

Social-Emotional Consultation in Infant and Toddler Child Care Programs

Many infants and toddlers are in child care settings that struggle even to meet the most basic health and safety requirements. Day after day, these children are losing ground. Together, we can reverse that trend by providing the high-quality early care that every New York child deserves.

Most of New York's children will spend some of their formative years in child care outside the home. And the quality of that care will help shape the rest of their lives.

Study after study has shown that those who receive high-quality child care are more likely to succeed, starting in kindergarten and continuing through adulthood. The foundation for this success must be laid early on, when children are infants and toddlers.

The Early Care & Learning Council has been working to make high-quality, affordable child care available to New York's families since 1975. The Council has been instrumental in influencing policy and in translating that policy into practice by promoting safe, nurturing environments for children throughout the state.

Through its network of Child Care Resource and Referral Services, the Early Care & Learning Council reaches out to communities, child care providers, and families. It provides leadership and support, emphasizing the early care and education that can help secure the future—for New York's youngest residents and for the state as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by a grant from the New York State (NYS) Office of Children and Family Services through American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Early Care & Learning Council staff and administration were instrumental in every stage of the project. The cross-disciplinary advisory team, whose members are listed below, offered valuable feedback and guidance in the design and implementation of the project and the evaluation.

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Executive Summary

Background

Social-Emotional Consultation in Infant and Toddler Child Care Programs was a statewide demonstration project to promote healthy social-emotional development, prevent problem behaviors, and treat developmental disorders of infants and toddlers in early care and learning environments. The project was coordinated by the Early Care & Learning Council and funded by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services between January 2010 and June 2011 through a grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Four communities were selected as demonstration sites including Syracuse, Putnam County, Westchester County, and New York City. Each site provided on-site mental health consultation to child care or home visiting programs that serve infants and toddlers. A collaborative model was developed to include representatives of child care councils, Regional Infant/Toddler Resource Centers, Early Head Start, county departments of health and mental health, and/or provider agencies with a focus on infant and toddler development. A child development organization provided training and technical assistance to the four sites. The following six evaluation questions guided the evaluation activities:

1. Are infants and toddlers who are involved in the consultation showing improved social-emotional behaviors?
2. Are the parents of infants and toddlers who are involved in the consultation satisfied with services?
3. Do the child care providers who are involved in the consultation have improved knowledge and skills?
4. Does the social-emotional consultation increase child care program quality?
5. Is the consultation instrumental in improving cross-system collaboration in I/T social-emotional development?
6. What are the training needs and outcomes of consultants and other partners involved in the project?

Methods

The evaluation sample consisted of multiple groups of programs and individuals from the four sites involved in the project. There were a total of 12 participating child care and Early Head Start programs, 752 infants and toddlers, and 165 caregivers and home visitors across four sites. A mix of observation tools, surveys, interviews, and focus groups were used by the central evaluation team and the local partners. A case tracking program was used to record and transmit data on child and family consultations, programmatic consultations, and Ages & Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE) scores. Teachers and home visitors who participated in the project were asked to complete an evaluation survey at the end of the consultation process. Child care directors were interviewed at the beginning and end of the project. Parents of infants and toddlers in participating child care centers were asked to complete a satisfaction survey towards the end of the project. Training services provided by the training organization were evaluated through background and training/supervision evaluation questionnaires that were distributed at the end of large group trainings and reflective supervision sessions. On-site focus groups were held in each of the four sites with different stakeholder groups. All of the instruments were developed and reviewed with the involvement of the advisory committee including the local representatives.

Results

The number of times a consultation type was selected among the given options for child/family consultations and program consultations in each community was analyzed. The most frequently selected consultation type across communities was “consult to director and/or owner” (22%), which was followed by “consult to teachers(s)” (17%), “conduct observation” (17%), “other” (14%), “consult to parent(s)” (13%), “modeling in classroom or socialization group” (8%), “train in formal workshop” (6%), “referral or collateral consultation” (3%), and “EI to CPSE transition” (0.3%).

ASQ:SE Questionnaire	Cutoff	Pre Scores			Post Scores		
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD
6 month	45	6	21.7	7.6	15	9.0	10.6
12 month	48	8	22.1	11.9	11	15.5	12.1
18 month	50	13	18.5	13.2	25	17.2	9.0
24 month	50	22	20.3	31.5	24	18.5	16.1
30 month	57	19	21.4	16.0	23	28.3	22.0
36 month	59	21	32.1	20.9	22	32.0	25.2
Overall		89	22.7	16.8	120	20.1	15.8

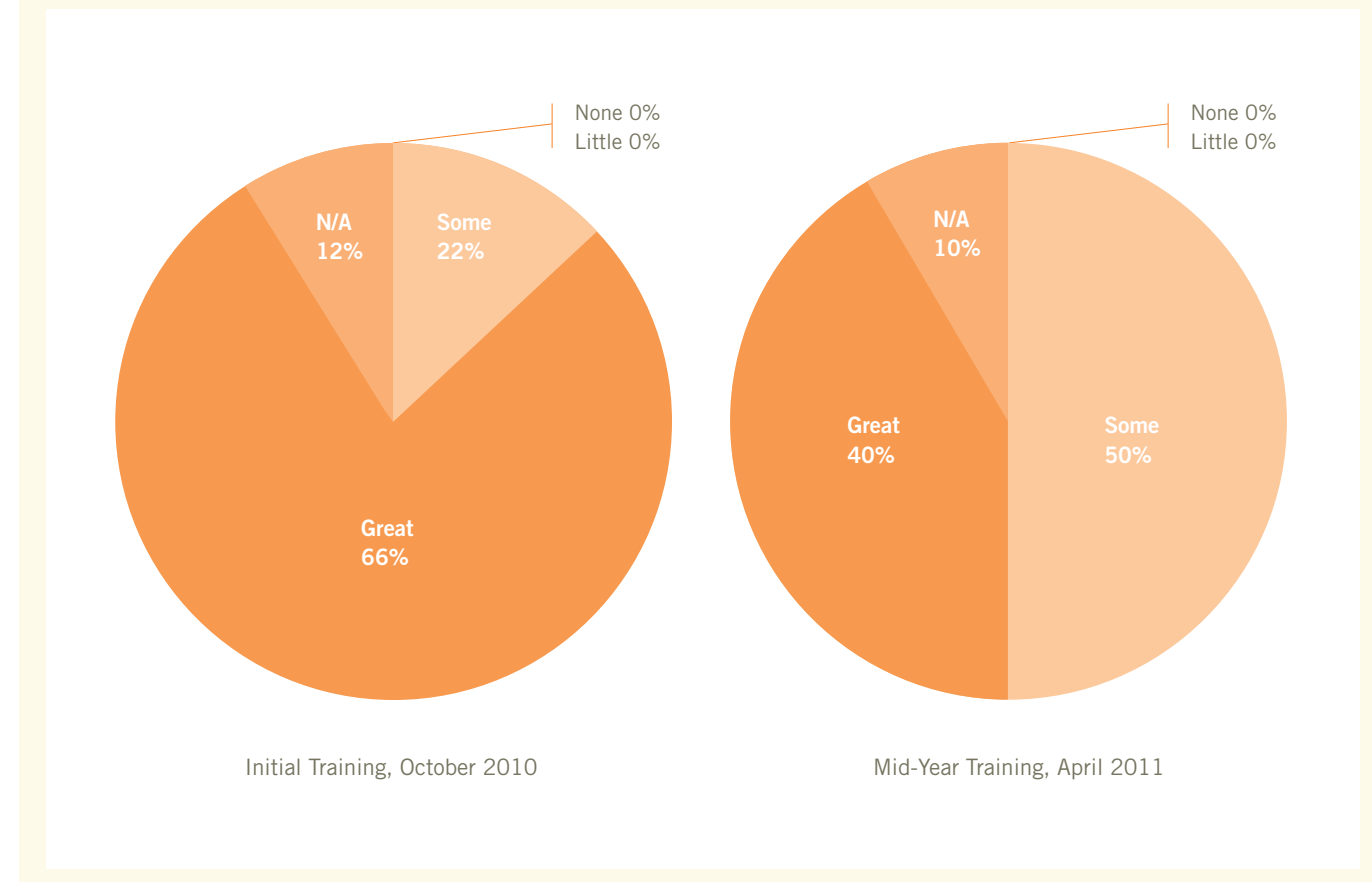
Three of the four sites had data on follow-up ASQ:SE scores. As shown in the following table, average ASQ:SE scores between initial and follow-up assessments in those sites showed a three point decrease from 23 to 20, which indicated an improvement in social-emotional behaviors and development of the children. In five of the six age groups, there was a reduction in the average scale scores.

Parents who received consultation were asked to rate their satisfaction with the services. Among the 51 parents from the two sites who completed an evaluation survey, nine parents, five from one site and four from the other, indicated that they received consultation services. 99% of the responses (82 out of 83) agreed or strongly agreed with the positively stated qualities of consultation services.

In the pre-post phone interviews, program directors from the four partnerships commented on knowledge and skills of their staff. Of the 11 items from the survey, there was an increased rating for 7 items, no change for 1 item, and a decrease for 3 items. The top three items with the biggest increase were 16 “Teachers feel comfortable referring a child and family to social-emotional development services,” 18 “Teachers feel competent and confident in their ability to respond to behavior that worries them,” and 13 “Teachers communicate regularly with parents about their infant/toddlers’ strengths and needs.”

Figure 1. Distribution of responses to an evaluation question at the initial and mid-year trainings

To what extent did the overall training increase your existing level of knowledge and practice?



Each of the participating communities was unique and at a different stage of system development with regard to mental health provision and services for infants and toddlers. Despite these differences there were two consistent changes in cross-systems development that emerged from the focus group and structured interviews. First, each site reported that their communities increased their emphasis on the importance of focusing resources and supports to the infant-toddler population. Additionally, all communities reported that they had made new linkages or had created stronger ties that were likely to be sustained beyond the period of the grant. As shown in the figure, 88% of the 32 participants at the initial training and 90% of the 10 participants at the mid-year training who completed an evaluation survey indicated that the overall training increased their knowledge and skills to some or great extent.

Conclusions

Results from the evaluation of Social-Emotional Consultation in Infant and Toddler Child Care Programs show that the four demonstration projects were instrumental in improving children’s behavioral outcomes, meeting parents’ needs, increasing knowledge and skills of caregivers and home visitors, enhancing program quality, and creating opportunities for cross-system collaborations. Data from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups, as well as information from other sources provided supportive indication of the overall project’s effectiveness and contributions. Successes, challenges, lessons learned, and limitations of the evaluation provide useful information in the understanding of the results from this evaluation as well as the implications for future projects.

