



## VAIMH ENDORSEMENT® INTRODUCTION

The primary mission of the infant mental health profession is to promote and support nurturing relationships for all infants. The focus is on the development of the infant/toddler or young child within the context of complex relationships. Services are comprehensive and intensive, covering multiple domains, including concrete needs, problem solving skills, and family relationships, as well as infant/toddler and young child development, parent-infant/young child interactions, and developing attachment relationships. Services are supportive, affirming, and strengths-based. They are specifically designed to be respectful of the infant/young child's and family's individuality, culture, and ethnicity. VAIMH endorsed service providers/professionals work in a variety of settings to assure that all infants have opportunities for nurturing relationships essential for optimal growth and development. Depending on the Category of Endorsement, VAIMH endorsed service providers/professionals offer direct services to infants, toddlers, young children, and families; supervise and train staff; consult with, collaborate, and educate other community professionals; advocate for services; develop best practice policies; and/or teach and conduct research in colleges and universities. All of these activities reflect a commitment to values that are the bedrock of infant and early childhood mental health practice.

### Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Basic Beliefs

1. Optimal growth and development occur within nurturing relationships;
2. The birth and care of a new baby offer a family the possibility of new relationships, growth, and change;
3. What happens in the early years affects the course of development across the lifespan;
4. Early developing attachment relationships may be distorted or disturbed by parental histories of unresolved losses and traumatic life events;
5. The therapeutic presence of a Mental Health Specialist may reduce the risk of relationship failure and offer the hopefulness of warm and nurturing parental responses.

### A Brief Overview of the Endorsement®

The **Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health®** (IMH-E® / ECMH-E®) is meant to recognize professionals who apply infant mental health principles to their work. It does not replace licensure, certification, or credentialing, but instead is meant as a specialization that complements one's professional license and/or other credentials. VAIMH Endorsement® is cross-sector and multidisciplinary.

The categories of Endorsement® are:

- **Family Associate (FA)**  
*Typically for professionals working directly with pregnant people, infants, toddlers, young children, and their families to promote optimal social emotional development and/or early relational health.*
- **Family Specialist (FS)**  
*This category is typically for someone whose work experiences come from programs that provide education/support/consultation to early care and education providers, or whose intent is primarily to educate parents.*
- **Mental Health Specialist (MHS)**  
*This category is typically for someone with licensure as a Mental Health Clinician and/or whose role includes intervention or treatment of the child's primary caregiver relationship (i.e., biological, foster, or adoptive parent or guardian).*
- **Mental Health Mentor (MHM):** There are 3 designations at this category:
  - Clinical (MHM-C): *Typically for practice leaders who provide reflective supervision or consultation;*
  - Policy (MHM-P): *Typically for practice leaders in policies and programs;*
  - Research/Faculty (MHM-R/F): *Typically for practice leaders in research, evaluation, and teaching at a College or University.*

Those who have earned Endorsement® demonstrate specialized education, work, in-service training, and reflective supervision/consultation experiences that have led to competency in the promotion and/or practice of infant and early childhood mental health within the individual's scope of practice. Detailed information about the requirements for specialized education, work, in-service training, and reflective supervision experiences are different in each category and can be found in the **Competency Guidelines for the Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health®** at <https://www.vaimh.org/> on the Endorsement page of the website.

Each category recognizes the educational experiences, in-service training experiences, and work experiences appropriate for best service outcomes for infants, toddlers, young children, and families which is documented in an online Endorsement portfolio in the **Endorsement Application System** or EASy.

The portfolio consists of documentation of all educational experiences accompanied by transcripts for courses, degrees, and/or certificates; a list of relevant in-service training experiences (related to culturally sensitive, relationship-based practices promoting infant and early childhood mental health); a list of relevant paid work experiences with infants/toddlers (birth to 36 months) or young children (ages 3-6) and their caregivers and families; any reflective supervision experiences; three professional reference ratings; membership in the State Association for Infant Mental Health (VAIMH); a signed Code of Ethics, and signed Endorsement Agreement.

For Mental Health Mentors, leadership activities at the regional or state level are also required and documented in the portfolio. A 4-hour written exam is also required and is based on the identified competencies for Mental Health Mentor categories.

To remain on Virginia's [Active Registry of Endorsed Professionals](#), renewal of the Endorsement is required and includes documenting continued membership in VAIMH; 15 hours annually of culturally sensitive, relationship-based training experiences that promote infant and early childhood mental health practice, and a minimum of 12 hours annually in ongoing Reflective Supervision (for FS, MHS, and MHM-C endorsees). Virginia's [Endorsement Renewal](#) cycle is every three years (2024, 2027, 2030, etc.) and is completed through an attestation process. In 2027, endorsees will attest to having received 45 hours of training, and 36 hours of RSC (if applicable) between January 2025-December 2027. Note: [VAIMH Memberships must be renewed each December](#).

### **How To Apply**

Review Endorsement information at <https://www.vaimh.org/>

- *Endorsement Competency Guidelines* - <https://www.vaimh.org/competency-guidelines>
- *IECMH Code of Ethics* - <https://www.vaimh.org/code-of-ethics>
- *Endorsement-related Fees* - <https://www.vaimh.org/endorsement-fees>
- *VAIMH Endorsement Overview* - <https://www.vaimh.org/vaimh-endorsement-overview>
- *Steps to Apply* - <https://www.vaimh.org/steps-to-apply>

For more information, contact [vaendorsement@vcu.edu](mailto:vaendorsement@vcu.edu)

*The Virginia Association for Infant Mental Health (VAIMH) partners with the Early Childhood Mental Health Virginia (ECMHVA) Initiative to implement the Virginia Endorsement for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant Mental Health. Funding for the ECMHVA Initiative is currently made available through the support of our largest funder, the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia at the Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services and by our sustaining partners, the Virginia Department of Education, Early Childhood Special Education and the Head Start State Collaboration Office within the Virginia Department of Social Services. Funding in previous years from the Virginia Department of Health (Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant) and the Virginia Department of Social Services (CCDBG Infant & Toddler) has also supported this initiative.*