



PROMOTING

Black Joy

and Countering Bias Through Infant and
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

A Centering Equity in Infant and Early Childhood
Mental Health Consultation Resource



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CONTRIBUTIONS

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (2023). Promoting Black Joy and Countering Bias Through Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

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This product was developed [in part] under grant number 1H79SM082070-01 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, opinions, and content expressed in this email do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

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INTRODUCTION

Reclaiming a sense of joy is necessary amid racial uprisings, a global pandemic, and increasing socioeconomic challenges.

During their earliest years, the most critical stage of brain development, Black infants and young children may be exposed to negative and violent images of Black pain through the ongoing media coverage of brutality. Increased conversations about racism, although necessary, may leave Black children fatigued and feeling bad about themselves and their people. As a result, children may have big emotions about racialized events occurring in our world today. Black children and families need — and deserve — more opportunities to experience and cultivate joy.

While there is no single definition of Black joy, it is essentially the freedom to be your whole self authentically. Black joy is multidimensional and can be anything from the everyday act of combing hair to the extraordinary accomplishment of becoming the first Black female U.S. Supreme Court justice. It may be helpful to consider Black joy through four elements: Black Brilliance; Black Innovation; Black Agency; and Black Beauty.¹ In early learning settings, creating space for Black joy looks like supporting children's expression of diverse emotions, respecting cultural parenting practices, looking toward cultural healing traditions, and celebrating racial pride. As a practice rooted in the belief that everyone deserves optimal well-being, infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) provides a unique opportunity to advance equity through centering Black joy and countering bias.

Building on the Equity in IECMHC Webinar Series:
Culture, Identity, and History as Sources of Strength



While there is no single definition of Black joy, it is essentially the freedom to be your whole self authentically.

and Resilience for African American Children, hosted by the Center of Excellence in IECMHC, this resource guides IECMHC consultants and supervisors as they seek to attend to equity within their work. The series includes an examination of issues of racialized inequities and bias in the early care and education experiences for African American children and families and explored ways to strengthen culturally responsive practices to reduce disparities and support children's healthy development and learning within a consultation framework.

THIS RESOURCE

The goal of this companion resource is to support the development of equitable learning environments for Black children. The resource is divided into three sections:

Section One includes information about Black culture, history, cultural strengths, values, and ways of knowing and being; **Section Two** guides users through the CoE Revised IECMH Consultation Competencies and provides promising practices and concrete strategies to increase consultants' and supervisors' capacity to handle personal and institutional bias; and **Section Three** invites users to consider the real-life implications of harmful practices through a series of case studies with questions for individual and group reflection.

The practices suggested in this resource may benefit children from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The resource is intended to fill the need for targeted support that is anti-bias, culturally rich, and promotes joy for Black children and families.

Promoting Black Joy in IECMHC



Creates space for joy by establishing a safe, warm, and Black-affirming learning environment.



Builds upon the experiences of Black children, families, teachers, site supervisors, directors, and administrators



Uses the wisdom of Black people rooted in African values to put equity into action.



Reimagines IECMHC to center joy as an outcome, and a way of being.



Does not exclude or devalue other cultural values but understands there is strength in the Black community.



SECTION 1

HISTORY AND CULTURE AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH

Human beings are socialized within the context of race, language, and culture. Culture embodies the norms, practices, values, and beliefs a group holds that govern how we interact with one another.

These cultural practices may be said or unspoken; they are the roots of the development of belonging and are intertwined within our most important relationships. Culture influences and is reflected in routines of daily living. It is essential to understand that what children learn from families and teachers is a system of ideals that extends deep into the values of a group of people. As a child acquires cultural ways of being, these cultural rules for behavior impact identity by giving children the tools to understand their family/community and to be understood within this context. The cultural practices of families can be a source of strength and foundation from which we as human beings learn and grow. It is essential to practice cultural humility and maintain curiosity about the cultural preferences and practices of children and families that differ from our own culture.

African American/Black families' strengths and assets are rooted in their connection to community, family, and cultural pride. Enslaved Africans, immigrants from the Caribbean, and the multitude of Black people from throughout the African Diaspora brought their societal norms, a variety of emotional healing practices, ways of expressing emotions, spirituality, educational values, and so much more. Four hundred years later, versions



It is essential to practice cultural humility and maintain curiosity about the cultural preferences and practices of children and families that differ from our own culture.

of these cultural traditions have evolved into what we know as Black culture, including cultural parenting practices. For example, a West African tradition of Othermothering, in which trusted women (friends, aunts, grandmothers, sisters, neighbors) assist blood mothers in child rearing, is a current cultural strength of many African American families.² This practice has evolved and includes trusted adults of all genders, known as Otherparenting or alloparenting. Although

often misinterpreted by educators as children having unstable living situations or uninvolved parents, conversely, children develop multiple secure attachments that strengthen resilience and act as a source of joy for children, families, and other parents. Consultants' and reflective supervisors' practices are enhanced as they view cultural traditions as assets in IECMHC.

CONSEQUENCES OF ANTI-BLACK BIAS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Too often, Black children of all genders who express joy in culturally appropriate ways may experience the consequences of anti-Black bias that results in inequitable, harsh discipline because of the devaluation of Black cultural ways of being and expressing.

This joy is necessary for persistence and maintaining a positive identity while existing in environments that are not welcoming or culturally aligned.³ It is a fitting role for IECMHC to continue the work of repair and to reassure Black children and families that they are safe and their whole authentic selves are welcomed in all learning and play spaces.

Often, early care and education spaces are not as welcoming and affirming to Black children and families, as evidenced by inequitable rates of suspensions and expulsions, the lack of Black consultants, teachers, and leaders, as well as colorblind materials that avoid mention of race, color, or racism.⁴ These inequities sustain historical ruptures in trust between Black people and education and mental health systems. Many scholars have documented how anti-Black bias shows up in early learning spaces. Creating more



affirming, loving, and joy-producing spaces requires a change in attitudes, perceptions, and systems.

Disrupting bias and creating more equitable systems requires shifting from child and family blame to provider and systems accountability. Unlearning unhealthy beliefs can be uncomfortable, and you may find yourself resisting some of the concepts presented in this document. Remember, our work in the mental health field is to remain curious and open to how our unique identities and histories impact our work. According to scholar and teacher, Gholdy Muhammad, black joy is a mechanism that allows children to see the joy in themselves and others.⁶

Pause and Reflect

- How do you feel when you read the terms anti-black or anti-bias?
- What term do you use to describe culturally and equitably relevant practices?
- What have you learned about the phrase Black Joy?

Creating more affirming, loving, and joy-producing spaces requires a change in attitudes, perceptions, and systems.

What does anti-Black bias look like in early childhood education?⁵

- Mispronouncing children's names that are not traditionally "white" names.
- Favoring White children over Black children.
- Calling on White children while ignoring Black children.
- Assigning Black children roles that are subservient and stereotyped.
- Misinterpreting children's actions and ways of being as defiant or disordered.

What does joy look like in early learning settings?

- Centering representation of Black pleasure, excitement, triumph, and fun.
- Prioritizing activities that bring children joy.
- Providing ample opportunity to express their emotions, opinions, and thoughts in various ways beyond verbally (i.e., dance, yoga, art).
- Allowing children to experience the fullness of childhood, like children combing each other's hair, rhyming, singing, and rapping with one another.

SECTION 2

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR COUNTERING BIAS AND PROMOTING JOY IN EARLY LEARNING SPACES

Alignment with the Infant and Early Childhood
Mental Health Consultant Revised Competencies

**We return to the competencies as
our guide for countering bias and
promoting joy through IECMHC.**

This section provides a rationale for centering Black ways of knowing, being, and expressing for effective consultation on behalf of Black families, children, and providers. Muhammad explains the importance of promoting joy in Black children as “advancing students’ happiness by elevating beautiful and truthful images, representation, and narratives about self and others.”⁷⁷ For each competency, concrete strategies are suggested to support consultants’ reflective capacity, ability to facilitate systemic change, and increased knowledge of values rooted in scholarship by Black mental health researchers and practitioners.

A central question remains: *How do we extend the notion of Black joy into mental health consultation as a framework for transformation and an outcome for Black children and families?*



COMPETENCY 1

Role of the IECMH Consultant

The foundation of IECMHC is the consultative relationship developed between consultant and consultee, where consultants work to build trust, mutual respect, and responsiveness when beginning new relationships with families and children. To be responsive to the needs of Black/African American children and families, it is essential to understand African-centered ways of knowing and relating that center on authenticity, truth, and justice to foster trust. On an individual level, this may look like explicitly acknowledging differences in ethnicity, power dynamics, and belief systems between programs and families. Using a systemic lens, confronting the mental health field's role in harming Black and African American communities through improper testing, diagnosis, and mistreatment is necessary to increase the capacity to address stigma and prove trustworthiness to families. These practices create a sense of safety that is vital for developing trust.

COMPETENCY 2

Foundational Knowledge

The consultative stance, which encourages consultants to highlight the importance of not knowing, is vitally important when entering into relationships with people whose culture, life circumstances, and values may be different than their own.⁸ Most IECMH consultants are educated and trained within the US education system that values eurocentric theories related to child-rearing, mental wellness, and early childhood education. Keeping in mind the dynamic nature of culture and its practices over time and circumstance, consultants must learn about Black

COMPETENCY 1

Promising Practices

- Reflect on your current social location (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, role, socioeconomic status) and how it impacts your work with Black/African American families, children, and providers.
- Increase awareness of the history of harmful practices enacted by mental health practitioners that have resulted in a mistrust of mental health professionals by many African American families and children.
- Commit to earning families' trust by acknowledging potential power dynamics and centering their values and goals for consultation, using a trauma-informed approach when necessary.
- Co-create a plan to address stigma with families, providers, and the communities served. For example, consider using a name or acronym for IECMHC that centers on positivity for your program (e.g., the Joy Team).

These practices create a sense of safety that is vital for developing trust.

history and culture broadly, and specifically engage the work of Black scholars on mental health and child development concepts related to child-rearing, social-emotional development, healing, and spiritual practices, and caregiver expectations to promote Black joy. A practice that is responsive to the needs of Black and African American families should consider the opportunity to uplift racial-ethnic identity development, prioritization of affective knowledge, and the integral nature of extended family to adult-child attachment.

Pause and Reflect

- Consider the history of psychology, the mental health field, and how this history has structured ideologies around race.
- Whose perspectives are absent from the mental health field, and whose perspectives are amplified?
- Have any cultural perspectives been appropriated by the dominant culture? Whose perspectives have been appropriated and how? How do we honor cultural wisdom (i.e., honoring that the roots of mindfulness practices are steeped in the practices of eastern religious and cultural traditions)?

COMPETENCY 3

Equity and Cultural Sensitivity

Implementing consultation with an equity lens must begin with a careful look at one's own culture, beliefs, and values to understand how they impact work with children, families, and programs. Each culture and individual family has unique values around goals for

COMPETENCY 2

Promising Practices

- Learn about the history of Black people and the complexity of the African diaspora. Research the deep structure of African American culture, history, language, and life well enough to structure the consultation process appropriately. View the [Equity in IECMHC Webinar Series](#).
- Intentionally seek out information on Black joy as resistance, pleasure, and leisure to expand your thinking of Black culture (i.e., research archives, visit galleries exhibiting Black artists, immerse yourself in Black-centered spaces).
- Research and learn about White cultural values in education, mental health, and theories of change. These ideologies are reflected within the mental health consultation system and strongly influence the experiences of Black children, families, caregivers, and providers.
- Support consultees in identifying relevant cultural and linguistic knowledge regarding child development, social-emotional development, and educating young children through a racial equity lens. Integrate learning and dialogue about Black-centered healing and social-emotional pedagogy in consultation and reflective supervision.
- As a part of the process of mental health consultation, ECE providers should be expected to participate in racial bias training. Training should include information about the history of racism, white supremacy, sexism, and ableism and their impact on the field of IECMHC. Utilize the [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) to facilitate new learning and discussion of complex topics related to racial equity.

socialization, feeding, sleeping, toilet training, and discipline. Particularly for infant care, there is a need for IECMHC to provide support in bridging differences in cultural caregiving expectations between Black families and providers. Cultural child-rearing practices are not neutral but come with values, a sense of belonging, and moral implications.⁹ Many mainstream childcare perspectives center on the mother-child dyad. In contrast, many African American families practice alloparenting, in which children form healthy attachments with multiple family members. Although research indicates children benefit from having multiple attachments, when children have multiple caregivers, providers may believe their mothers or fathers are uninvolved. Providers' beliefs about what a responsive caregiver looks like may be misaligned with the values of African American or Black families.

Mindful Moment

It is important to be mindful that behavior can be due to individual temperament (e.g., a child can prefer internal processing and present as reserved), culturally influenced (e.g., some cultures value being more reserved, others more outgoing), and both individual and cultural factors influence children's behavior. Make an effort not to make assumptions and instead get to know each child.

COMPETENCY 4

Reflective Practice

Maintaining a reflective stance is integral to the important daily work of IECMH consultants. Broad reflection may not provide the targeted processing needed when considering the context, experiences, and values of Black families.¹¹ Equity-centered

COMPETENCY 3

Promising Practices

- Reflect on your values around infant caregiving, child development, classroom management, and the concept of which behaviors are considered “appropriate behaviors.” Where did you learn these ideas (i.e., home, school, college, community)? Do these align with your values? Do these align with voices within the community of Black mental health scholars?
- Evaluate the ways policies and practices reflect White middle-class values. Work with providers to balance classroom policies and practices to be culturally responsive. Tailor services to specific cultural values and expectations of Black families.
- Consider the structure of the consultation referral process, intake procedures, and assessment practices. Emailing assessments with deadlines and expecting families to complete them may be ineffective.¹⁰ It may be useful to complete the assessment together in person or using a virtual platform.
- When working with providers and writing improvement plans, reframe cultural behaviors that are often mislabeled as inappropriate as developmentally and culturally appropriate. For example, in collectivist cultures, collaboration may include speaking at the same time as others (verbal overlap) as a tool for co-creating knowledge. This is often mislabeled in Black children as impulse control issues when it may be a cultural practice that is not considered rude but instead is viewed as collaboration.

reflection that calls out pervasive beliefs about Black people and Black culture is necessary to counter bias and promote joy. This includes questioning the role of power, privilege, and oppression in work with providers, families, and children and its potential impact on the consultee-consultant relationship. It is helpful to utilize reflective journaling and group discussions to facilitate this process.

COMPETENCY 5

Child and Family-Focused Consultation

Mental health consultants (MHCs) are often called upon to assist teachers in responding reflectively to behaviors they perceive as challenging. IECMHC is not meant to “fix” families and children but to partner with consultees, families, and children to address the root causes of reported concerns and to prevent future harmful situations. Before beginning the process of changing parenting behaviors that may be believed to be unhealthy, it is important to understand that these practices may be the result of personal or group-based racialized trauma and serve a protective role.¹² This competency is a fitting invitation to use the assets of families in your care and the Black joy framework (Black Brilliance, Innovation, Agency, and Beauty) to co-create consultation experiences that are mutually enjoyable. It is vital that consultants remain trustworthy and adopt asset-based language and perspectives. Black children need to feel safe, affirmed, and protected. Gilliam emphasized that early childhood educators’ biases may sometimes be triggered when they learn characteristics of families’ backgrounds like socioeconomic status, home language, and family structure. These biases may

COMPETENCY 4

Promising Practices

- Engage in ongoing self-reflection of how your positionality, culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status impact personal and professional beliefs and attitudes. Consider the central questions: Who am I?; What do I believe?; How does who I am and what I believe influence my work with children, families, and providers?
- Reflect on and identify your biases and beliefs about African American culture. Reflect on how incorrect messages about African American culture, families, and children have shown up in your family and social circles, then examine how they have impacted your belief systems. Notice these biases without judgment to create an uninhibited space for unlearning harmful beliefs. Shaming and judging yourself will only create a barrier to the unlearning process.
- Make a commitment to increase your awareness of your personal biases. Consider finding an accountability partner in your personal or professional life who is also committed to active self-reflection, and identifying personal and institutional bias.
- Consider the following questions when creating plans for programs, classrooms, and children and families: *Who benefits and is disadvantaged by how I engage with children, families, or providers?; How does my culture influence my approach?; Is the flow or cycle of consultation responsive to the needs of consultees?; Do these practices promote joy or act as a barrier?*

impact how they view families and the distribution of support and resources. Accordingly, it is necessary to actively counter biases to reframe the personal and collective understanding of Black culture.¹³

Pause and Think

- As we reimagine early learning environments that center equity by promoting Black joy, infant and early child mental health (IECMH) consultants have the opportunity to rethink how we engage in the consultative process. What would it be like if consultants centered joy as an outcome when envisioning new outcomes for children and families? How does centering joy change the interventions we suggest and how we approach interactions with parents or providers?
- What would it look like to co-create goals with children and families with the explicit outcome of increasing joy? What would this look like in your context?
- How can the tenets of Black joy be used to improve experiences for Black children and families (e.g., Black Brilliance, Black Inventiveness, Black Kinship, and Black Aesthetics)?

It is necessary to actively counter biases to reframe the personal and collective understanding of Black culture.

COMPETENCY 5

Promising Practices

- Reflect on your upbringing and family values and the cultural lens through which your perception of behavior is framed.
- Acknowledge familial capital, also called fictive kinship, as an asset for programs in which the extended family (even those without shared lineage) is as involved as biological parents in children's schooling. This may look like aunts, uncles, and grandparents (even those not related by blood) participating in family meetings, picking up children from school, and bringing them to school.
- Welcome the use of African American language as the various language styles Black children and families employ. Linguistic and cultural repertoires of Black families should be viewed as assets to programs and the consultee relationship.
- Collaboratively develop a shared vision and plan for consultation.
 - For parents, you can ask: *Please tell me what makes your child laugh?; What are your child's strengths?; What are your goals for your child and consultation?*
 - Parents or teachers can ask older children: *What is something that you feel you are good at?; What is something that you like about yourself?; What is something that makes you happy?; What is something that can make you feel safe and happy in your/our classroom?* Encourage children to respond to prompts using words, drawings, or photography.

Affirm Black children's right to innocence and childhood

- Be aware of adultification bias, the view of Black children as older than their chronological age. Black girls may be perceived as needing less nurturance, support, protection, and comfort than their peers.¹⁴ Black boys are perceived as deviant or defiant, and their emotions are often disregarded or interpreted as threatening.¹⁵
- Integrate training and ongoing conversation on the definition, history, and current implications of adultification bias on Black infants and children.
- Be aware of the ways adultification bias presents in disciplinary decisions, leadership opportunities, and forgiveness offered to Black children. Take note of which children are offered a second chance or given the benefit of the doubt.
- Black children should be asked to share their cultural values and beliefs, but these beliefs should not be generalized to all Black children and families. Black children should not be asked to be spokespeople for their racial identity/ethnicity.

COMPETENCY 6

Classroom and Home-Based Consultation

Early learning settings should be places of joy that do not perpetuate racial trauma. Through direct teaching, sharing resources, and appropriate use of assessment, MHCs can support providers in becoming active disruptors of bias who are enablers of joy. Using culturally responsive tools that are sensitive to bias can result in more equitable learning environments and

COMPETENCY 6

Promising Practices

- Reflect on your beliefs about what constitutes an evidence-based practice. Where did you learn what type of evidence is valid in defining an “evidence-based” practice or tool?
- Adopt child, program, and classroom/home level tools that are equity-minded, valid, and reliable. When identifying new tools, use separate tools, alongside global classroom quality measures, that pays particular attention to influences such as bias and equity (e.g., Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES)), the inclusion of children with disabilities (e.g., Inclusive Classroom Profile), and experiences of racial trauma (Parent and Caregiver's Childhood Experiences of Racial Acceptance and Rejection (CERAR¹⁷)).
- Facilitate providers' capacity to consider how a program's physical environment and culture impact the well-being of Black children, families, and leaders. Is the physical environment reflective of the fullness of Black culture, including art, music, traditions, etc.? If not, encourage programs to solicit stories and/or images from the community.
- Provide concrete strategies to help consultees hold space for children to express the range of their emotions. For example, former teacher Akiea “Ki” Gross,¹⁸ creator of the [Woke Kindergarten](#) YouTube channel, reimagines what engaging in racially just learning for young children may look like. They suggest asking questions to spark conversations, like: What makes you feel safe?; Who makes you feel safe, and why?

CONTINUED ►

positive experiences for children.¹⁶ Many mainstream classrooms and home-based learning environments operate based on cultural values that may not align with Black family practices. This is reinforced by observation tools that are rooted in dominant belief systems about appropriate ways adults express care, instruct learners, and set up environments. The most commonly used tools over the past decades, including the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), Environment Rating Scales (ERS), and Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA), lack responsiveness to the lived realities of Black children and do not meaningfully integrate the perspectives of Black early childhood professionals. The CLASS released a revision that more effectively embeds principles of equity to reduce observer bias and integrate the voices of Black experts. Further research is needed to assess the efficacy of these changes. Yet, when IECMH consultants utilize individual child and classroom-based assessments that are not culturally appropriate, they cannot be considered culturally responsive.

Mindful Moment

Taking inventory of the language we use can be a powerful reflection tool to uncover our underlying assumptions and biases. Often language we use can place blame on people instead of on systemic inequities and circumstances. For example, phrases like low-income and at-risk describe people as the problem instead of systemic inequities and/or circumstances. Consider the words you use to describe those you work with. Do these words affirm? Do these words spark joy and express value? Do they describe people as the problem?

- Build consultees' capacity in classroom management skills that encourage expressions of joy that may be outside of what providers have experienced. Work with providers to elevate moments of joy in their learning environments. In *Black Girlhood Celebration*, Nicole R. Brown discusses creating learning environment guidelines for adults and less for children. One of the aspirational guidelines is not to ask children to be quiet but to create meaningful relationships and curriculum, and set expectations such that silencing is seldom necessary.¹⁹

Using culturally responsive tools that are sensitive to bias can result in more equitable learning environments and positive experiences for children.

COMPETENCY 7

Programmatic Consultation

Program-wide consultation provides an opportunity to affect system-wide change and create safe, welcoming, and affirming spaces for Black families. This includes examining program design for bias and reflecting on potential disparities about Black people in leadership roles. The goal is to assist programs in creating safe spaces that are not sources for more racial trauma. Implementing concrete and substantial changes in policies, practices, and attitudes creates space for and protection of Black joy.

Stop and Think

Historically, who has and continues to dominate mental health consultation, and how does this influence infant and early childhood research, practice, communication, and engagement?

COMPETENCY 8

System-Wide Orientation

This competency provides a fitting opportunity to integrate the wisdom of Black scholars, educators, families, and children into the mental health concepts and supports provided in all learning environments.

Community stakeholders have insights into the mental health needs of African American children and families and are vital resources in cultivating safe spaces. Relationships with key community organizing and advocacy groups can provide the necessary

COMPETENCY 7

Promising Practices

- Consider the use of coded language such as vulnerable, marginalized, low-income, and at-risk. Are these phrases substitutes for Black or African American? Replace these phrases with asset-based terminology specific to the topic being addressed. Embrace asset-based language and perspectives, and counter deficit-based perspectives of Black families. Conduct an audit of language use in materials and personal language use. For a week, note the words you use when referring to a Black child or adult.
- Conduct a critical assessment of the workforce, including barriers for African American people to earn leadership positions. Black employees may have their hairstyles banned in dress codes or be discouraged from using their home language, dialect, or style in learning settings. A national study revealed Black women are 80% more likely to believe they have to change their hair to fit in at the office.²⁰
- Increase the program's capacity to collect and use disaggregated data by race, gender, language, and early intervention to identify disparities, celebrate accomplishments, and create targeted policies.
- Work with administrators to remove and replace practices and policies which harm Black, Brown, and Indigenous children (i.e., harsh or exclusionary discipline, disparities in referrals).

support for ongoing professional development, assist with identifying resources for families, and facilitate authentically Black-centered spaces and processes.

Program Reflection Questions

- Are Black people represented in program leadership?
- Is music rooted in Black culture played in the classrooms?
- Are there visual images of Black creativity, healing, or joy?
- Are intervention tools (i.e., feeling charts, social stories) representative of the shades of color representing Black culture?

Pause and Reflect on Section 2

- How can allies and folks who are not Black embrace and uplift Black joy without misappropriating it?
- What does this look like for consultants and other educational staff working in settings without Black children? Why is this important for White children and other children of color?
- How will you commit to elevating Black joy in your professional and personal lives?

COMPETENCY 8

Promising Practices

- Identify community members and culturally-aligned impacted parties with whom to partner and compensate them for their participation.
- Connect consultees to community resources and support for needs that extend beyond the goals of IECMHC.
- Acknowledge how racism and community trauma have impacted children, families, and communities; this cannot be separated from child behavior and classroom dynamics.
- Partner with local family child care networks to establish best practices for engaging home-based providers.

SECTION 3

SCENARIOS BASED ON REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES IN INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

The following scenarios are based on the lived experiences of children, families, and providers in early childhood learning spaces. They are meant to highlight the experiences of Black children and families.

After the scenarios are questions to prompt personal reflection and facilitate group dialogue. Use the promising practices outlined above to guide your thinking and responses.



CASE STUDY #1

Elijah

Scenario

Four-year-old Elijah loves to play with trucks in the sand during outdoor playtime. He runs over to Jeremy, also four years old, and asks, “Do you want to play trucks with me?” Jeremy shakes his head slowly and says, “I can’t play with you because Black people like you make me crazy,” as he holds his finger up to his ear and moves it in a circular motion. Ms. Marissa overhears the boys’ conversation and says, “Everyone in Ms. Marissa’s class should be kind and play with one another.” When Elijah goes home, he tells his mom what happened and cries because his friend wouldn’t play with him. Elijah’s mom, Denise, was distraught and asked school administrators why they did not communicate with her about the incident. She said she felt like Jeremy’s comments were directed at Elijah because he was Black. Ms. Marissa and Ms. Alma, the director, suggested they speak with the IECMH consultant, who was observing Ms. Marissa’s class that day.

Debrief

Children may express anti-Blackness during play. It may be challenging to respond in the moment when you have not had time to process the entire situation. Give yourself permission to step back and reflect on potential responses before proceeding. It is vital that while you take time to process your responses, you validate the experiences of those harmed and the racialized nature of negative remarks, particularly remarks made towards Black people. Ignoring or dismissing Black families’ feelings and exposure to anti-Black racism may lead to further mistrust and ruptures in school-family relationships and impede pathways to safe learning environments for Black children. Further, it is important to scaffold the

CASE STUDY #1 QUESTIONS

Personal Reflection Questions

- What are your initial feelings about and reaction to this scenario?
- What are your beliefs about young children’s ability to engage in racist behaviors? Can children be racist?
- What new knowledge would support the educators in this scenario to address this issue with a reflective anti-bias lens?

Questions for Discussion and Action

- In what ways could you bridge the conversation between Denise and Ms. Marissa?
- What strategies could you use to support Elijah and his family who were hurt by Jeremy’s comments?
- Why is the belief in children’s racial innocence prevalent among early childhood professionals?
- Using the Black joy framework, how would you respond as the consultant in this situation?

teacher in addressing instances of anti-Black racism directly.

In situations like these, it is important for the adults to remain curious while making their position clear.

Ask: Can you tell me why you do not want to play with Elijah?; Can you tell me what it means when you say that Black people make you crazy?

State: I need to tell you, I do not like when children leave other friends out because of their skin color, the way they talk, or where they live.

CASE STUDY #2

Kerry

Scenario

Kerry is a 51-year-old White psychologist providing reflective supervision for a community agency. Kerry has extensive knowledge of IECMHC and supervises a group of ethnically and linguistically diverse, early-career consultants. Aerial is a 26-year-old IECMH consultant who is Black. Many of the consultation requests come from programs that have predominantly White teachers, directors, children, and families. Kerry often hears Aerial recount some of her racialized experiences to other Black consultants before group supervision but she never shares with the whole group. Today he overhears her saying, “Tell me why this little girl tried to ‘clean’ my arm as if my brown skin was dirty.” The other consultants shook their heads, seemingly knowingly. Kerry wonders how he can help or if it’s his place as a White man to intervene.

Debrief

This scenario provides an opportunity for the supervisor to first state his social location then invite discussion about the overt and covert ways power

CASE STUDY #2 QUESTIONS

Personal Reflection Questions

- What are your initial feelings after reading this scenario?
- What emotions possibly came up for Kerry in this scenario?
- What emotions possibly came up for Aerial?
- How would you have responded to Aerial as her reflective supervisor?

Questions for Discussion and Action

- What possible role does power, privilege, and oppression play in the relationships described in this scenario?
- Which of the Promising Practices do you think would be most relevant to this scenario?
- How could you use Black perspectives of Black thinkers and practitioners to inform your response to Aerial and the group as a whole?
- Using the Black joy framework, how could you respond as the reflective supervisor in this situation?

and privilege operate in supervision as well as on-site during consultation. Kenneth Hardy and Toby Bobes would say the act of a supervisor discussing issues of social justice grants all the consultants “permission” to speak the unspeakable and discuss their experiences with discrimination.²¹

CASE STUDY #3

Kristine

Scenario

Consider the experience of Kristine, 28, a newly licensed White social worker providing consultation for a predominantly Black school in a neighborhood recovering from the impacts of poverty. Kristine met with the PreK lead teacher, Ms. Lawrence, who was brand new to the program. During Kristine’s first observation, she noticed that the focus children were all boys of color, the oldest and biggest in the class. She observed Ms. Lawrence clap her hands to get the children’s attention and chastise children who did not clean up and get to the carpet quickly. Kristine believed the children were not given sufficient play time or movement breaks. It seemed to Kristine that Ms. Lawrence loved teaching children because of her creative circle time activities and art projects. Kristine provided strategies for Ms. Lawrence, for example, ways to improve transitions and make activities more engaging for the children. She recommended offering more movement breaks and sensory options. Kristine was very encouraging and came back frequently to check in with Ms. Lawrence. After about a month, Kristine became frustrated that none of Ms. Lawrence’s practices changed, and she no longer received referrals from her class.

Debrief

New and experienced consultants alike may move too quickly to providing recommendations without

CASE STUDY #3 QUESTIONS

Personal Reflection Questions

- In what ways can you relate to the professionals in this scenario?
- What potential opportunities did Kristine miss?
- In what ways may power, privilege, and oppression have impacted how Kristine approached this case? And for Ms. Lawrence?
- What expectations do you have for teachers, and where did you learn them?

Questions for Discussion and Action

- How could you use Black-centered bodies of knowledge to inform your response?
- How would this case look different if Kristine had centered Ms. Lawrence’s strengths and considered joy as a desired outcome for Ms. Lawrence?
- Which of the Promising Practices for countering racism and promoting joy could Kristine have implemented with Ms. Lawrence?
- What steps do (will) you take to learn about a teacher’s culture, experiences, beliefs, and values?
- Using the Black joy framework of Black Brilliance, Black Innovation, Black Agency, and Black Beauty, how would you respond as the IECMH consultant in this situation?

first considering the experiences of the consultee. In this scenario, Kristine immediately identified behaviors that she deemed inappropriate and sought to fix them. For the teacher, these behaviors may be cultural, responses to previous trauma, or learned from their family unit. Consultants are encouraged to employ the consultative stance in their work. This way of being is critical for the development of a collaborative relationship with consultees, allows space for wondering instead of knowing, and creates opportunities to learn the cultural

beliefs and caregiving philosophy of the consultee. Prior to creating a plan of action it is important to consider if these behaviors actually are harmful to the children or if they simply do not align with our personal beliefs. Consider Competency #3, Equity and Cultural Sensitivity, and Competency #4, Reflective Practice, along with the promising practices to guide a response that nurtures relationships, brings biases into awareness, and promotes joy for the Black educators and children.

CASE STUDY #4

Personal Scenario

Now it’s your turn. Have you had a situation where the *Countering Bias and Promoting Black Joy* resource would be applicable? Please write your personal experience or an experience of a colleague here and use the following questions to consider potential solutions.

Scenario

Personal Reflection

Questions for Discussion and Action

Which Competencies and Practices are Relevant?

Which Elements of Black joy can be elevated?

CONCLUSION

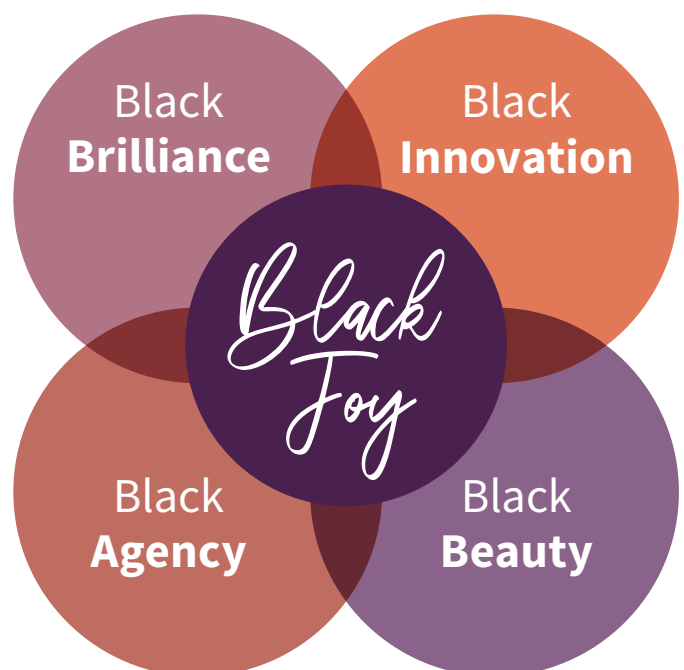
Infant and early childhood mental health consultation is uniquely positioned to counter racism and bias because of its goal to build providers' reflective capacity.

It can be a challenge to commit to reflecting and questioning your beliefs about concepts that are integrated into our value systems that we have come to accept as truth. Seeking out the support of those on a similar journey of unlearning and relearning can provide needed support and new perspectives during times of uncertainty.

Self-reflection is an ongoing process with no specific endpoint. It may become easier as you practice stepping outside of your own thought processes and interacting to understand new ways of thinking. Critical reflective practice is necessary to learn before implementing anti-bias, anti-racist pedagogy, or culturally responsive teaching. Embracing self-compassion as you develop these critical reflective practices may increase your willingness to commit to the process. Just as we have compassion for our youngest learners as they grapple with complex emotions, be compassionate towards yourself and your colleagues as you learn new topics and adjust to new situations. When intentional strategies to counter bias and increase Black representation are applied, early learning spaces have the potential to be safe and joy-producing environments for Black children and families.

It is important to move from reflection to knowledge consumption to action. The hope of the authors of this resource is to provide you with a foundation to begin putting these promising practices into action and integrate them into your daily work. Resources are provided below to support your continued efforts

toward supporting Black children, families, and providers to have equitable experiences void of bias and full of joy.



When intentional strategies to counter bias and increase Black representation are applied, early learning spaces have the potential to be safe and joy-producing environments for Black children and families.

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RESOURCES

FOR CONSULTANTS AND EDUCATORS

What is Black Joy

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Asset-Based Language

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Professional Development

Equity and Social Justice

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NBCDI (National Black Child Development Institute) <https://www.nbcdi.org/>

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Whiteness and White Cultural Values

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Feris, S. (n.d.). *Raising Race Conscious Children*. <https://raceconscious.org/>

Equity and Mental Health

Hardy, K.V. & Bobes (Eds.). (2016). *Culturally Sensitive Supervision and Training: Diverse Perspectives and Practical Applications*. Routledge.

COE for IECMHC Resources:

IECMHC Racial Equity Toolkit. <https://www.iecmhc.org/resources/coe-equity-toolkit/>

Equity Chat Series. <https://www.iecmhc.org/resources/equity/equity-chat-series/>

2021 Equity in IECMHC Webinar Series. <https://www.iecmhc.org/resources/equity/2021-equity-in-infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health-consultation-webinar-series/>

Beyond the 101: Equity, Disparity & Bias. <https://www.iecmhc.org/resources/beyond-the-101-equity/>

2020 Equity in IECMHC Webinar Series. <https://www.iecmhc.org/resources/equity/equity-webinars/>

Children's Books that Promote Black Joy: Recommended Websites

Teaching for Change. <https://www.teachingforchange.org>

Just Us Books. <https://justusbooks.com/>

Lee and Low Books. <https://www.leeandlow.com/>