

# COMPETENCY DETAILS

## INFANT FAMILY SPECIALIST (IFS)

### 1. Theoretical Foundations

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#### *Knowledge Areas:*

- pregnancy and early parenthood
- infant/young child development and behavior
- infant/young child and family-centered practice
- relationship-focused, therapeutic practice
- family relationships and dynamics
- attachment, separation, trauma, grief, and loss
- disorders of infancy/early childhood
- cultural competence

#### *As Demonstrated by:*

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

- During observations and assessments, identifies emerging competencies of the infant and young child within a relationship context
  - Supports and reinforces parent's capacity to seek appropriate care during pregnancy
  - 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 (eg, playing, holding, teaching) that constitute effective parenting of that child
    - Derive pleasure from daily activities with their children
  - Shares with families the 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 that require 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
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## 2. Law, Regulation, and Agency Policy

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### *Knowledge Areas:*

- ethical practice
- government, law, and regulation
- agency policy

### *As Demonstrated by:*

- 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 (eg, Children's Protective Services, Duty to Warn)
- 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 Children's Protective Services
- Accurately and clearly explains the provisions and requirements of federal, state, and local laws affecting infants/young children and families (eg, Part C of IDEA, child protection, child care licensing rules and regulations) to families and other service providers working with these families
- 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

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## 3. Systems Expertise

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### *Knowledge Areas:*

- service delivery systems
- community resources

### *As Demonstrated by:*

- Assists families to anticipate, obtain, and advocate for concrete needs and other services from public agencies and community resources
- Actively seeks resources to address infant/young child and family needs
- Works collaboratively with and makes referrals to other service agencies to ensure that the child(ren) and family receive 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 as needed and as available in the community
- Makes families and service providers/agencies aware of community resources available to families

## 4. Direct Service Skills

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### *Knowledge Areas:*

- observation and listening
- screening and assessment
- responding with empathy
- advocacy
- life skills
- safety

### *As Demonstrated by:*

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 needed change
  - Provides services to children and families with multiple, complex risk factors
  - Formally and informally observes the parent(s) or caregiver(s) and infant/young child to understand the nature of their relationship, developmental strengths, and capacities for change
  - Conducts formal and informal assessments of infant/young child development, in accordance with established practice
  - Effectively implements relationship-focused, therapeutic parent-infant/young child interventions that enhance the capacities of parents and infants/young children
  - Provides information and assistance to parents and/or caregivers to help them:
    - 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
  - Nurtures the parents' relationship with each other, if one exists; alternatively, helps the custodial parent manage appropriate contact with the non-custodial parent
  - Promotes parental competence in:
    - Facing challenges
    - Advocating on behalf of themselves and their children
    - Resolving crises and reducing the likelihood of future crises
    - Solving problems of basic needs and familial conflict
  - Advocates for services needed by children and families with the supervisor, agencies, and other available programs
  - Recognizes environmental and caregiving risks to the health and safety of the infant/young child and parents and takes appropriate action
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## 5. Working With Others

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### *Skill Areas:*

- building and maintaining relationships
- supporting others/mentoring
- collaborating
- resolving conflict
- empathy and 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 and colleagues in a tactful and understanding manner
- Provides positive, specific feedback to encourage and reinforce desired behaviors and interactions in families
- 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
- Encourages parents to share with other parents (eg, through nurturing programs, parent-child interaction groups)
- 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 (eg, interagency, peer-peer, and/or supervisor-supervisee conflicts)
- Provides emotional support to parents/caregivers and children when sad, distressed, etc



## 6. Communicating

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### *Skill Areas:*

- listening
- speaking
- writing

### *As Demonstrated by:*

- Actively listens to others and 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 may experience a communication barrier
  - Writes clearly, concisely, and with the appropriate style (eg, business, conversational) in creating notes, reports, and correspondence
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## 7. Thinking

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### *Skill Areas:*

- analyzing information
- solving problems
- exercising sound judgment
- maintaining perspective
- planning and organizing

### *As Demonstrated by:*

- Sees and can explain the “big picture” when analyzing situations
  - Sees and can explain the interactions of multiple factors and perspectives
  - 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-focused, 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, ensuring follow up, and monitoring the effectiveness of service delivery as a whole
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## 8. Reflection

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### *Skill Areas:*

- contemplation
- self-awareness
- curiosity
- professional/personal development
- emotional response

### *As Demonstrated by:*

- Regularly examines own thoughts, feelings, strengths, and growth areas and discusses issues, concerns, actions to take with supervisor, consultants, or peers
- Consults regularly with supervisor, consultants, and peers to understand own capacities and needs as well as the capacities and needs of families
- Seeks a high degree of agreement between self-perception 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
- Keep up to date on current and future trends in child development and relationship-focused practice
- Uses reflective practice throughout work with infants/young children and families to understand own emotional response to infant/family work and recognize areas for professional and/or personal development

# ENDORSEMENT® REQUIREMENTS INFANT FAMILY SPECIALIST (IFS)

## EDUCATION

Official transcripts from all degrees earned and from any college credits earned are required. The minimum requirement is a Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BS), Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), or a Bachelor of Nursing (BSN) degree. Other accepted degrees include a Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MS), Master of Social Work (MSW), Master of Education (MEd), Master of Nursing (MSN), Master of Applied Studies (MAS), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Education (EdD), or Doctor of Psychology (PsyD)

## TRAINING

- Applicants will include as many hours of training and/or continuing education as necessary to document that competencies (as specified in *Competency Guidelines*®) have been met
- For those whose degree is in a field that is unrelated to infant mental health, more specialized in-service training may be required to meet the breadth and depth of the competencies
- Training content will include the promotion of social-emotional development and/or the relationship-based principles of infant mental health
- **Minimum** 30 clock hours required
- Typically, successful IFS applications include 50 or more hours of specialized training unless the applicant has completed coursework specific to the *Competency Guidelines*®

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Minimum two years of paid, post-Bachelor's, professional work experience providing prevention and/or early intervention services that promote infant mental health. Work experience meets this criterion as long as the applicant has:

1. Served a minimum of 10 families where the target of services is an infant/toddler (birth to 36 months),  
AND
2. A primary focus of the services provided is the social-emotional needs of the infant/toddler,  
AND
3. Services focus on the promotion of the relationships surrounding the infant/toddler

## REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION/CONSULTATION

Minimum 24 clock hours within a one- to two-year timeframe of post-Bachelor's, relationship-based, reflective supervision or consultation, individually or in a group while providing services to infants/toddlers (birth to 36 months) and families

Applicants for Endorsement® as an IFS will receive reflective supervision/consultation from someone who is endorsed as an IMHS or IMHM-C. A Bachelor's prepared IFS applicant should receive reflective supervision/consultation from an IMHS or an IMHM-C and may seek reflective supervision/consultation from a Master's prepared person who has earned IFS Endorsement® if there is no one with an IMHS Endorsement® or IMHM-C Endorsement® available to provide this. The master's prepared IFS reflective supervision/consultation provider must receive reflective supervision/consultation while providing supervision to others

## PROFESSIONAL REFERENCE RATINGS

*Please note:* At least one rating must come from endorsed IFS, ECFS, IMHS, ECMHS, IMHM, or ECMHM. Reference raters must be familiar with the applicant's capacity to implement infant mental health principles into practice

Total of three required:

1. One from current program supervisor
2. One from person providing reflective supervision/consultation
3. One from another supervisor, teacher, trainer, consultant, or colleague

## CODE OF ETHICS AND ENDORSEMENT® AGREEMENT

Signed

## DEMONSTRATION OF COMPETENCIES

Application will demonstrate that competencies have been adequately met through course work, work/volunteer experience, in-service training, and reflective supervision/consultation experiences. Written examination not required for applicants seeking Infant Family Specialist Endorsement®

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Infant Mental Health Association

# ENDORSEMENT® RENEWAL REQUIREMENTS INFANT FAMILY SPECIALIST (IFS)

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Minimum of 15 clock hours per year of relationship-based education and training, pertaining to the promotion of social-emotional development in the context of family and other caregiving relationships, of children during the prenatal period up to 36 months of age, including the principles and practices of infant mental health (eg, regional training, related course work at colleges or universities, infant mental health conference attendance, participation in competency-based activities such as professional reading group, community practice, mentorship group)

Documentation of training hours submitted with membership renewal

For those who are Master's prepared and earn an IFS Endorsement® and provide reflective supervision/consultation to others, at least three of the hours of specialized training must be about reflective supervision/consultation

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Annual renewal of membership in the Infant Mental Health Association

## REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION/CONSULTATION

It is required that all professionals endorsed as Infant Family Specialists receive a minimum of 12 hours of reflective supervision or consultation annually