IECMH-Endorsement® Mentor Research/Faculty Examination Guide and Preparation Packet

Provided by CERH in partnership with the IECMH International Institute

For IMH Endorsement® and ECMH Endorsement®
Mentor-Research/Faculty applicants

Grounded in the IECMH Competency Framework™

A shared, cross-sector framework for strengthening infant and early childhood mental health–informed, relationship-focused practice across disciplines, roles, and settings.

Center for Early Relational Health
Community and Connection

IECMH-E®
A CREDENTIAL FOR THE INFANT & EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH-INFORMED WORKFORCE
For professionals worldwide-across disciplines, settings, and scopes of practice

Welcome! **Research and teaching are essential forms of leadership in infant and early childhood mental health.** Through the questions you investigate, the knowledge you share, and the learning relationships you create, you help shape how the field understands and supports infants, young children, and their families. We are grateful for your contributions to the field.

Your work may involve studying early development, examining caregiver–child relationships, evaluating interventions, teaching university students, or mentoring emerging scholars. You may deepen an established area of knowledge or bring forward questions and perspectives that have received too little attention. These are valuable ways of contributing to IECMH. The field needs people who build on what is known, thoughtfully challenge assumptions, and help others make meaningful connections between evidence and the lives of children and families.

An IECMH-informed perspective keeps young children's social-emotional well-being and their important relationships at the center. It considers development within the contexts of family, culture, community, and lived experience. In research and teaching, this means explaining how the knowledge helps us understand their emotional experiences, development, relationships, and needs—and how that understanding can inform the ways we support them and their caregivers.

The field also grows through reflection on how knowledge is created and shared. Whose scholarship is cited and taught? Whose experiences inform our theories, measures, and interpretations? How do our own perspectives influence what we notice and what we overlook? Attention to diversity, equity, and cultural context strengthens the questions we bring to both research and teaching. It creates opportunities to revisit familiar ideas, recognize gaps, and develop understanding that more fully reflects the children and families our work seeks to serve.

In a classroom, this may mean helping students examine evidence, remain curious about behavior, and recognize the influence of their own assumptions. In research, it may mean thoughtfully selecting methods, building respectful relationships with participants and communities, or being explicit about what findings do—and do not—support. Across both settings, curiosity, reflection, and respect for relationships belong alongside scholarly rigor.

You bring a way of thinking about children, families, relationships, and evidence to this examination. The written response is an opportunity to make that thinking visible. Drawing on research in an area familiar to you, you will explain what the evidence contributes to your understanding and how it informs your proposed teaching or research approach.

We appreciate the preparation, thoughtfulness, and care behind your decision to pursue Endorsement. We hope this guide helps you understand what to expect, recognize the relevance of your experience, and prepare with confidence. Just as importantly, we hope you feel welcomed as part of a field that continues to learn—and that benefits from what you have to contribute.

Warmly,

CERH and the IECMH International Institute Examination Team

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What to expect from the Mentor-Research/Faculty exam

The exam has two parts. The two parts ask you to demonstrate different kinds of knowledge. **Part One** is a 60-question multiple-choice section about foundational infant and early childhood mental health knowledge. **Part Two** is a written response focused on either teaching I/ECMH content at a university level or conducting I/ECMH research. You will have 90 minutes for each part, time to read the written scenario before responding, and a 15-minute break between sections.

Your exam will be administered by the IECMH International Institute. Once your application is reviewed, you will receive an email from your Endorsement Coordinator confirming that you are approved to sit for the exam and connect you with the Institute. You will take the exam in a virtual, one-on-one appointment with a live proctor, using Zoom, and the exam materials they provide via google docs. Appointments are available Monday through Friday, with flexibility across time zones. When your application has been approved, do not feel like you need to sit for the exam right away. Work with your Endorsement Coordinator, exam coach, or reflective supervisor to choose a timeline that supports your preparation.

Exam payments never expire**,** including payments previously made through the Alliance.

Payment and scheduling links will be provided in your Approved to Sit Exam from your endorsement coordinator

The Institute arranges reviews by trained exam reviewers, keeps your identity confidential during the review process, and provides feedback regardless of the outcome.

Planning for the Day of the Exam:

Reserve about **four hours** for your appointment. The exam takes approximately 3½ hours, including a 15-minute break, with additional time for check-in and wrap-up. You do not need a printer or Microsoft Word.

Before your appointment, choose a quiet space and test your internet connection, webcam, microphone, Zoom, and screen sharing. Close other applications and notifications. At check-in, your proctor will confirm your identity, ask to see your workspace, and guide you through sharing your screen. They will provide the secure exam links. Type your written response in the document provided, and keep it open when you finish until your proctor confirms it has saved. Have blank paper and a pen or pencil available for notes, as directed.

Exam agreement: Please review the Endorsement Exam Agreement before your appointment so you are familiar with the exam requirements. You will be asked to complete and submit the agreement during check-in before your exam begins. **Review the Exam Agreement**

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Accommodations: If a disability, medical condition, language need, or other factor could affect your ability to complete the exam within the standard time, email **endorsementinstitute@gmail.com** when registering. Describe what you need and include supporting documentation from a qualified professional. If you have already registered, contact us as soon as possible; we will consider requests when feasible. Applicants whose primary language is not English may request up to 60 additional minutes for each part and use a translation dictionary. These standard language accommodations require only a written request from the applicant.

Retakes: If you do not pass either part, you may retake that part six months after your original exam date. Email **endorsementinstitute@gmail.com** in advance to discuss scheduling and next steps.

Part One Multiple Choice

The multiple-choice section of the exam is shared across Mentor categories. The IMH exam centers on ages 0–3; the ECMH exam centers on ages 3–6, however it also includes some foundational questions that focus on infancy and toddlerhood because development during the preschool years builds on earlier brain development, attachment and caregiving relationships, regulation, and early social-emotional experiences.

Research and teaching in IECMH require foundational knowledge of development, relationships, and the practices and systems that support infants, young children, and their families. Understanding development, attachment, trauma, assessment, intervention, reflective practice, and service systems helps researchers and faculty connect evidence and teaching to IECMH-informed practice. This section assesses that shared IECMH knowledge base.

Respondents have 90 minutes to answer 60 multiple-choice questions. Eighty percent or better is required to pass; no more than 12 incorrect answers.

We do not recommend waiting to hear whether your EASy application has been approved before beginning to study. We encourage you to begin studying as soon as you decide that you hope to sit for an upcoming exam. Reviewing the material will be helpful in your work, and starting early can help you avoid feeling rushed or pressured once you are approved to schedule the exam.

The examination samples knowledge across the IECMH Competency Framework. Across roles, the exam asks whether the applicant can recognize development and behavior in **relational, developmental, cultural, and contextual terms** and choose responses consistent with IECMH-informed practice.

Behavior → wonder → context → relationship → response

When a child, caregiver, or professional is struggling, avoid jumping immediately to a label or correction. First ask what the behavior may be communicating, what developmental and relational context matters, how culture and lived experience may shape its meaning, and what response supports **safety, connection, regulation, and appropriate referral**.

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This section is meant to measure what is known and is derived primarily from the knowledge and skill areas found under the **Theoretical Foundations** and **Direct Service Skills** domains of the Competency Guidelines, with greater emphasis on:

- pregnancy and early parenthood
- infant/young child development and behavior
- attachment, separation, trauma
- grief, and loss
- cultural humility, diversity, equity, and inclusion
- disorders of infancy/early childhood
- screening and assessment
- parent-infant/very young child relationship-based therapies and practices
- reflective supervision/consultation (RSC)

The multiple-choice questions will place greater emphasis on direct service; however, some questions will relate to RSC, policy, ethical practice, service delivery systems, and research

As you prepare, focus your study on being able to recognize and apply the following concepts:

- Recognize secure-base behavior, attachment patterns, co-regulation, internal working models, and the meaning behind behavior
- Understand toxic stress, trauma effects, protective relationships, family violence, maltreatment, and caregiver depression
- Know broad infant/toddler developmental expectations, red flags, temperament, screening, referral, and developmental context (and preschool for 3-6 exam)
- Use cultural humility, curiosity, self-awareness, respect for family expertise, and an equity-informed stance
- Understand reflection, parallel process, thoughtful use of self, how to remain curious, and examine assumptions
- Know what major frameworks and tools are for and when they may be relevant, including DC 0-5, CPP, IPP, AAI, ASQ, and Touchpoints.

Suggested Resources to Support Your Preparation for Part 1

As you review the knowledge and skill areas above, identify where you feel confident and where additional study may be helpful. The resources below are suggested, not required. You do not need to review every item. Focus on materials that address your learning needs, application review feedback, and relevant coursework or specialized training.

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These are eight high-yield resources.

1. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University
    - Focus on how relationships and developmental environments shape stress regulation and development.
    - **Suggested Topics:** Brain Architecture, Serve and Return, Toxic Stress, and Resilience

2. Davies, D. & Troy, M. – Child Development: A Practitioner's Guide
    - If possible, look for the full book through a **public library, university library, workplace, or interlibrary loan** before purchasing a copy. If you can access **either edition**, either is appropriate for exam preparation.
    - **Google Books generously offers a free preview** on two high-yield chapters: Attachment and Brain Development. If possible, however, use the full text to review the developmental chapters that cover infant and toddler development, including how early experience, caregiving, regulation, development, and assessment come together in practice.
    - For **3–6 applicants**, **the later preschool chapters** address physical, social, language, cognitive, and symbolic/play development; attachment; regulation of emotion and behavior; the developing self; and applying developmental knowledge in assessment, consultation, intervention, and play.
    - Read for developmental understanding and application **rather than memorization**.

3. Head Start – Infant and Toddler Behaviors That Can Challenge Adults
    - Use these materials to connect IECMH concepts to **early childhood program practice, consultation, family partnership, regulation, and referral**.
    - Strengthen understanding of **behavior as communication** and the developmental meaning behind infant and toddler behavior.
    - Consider how **development, regulation, temperament, relationships, culture, and adult interpretation** shape behavior.
    - Notice the adult's role in **pausing, reflecting, co-regulating, and responding intentionally** rather than reacting only to the behavior.

4. Irving Harris Foundation. (2012). *Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets.*
    - Read the Tenets as a stance for practice: self-awareness, equity, culture, power, family expertise, and reflective capacity.

5. *Endorsement Code of Ethics* (2026). **Available within Endorsement applications in EASy.** - It will be helpful to print the Code of Ethics from EASy to prepare.

6. *Competency Guidelines* (**Available in EASy under "Support").** Focus on your category of Endorsement. It will be helpful to print these from EASy as a way to prepare.

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7. Pawl, J. & St. John, M. – *How You Are Is as Important as What You Do*
    - *Alternative:* Perez, L., Wong, E., & St. John, M. S. – Reflecting on "How You Are Is as Important as What You Do": Jeree H. Pawl's Enduring Influence in Contemporary IECMH Practice: Use to deepen **relationship-based practice, reflective stance, and use of self**.
    - Consider how **who you are and how you are with families and colleagues** influences the work, not only what you do. Pay attention to your **own reactions, assumptions, emotional responses, and presence** as part of reflective practice.

8. Slade, A. – *Parental Reflective Functioning: An Introduction*
    - *Alternative: Free Full Text on the Same Core Ideas:* Ordway, M. R., Webb, D., Sadler, L. S., & Slade, A. – *Parental Reflective Functioning: An Approach to Enhancing Parent-Child Relationships in Pediatric Primary Care*
    - Focus on understanding behavior in relation to **feelings, thoughts, intentions, and other mental states**.
    - Consider what may be happening internally for the **child and caregiver**, rather than responding only to observable behavior.
    - Apply the same reflective stance to your **own reactions, assumptions, and responses as a professional**.

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Secondary Resources: *Optional* Deeper Reading

These readings offer additional depth in relationship-based practice, reflective supervision, and infant and early childhood mental health. **They are optional—s**elect readings that address your learning needs.

- **Fraiberg, Adelson & Shapiro – Ghosts in the Nursery**
- **Heffron & Murch – *Reflective Supervision and Leadership in Infant and Early Childhood Programs***
  Free companion readings—not excerpts from the book: Three Building Blocks of Reflective Supervision and Essential Elements of Reflective Supervision and Consultation.
- **Heller & Gilkerson, editors – *A Practical Guide to Reflective Supervision***
  Free chapter by Costa and Sullivan: What Staff Development Activities Can Be Used to Build Reflective Capacity? (PDF)
- **Lieberman & Van Horn – *Psychotherapy with Infants and Young Children***
  Free introductory chapter: When Development Falters: Putting Relationships First (PDF)
- **Infant Mental Health Home Visiting Manual –Michigan Association for IMH**
- **Reflections from the Field Bundle** 51 IMH articles, with companion questions from leaders in the field that support deeper exploration of infant and early childhood mental health and relationship-based practice.
- **ZERO TO THREE – *DC:0–5™: Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood***
  Free companion article—Reflections on DC:0–5 at 5

Respondents taking either the IMH Endorsement® Mentor Research/Faculty exam or the ECMH Endorsement® Mentor Research/Faculty exam will have **90 minutes to write about one of two focus areas**: teaching I/ECMH content at a university level or conducting I/ECMH research. Respondents select **one focus area only**. Both options require relevant research evidence; respondents are not required to complete both a teaching plan and a research proposal.

The written section measures your knowledge of research related to I/ECMH principles and practices and how you apply that knowledge to research/evaluation or teaching in higher education. **Make your reasoning explicit:** explain the theoretical perspective guiding your response, why you selected particular research, and how the findings inform your understanding and proposed approach.

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Part Two Research/Faculty Written Examination

Using theory and research

Respondents should cite direct empirical, peer-reviewed research in an area of I/ECMH that is most familiar to them, such as attachment, psychopathology, parenting, or reflective functioning. **At least one classical and one contemporary research reference are required.** Citations should include, at minimum, the primary author's name. These are minimum requirements; your response should include enough relevant research to demonstrate knowledge of your selected topic.

Go beyond naming authors, theories, or studies. Explain the relevant findings, why they matter to your topic, and how they fit together within your theoretical framework—the theory or conceptual perspective you are using to understand the topic. Consider relevant perspectives and contextual influences rather than presenting an isolated finding as a complete explanation.

Clearly explain how your theoretical perspective and selected research connect to the social, emotional, and relationship needs of infants or young children and their families. **Show how these connections inform your proposed teaching or research approach.**

Research from related fields is appropriate when its relevance to I/ECMH is clearly explained.

What reviewers look for- responses are reviewed in two areas:

- **Identification of Relevant Research:** The ability to identify and explain relevant theory and empirical research, integrate them into a coherent response, and show how they inform your proposed approach.
- **Attention to I/ECMH Concerns:** The ability to explicitly connect the research to the social, emotional, and relationship needs of infants or young children and their families, with attention to culturally sensitive, relationship-based principles and practices.

For both, explain how these considerations shape your understanding and proposed approach rather than leaving the reviewer to infer the connections.

For the **ECMH Research/Faculty exam**, reviewers will look for research and discussion relevant to **children ages 3–6 and their caregivers**. Research concerning infancy may be included when its relevance to early childhood is clearly explained. The IMH and ECMH versions use the same core scoring expectations, applied to the developmental focus of the examination.

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Preparing your response

Practice writing about a familiar topic, connecting and applying what you know rather than only memorizing references. Before finishing your response, check that you have explained your theoretical framework, summarized relevant research findings, and shown how they connect to I/ECMH needs and inform your proposed approach.

There is no single "right" teaching or research approach. Focus on clearly explaining and supporting your approach through relevant theory, research, and culturally sensitive, relationship-based I/ECMH principles.

Suggested Research/Faculty Resources

You are encouraged to draw on research you use in your teaching, research, evaluation, and other professional activities. There is no single reading list that will fit every applicant's area of expertise. Begin with an I/ECMH topic familiar to you and revisit relevant empirical, peer-reviewed studies, including at least one classical and one contemporary reference in your response. Explain the relevant findings and how they inform your proposed teaching or research approach.

As you prepare, practice explaining what the research found, its strengths and limitations, and how it informs your proposed teaching or research approach. Make the connections to young children's social-emotional development, relationships, and family experiences explicit, with attention to developmental age, culture, and context. Include enough relevant research to demonstrate your understanding; the required classical and contemporary references are a minimum, not a complete response by themselves.

The optional resources below may help you strengthen aspects of teaching or research design that are less familiar to you. They supplement—not replace—the research knowledge you bring to the examination.

Research/Faculty preparation should include classical and contemporary empirical, peer-reviewed research relevant to your selected topic and the developmental focus of your examination. The general resources following Part One may support your understanding of foundational theory. Supplement these with relevant original research studies, including contemporary literature, to meet the expectations described above.

Optional Resources for Teaching and Research in I/ECMH

Relevant to both focus areas:

- *Competency Guidelines* (**Available in EASy under "Support")** Review the ones under **Research & Evaluation Competency domain**, including Study of Infant Relationship and Attachment, Study of Infant Development and Behavior, and Study of Families.

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- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Research
- Diversity-Informed Tenets for Work with Infants, Children and Families
- Supplemental Author Guidelines on Diversity and Anti-Racist Scholarship in IMHJ

Teaching I/ECMH Content

- CONNECT Modules – 5-Step Learning Cycle
- Holding up the mirror: The role of teacher educators and syllabi in perpetuating or disrupting inequity
- SCRIPT-NC – Tools for Early Childhood Faculty

Conducting I/ECMH Research

- Georgetown University – Research & Evaluation Resources
- Harvard Center on the Developing Child – IDEAS Impact Framework

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A final note as you prepare

We know that preparing for an exam takes time, energy, and attention—and that you are fitting this into a life that is already full. You may be leading a program, supporting a workforce, navigating difficult funding decisions, caring for people in your own life, or doing several of these things at once. We appreciate the commitment behind your decision to pursue Endorsement and the thoughtfulness you bring to this work.

Give yourself permission to prepare in manageable pieces. These resources are an invitation to deepen your understanding. Begin with what is less familiar, build on what you already know, and make room to connect the material to your own work. A short period of focused reading followed by thoughtful reflection can be more useful than trying to push through a large amount of material.

You do not have to prepare alone. Consider finding a study partner and choosing one resource—or a section of a resource—for each of you to explore during the week. Then meet briefly to explain what you learned to one another. Share an idea that stayed with you, something you are still wondering about, and how it might apply in your setting. You might each read something different and exchange insights, or read the same material and notice what stood out differently. The goal is not to become the expert for the other person; it is to make learning more accessible, connected, and meaningful.

As you study, keep bringing the ideas back to the social-emotional and relationship needs of infants and young children and their caregivers. What does a finding help us understand about early relationships, emotional experiences, regulation, and development? Whose experiences are represented—or missing—in the evidence? How might developmental age, culture, and family context shape its interpretation or application? Consider how your own experiences and assumptions influence the questions you ask and the meaning you make of the findings. An IECMH-informed approach also invites attention to how you teach and conduct research—with curiosity, respect for family and community knowledge, and thoughtful relationships with students, research participants, and colleagues. These connections help keep both the knowledge and the process of learning grounded in the children and families the work ultimately serves. Our field benefits from leaders with different experiences, perspectives, and areas of influence. No one person holds all the knowledge this work requires. There is value in what you bring, in what others can teach you, and in what becomes possible when we share ideas and resources generously. Curiosity, reflection, and a willingness to keep learning belong alongside experience and expertise.

Thank you for investing in your learning and in the knowledge that supports young children and families. Through the questions you ask, the research you conduct, the students you mentor, and the learning environments you create, you help shape how others understand and respond to early development and relationships. As you prepare, we hope you make room for encouragement, reflection, connection, and rest.

Warmly,

CERH and the IECMH International Institute Examination Team

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