriers for children and families

### Skills

- Provide support to access services and programs when needed
- Engage in cross-sector collaboration and communication
- Share knowledge and resources with families
- Support families in transitioning between services
- Engage and collaborate with other professionals
- Translate knowledge for others
- Use agency to provide services which align with capacity



## Advocacy

### Knowledge

- Interpret key messages around infant and early childhood mental health
- Understand the benefits of prevention and early intervention efforts with key stakeholders
- Recognize the importance of sharing knowledge about infant and early childhood mental health

### Skills

- Share knowledge to increase public awareness about infant and early childhood mental health
- Share key messages about infant and early childhood mental health
- Share the benefits of prevention and early intervention efforts with key stakeholders
- Advocate on behalf of vulnerable children and families
- Identify and reflect on systemic barriers in service delivery, gaps, and how to address them
- Advocate for better systems and services that support early well-being from an evidence-informed position

## Cultural Humility

### Knowledge

- Understand principles of equity
- Understand rights-based framework
- Understand cultural safety
- Understand culturally informed practices
- Recognize concepts of privilege, colonialism, racism and oppression
- Understand the important role of culture in a child's sense of self in the community
- Understand a child's development in the context of a family's culture

### Skills

- Work with and learn about the child within the context of their family and culture
- Recognize one's own power, privilege, limitations, biases and attitudes when working with others and their culture and values
- Engage in ongoing learning of a family's culture
- Support families in creating a safe community while maintaining their own cultural identity
- Engage in ongoing learning and self-reflection to increase cultural proficiency with families
- Engage in ongoing learning and implementation of Anti-Oppressive Practice

## Recognition of Evidence-Informed Practices

### Knowledge

- Understanding and interpret research
- Science and research supporting infant and early mental health
- Evidence-informed and evidence-based practices
- How research can inform our practice

### Skills

- Apply the science and research within scope of practice to support infant and early childhood mental health
- Use evidence-informed and evidence-based practices within scope of practice to support infant and early childhood mental health



## Trauma-Informed Care

### Knowledge

- Understand how parent/caregiver abuse, neglect, trauma, and/or unresolved loss from childhood, adverse childhood experiences, and intergenerational trauma can impact the child's development
- Understand how the caregiver-child relationship is key to buffering traumatic experiences for infants and young children
- Anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-colonial approaches to practice, and the historical context from a cultural perspective

### Skills

- Integrate trauma informed knowledge in the work with children and families
- Be able to interpret behaviours as having multiple meanings
- Practice from an anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-colonial perspective

# PROMOTION: Knowledge and Skills



All Foundational Knowledge and Skills are required, in addition to the following:

## Nurturing Development

### Knowledge

- Scaffolding of child development over time
- Importance of play for young children's development
- Child characteristics and how they can influence development and the quality of their relationships
- Understand how positive or adverse interactions and experiences influence brain development and overall well-being

### Skills

- Recognize and respond to child's individual characteristics such as temperamental differences and know how to adjust the approach with child and parent
- Observe how a child stress responds to stress, how a parent responds to the child and provide information to parent/caregivers how stress can impact the child's development
- Educate, support, model how parent/caregiver can be responsive to the child's stress
- Employ a strengths-based, non-judgmental approach

## Family Engagement

### Knowledge

- Adult learning principles
- How relationships and regulation are interrelated
- Strategies to empower children and families

### Skills

- Promote the parent/caregiver and family as the experts on their child
- Confidently engage in conversations with families about their child's development
- Support the parents/caregivers in recognizing their child's cues
- Engage and motivate families
- Build parenting capacities
- Connect families to community supports and resources
- Plan, develop, and implement parent/caregiver education (in individual and group settings)
- Employ a variety of techniques to facilitate positive parent/caregiver-child interactions

## Interdisciplinary Practice

### Knowledge

- Community services, programs, and various disciplines that support child development
- Service pathways
- Cross-sectoral, multi-professional collaboration

### Skills

- Assessment of child and family needs
- Initiate, engage and maintain cross-discipline and sector partnerships
- Coordination and collaboration on behalf of families to connect with the most appropriate service and program
- Strong oral and written communication skills

# PREVENTION: Knowledge and Skills



All Foundational Knowledge and Skills are required, in addition to the following:

## Supporting Developmental Vulnerability

### Knowledge

- Understanding the importance of collaborating with other professionals to see the whole child
- Strengths and limitations of screening and assessment tools

### Skills

- Collaborate with other professionals to develop a wholistic understanding of child
- Observe the parent/caregiver-child relationship to mitigate risk factors and leverage protective factors
- Observe, screen, and monitor child development (gross motor, fine motor, cognitive, language, and social-emotional)
- Interpret the child's behaviour/challenges with an understanding of brain development
- Appropriately include families in screening processes
- Use a family-centered approach to guide and support the parent/caregiver-child relationship and the child's development in the context of their culture
- Refer to and follow up with families about health, cognitive, language, and social-emotional risks

## Understanding Developmental Profiles

### Knowledge

- Differences in typical and atypical development and behaviours
- Risk and protective factors that influence behaviour and development
- Appropriate services and resources to address identified needs

### Skills

- Discriminate between typical and atypical development and behaviours
- Communicate with families when there is a concern about their child's development
- Recognize relationship patterns that are indicative of security
- Identify factors that may be affecting development and behaviours (i.e. medical concerns, circumstantial events, risk and protective factors)

# Trauma-Informed Practice

## Knowledge

- How trauma and adversity can impact a child's development and well-being across the lifespan
- The pathways to immediate services and resources to support families in crisis
- Recognize when a child and family are in crisis

## Skills

- Support parents/caregivers in responding to their child's distress
- Communicating how adverse life experiences can impact a child's development and well-being
- Provide sensitive and informed responses to families
- Support the development of resiliency skills in children



# Creating Pathways to Services and Supports

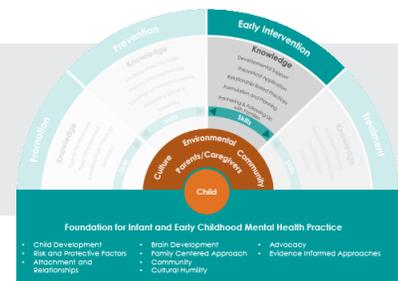
## Knowledge

- Service pathways and resources and services available in the community

## Skills

- Recognize when referrals to other professionals and services are needed
- Identify and provide the appropriate level of support a family requires to engage in service/program/pathway
- Encourage and engage families to make appropriate referrals
- Identify and provide appropriate interventions to address the needs of a family
- Connect with appropriate service providers
- Follow up with families when referrals are made
- Reflect on how to improve programs and services to identify gaps in service provision

# EARLY INTERVENTION: Knowledge and Skills



All Foundational Knowledge and Skills are required, in addition to the following:

## Theoretical Application

### Knowledge

- Theories that influence practice with children and families (e.g. child development, attachment, trauma-informed, psychodynamic, social support, cognitive behavioural, family and group dynamics, communication, cultural humility, and ecological and systems theory)
- Theories, framework, and intervention models that help support early intervention
- Anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-colonial approaches to practice, and the historical context from a cultural perspective

### Skills

- Practice from an anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-colonial perspective
- Be able to inform on a child's development and behaviour and integrate into conversations
- Integrate familial cultural values into practice
- Select effective interventions and adapt practice methods to best suit the family based on their unique needs while ensuring fidelity to the program design
- Set the framework of the treatment

## Learning with the Child and Family

### Knowledge

- Importance of primary relationships and family history
- Efficacy and validity of screening, assessment and intervention tools
- Strategies and tools to gather information about the child and family
- Recognizing rupture-repair sequences in relationships

### Skills

- Observe and assess interactions between the child and their parents/caregivers
- Gather information about the child and family through observations, screening results, family input, referrals, etc.
- Document the child and family history
- Use validated tools to complete assessment
- Conduct developmental assessments
- Be able to respond in the moment to the parent/caregiver-child dynamic
- Interject to model positive behaviours
- Engage with and confer with service providers supporting the child and/or family, when appropriate
- Support and facilitate reparative relationships between the child and their parents/caregivers

# Partnering with Parents/Caregivers and Children



## Knowledge

- Personal skills and limitations, and those of other professionals
- Cultural importance and meaning of extended family
- Appropriate approaches to counselling and guidance
- Approaches to intervening with the child and the family to mitigate risk factors and enhance protective factors
- Interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary models of intervention, e.g. what other service providers are involved in the child's support system

## Skills

- Engage both the child and their parents/caregivers
- Engage in reflective practice
- Leverage extended family and community support networks
- Build therapeutic relationships and alliances throughout interventions
- Set clear boundaries and expectations for intervention
- Support parents/caregivers to problem solve and gain insight into personal issues (history, adverse childhood experiences)
- Provide support through quality interventions to address the mental health needs of all children
- Support parents/caregivers in working with their child on a developmental support plan
- Provide supportive counselling and guidance
- Provide parent/caregiver coaching and modelling
- Provide parent/caregiver groups (e.g. attachment focused, positive parenting focused, etc.)

## Formulation and Service Planning

### Skills

- Integrate what is learned from the child and family into a formulation
- Include families in planning activities, supports, and resources when appropriate
- Create realistic goals for intervention with the child and family
- Create developmental goals and strategies for the child with their family
- Develop an integrated service plan reflective of the child, family, and environmental context

### Follow up

- Follow up with families on an ongoing basis
- Provide feedback to parents/caregivers
- Engage in consultation with agencies and across disciplines when appropriate
- Make referrals for specialized assessments to appropriately trained professionals as needed
- Provide service coordination with community partners and other professionals in the child and family's circle of care
- Check in with families and other sources for updated information (i.e. rescreening) when necessary
- Review progress and reformulate plans

# TREATMENT: Knowledge and Skills

All Foundational Knowledge and Skills are required, in addition to the following:



## Assessment, Formulation and Diagnosis

### Knowledge

- Context of developmental and/or intergenerational trauma
- Intersection of adult and child mental health
- Limitations of one's own biases and/or practice capabilities
- Cultural application of clinical assessments
- Assessment and diagnostic tools, and their strengths and limitations
- Limitations of scope of practice and when other expertise or disciplines are required

### Skills

- Determine the parents/caregivers' (and others who are involved with the child) readiness to participate in services and treatment
- Use validated clinical assessments by trained individuals such as professionals, Elders, traditional healers, and knowledge keepers
- Conduct observations and assessments to identify significant mental health and health challenges which may or may not lead to a diagnosis in the context of the parent/caregiver-child relationship and environment
- Engage and collaborate with professionals who can support and augment treatment plans to address the child's needs
- Reassess, on an ongoing basis, to adjust treatment and support parent/caregiver engagement as necessary

## Therapeutic Approaches

### Knowledge

- Understanding a variety of therapeutic approaches that can be tailored to the needs of the child and their family, and within one's scope of practice

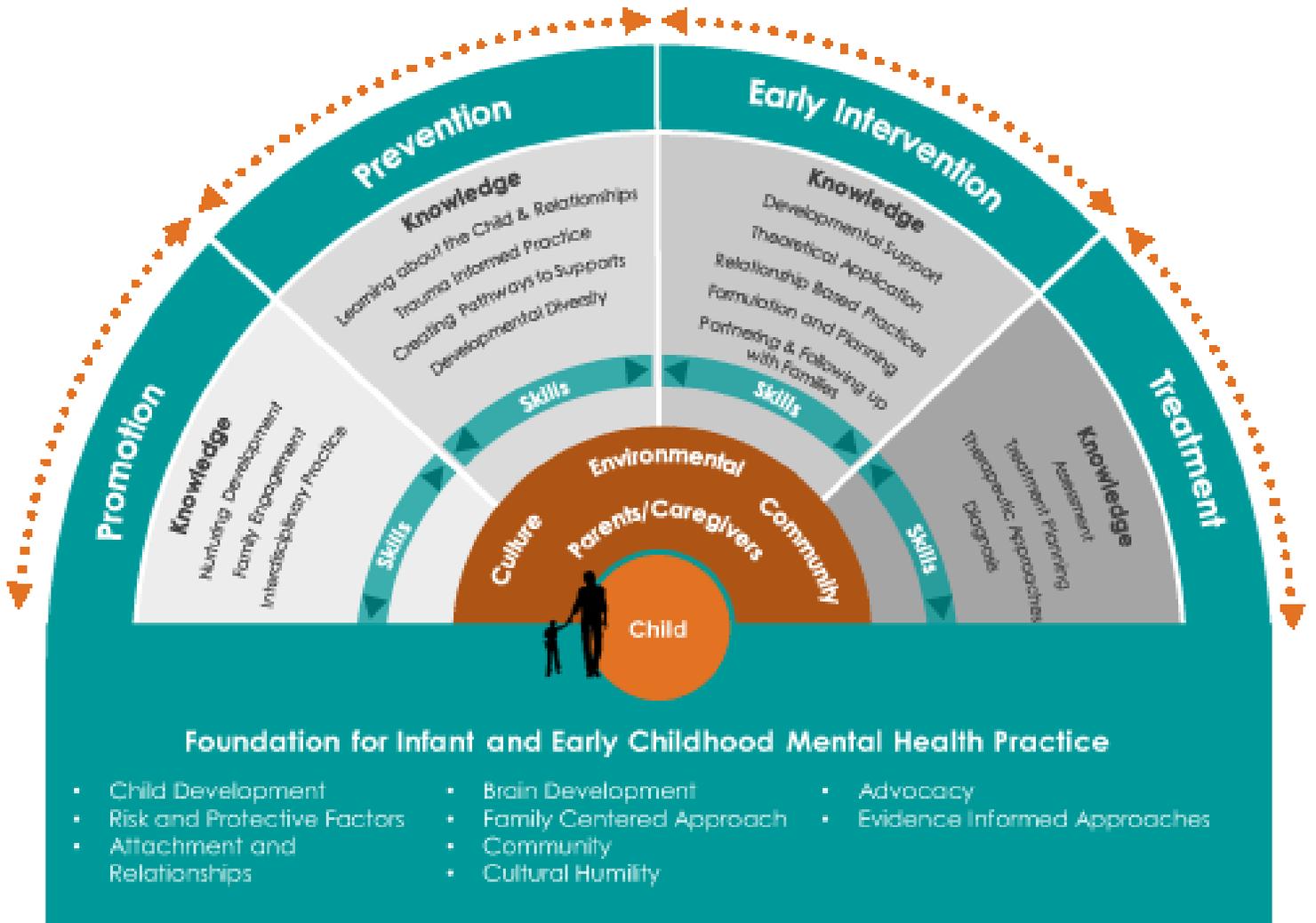
### Skills

- Application of trauma-informed interventions
- Support parents/caregivers to cope and reflect on unresolved issues that may interfere with caregiving abilities (e.g. parent psychotherapy, parent counselling)
- Provide individual or group therapy for parents/caregivers to reflect on their early experiences (e.g. for unresolved loss/trauma, mental health issues, substance abuse, violence)
- Provide developmental therapy to enhance communication, cognition/learning, social interaction, self-regulation (e.g. play therapy, intensive behavioural intervention, sensory-motor integration, speech and language therapy) in the context of the caregiving relationship
- Provide dyadic or family interventions to enhance reciprocity, sensitivity, responsiveness, and attachment (e.g. family therapy, psychodynamic parent-infant psychotherapy, infant-led psychotherapy, interaction guidance or modified interaction guidance, behavioural interventions)

## Planning

### Skills

- Ensure the parent/caregiver-child relationship is incorporated throughout treatment
- Develop and monitor goals for treatment plans for the child and family
- Create targeted treatment plans to address mental health/developmental concerns of the child and/or their parents/caregivers
- Engage in ongoing collaboration with other service providers



**Infant and Early Mental  
Health Promotion**  
**IEMHP**

**SickKids®**  
LEARNING  
INSTITUTE

[www.IEMHPromotion.ca](http://www.IEMHPromotion.ca)