THE NATIONAL CENTER ON Quality Teaching and Learning

NCQTL

# THE MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTANT'S ROLE **IN SCHOOL READINESS**

## 1.) ESTABLISH GOALS

Become familiar with your states early learning guidelines and standards as well as the LEA expectations. Ask about your program's process for establishing school readiness goals. As the mental health consultant you can offer a great deal of expertise to the team working on school readiness goals. Consider using the following questions to involve yourself in the goal setting process. Ask:

- How can I be involved in the process to establish the goals (if they are not already established)?
- How can I be included in meetings where goals are reviewed and discussed?
- How has the program developed their goals and indicators (what sources did they use)?
- How were/are families involved in the process of establishing goals?
- How do the goals align with LEA expectations, state early learning guidelines, and other infant toddler and/or preschool goals?
- How is/was staff involved in the establishment of the goals?
- How does the curriculum align with the goals?
- How does the on-going assessment align with the goals?
- How are health and mental health reflected in the goals directly or indirectly?
- Does the program have goals for families?

## 2.) CREATE AND IMPLEMENT AN ACTION PLAN FOR ACHIEVING THE ESTABLISHED SCHOOL READINESS GOALS

- Use your observations of individual children, classrooms or large groups, and/or your consultations with staff and families to reflect on and provide strategies to promote high quality effective practices that support children's development and learning.
- Help to ensure that teachers, home visitors, family service staff, families and community partners understand the school readiness goals and know how to support children's progress. (Talk about the goals throughout your work across the program).
- Ensure that staff and families can describe how addressing mental health (both for adults and children) supports school readiness for children
- Help staff and families understand the connection between positive nurturing relationships with children and progress towards school readiness goals
- Provide training and information sharing on the latest research and effective strategies for supporting young children's social emotional development

## 3.) ASSESS CHILD PROGRESS ON AN ONGOING BASIS AND AGGREGATE AND ANALYZE DATA AT MULTIPLE TIMES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

- Many psychologists and other mental health professionals have specific expertise in child assessment. Often a specific task of the mental health professional in EHS/HS (depending on his/her expertise) is to provide guidance to the EHS/HS program on how to select and use the findings of screening and/or assessments to address a child's identified need (HSPPS 1304.20(b)(2)). You may also provide guidance on the process for collecting and analyzing data including ensuring the assessments are appropriate for the children and families in the program (developmentally, culturally, linguistically, etc.) and are accurately measuring children's progress.
- Provide guidance to staff and families on how to understand the child assessment results and how to individualize services for each child.
- You may share insights on how to assess an individual child most accurately. For example, perhaps an individual child comes to the program less regulated on Mondays but is much more calm and able to focus by Friday. You can also help families and staff understand the role and value of child assessment in determining how children are progressing.
- Consider taking part in meetings throughout the year (at least 3 times a year or 2 times a year for programs operating less than 90 days) to discuss how the assessment data is aggregated and analyzed to explore how various groups of children in the program are progressing toward school readiness goals.

## 4.) EXAMINE DATA FOR PATTERNS OF PROGRESS FOR GROUPS OF CHILDREN IN ORDER TO REVISE, OR DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PLANS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT.

- Assist the program to examine data for patterns of progress for groups of children in order to revise, or develop and implement plans for program improvement.

- Assist staff to explore patterns of progress and outcomes in groups of children e.g. by age, rates of attendance, program option or setting, language group, risk factor, environmental changes, etc.
- Assist parents and staff to use the analysis of the child assessments to inform the program self-assessment and to improve program services.
- Assist program leadership to explore program adjustments such as frequency and type of training, strategies for engaging families and or program structure.



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