

Guide to Supporting Children and Young People who are affected by Parental Mental Health

The **Assessing Impact of Parental Mental Health on Children and Young People** Tool contributes to a practitioner's assessment of the level of need and/or risk to a child who is affected by behaviours associated with parental mental health and links responses to the Continuum of Need. This guide, **Supporting Children and Young People who are affected by Parental Mental Health**, outlines the type of support that can benefit children and young people who may be affected by parental mental health.

What helps children and young people?

Resilience¹

How children respond to life experiences, may depend on their level of resilience, that is, their capacity to face, overcome and ultimately be strengthened by life's adversities and challenges. Some children develop well despite growing up in high-risk environments and recover more successfully from traumatic events or episodes, whereas others are less able to resist adversity or cope with uncertainty. Where adversities are continuous and extreme (Adverse Childhood Experiences), and are not moderated by factors external to the child, resilience will be very rare. In many cases, where children lack strategies to cope with difficult circumstances, with support and guidance, they can learn some.

¹ RIP (2014) [Promoting Resilience in Children, Young People and Families](#)

A resilient child would be able to describe a **secure base**, for example, I have people:

- around me I trust and who love me no matter what,
- who set limits for me, so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble,
- who show me how to do things right by the way they do things,
- who want me to learn to do things on my own,
- who help me when I am sick, in danger, or need to learn?

A resilient child would **show good self esteem**, for example, I am a person:

- other people can like and love,
- who is happy to do nice things for others and able to show my concern,
- who is respectful of myself and of others?
- who is willing to be responsible for what I do,
- who is sure that in the end, things will be alright?

A resilient child would **demonstrate self-efficacy**, for example, I can:

- talk to other people about the things that frighten or bother me,
- find ways to solve the problems I might face,
- control myself when I feel like doing something that's not right, or that's dangerous,
- figure out when it is a good time to talk to someone, or to take action,
- find someone to help me when I need it.

By speaking to the child and finding out where there are any gaps (or vulnerabilities) in their resilience, work can be targeted on building up that area of weakness and on developing Protective Factors i.e. Factors (intrinsic to the child and within their environment) that act as a buffer to the negative effects of adverse experiences.

This may include:

- Promoting physical activity.
- Developing emotional and social skills.
- Promoting social identity and self-esteem.

which may be achieved through having a Secure Base; Friendships; Talents and Interests; Positive Values; Social Competencies; and Education.

Providing factual information

Children need to be given clear, age appropriate, factual information about their parents' mental ill health and impact of medication - children say they feel less anxious if they are told the truth. Some websites e.g. [Young Minds](#) provide a source of useful information for children and young people. With parental consent, if mental health practitioners are involved, they may be able to give more specific and tailored information about the parent's condition or impact of medication on daily life.

Preparing for an emergency

Writing up an information sheet with their parents can prepare children for times when their parent may be absent. It could describe the child's daily/weekly routine and their likes and dislikes. If other caregivers follow this guidance it can provide children with continuity and a sense of security. It can also enable parents to maintain a sense of control and that they are contributing to their child's well-being when they are in hospital or out of the home.

Parents can also write down what they find helpful and unhelpful when they are unwell. Children often carry this information in their heads which means they may assume the role of their parent's carer without looking for support outside the family. Sharing the parent's support needs with a trusted adult reduces the likelihood of the child taking on inappropriate caring responsibilities and can reduce the guilt that parents may feel about their children carrying these responsibilities.

Facilitating contact with the parent in hospital

If a child is going to visit their parent in hospital, it is important that whoever takes them can explain beforehand what to expect - what the building looks like, how their parent may look and behave, and the effects of medication, how the other service users behave. Mental health wards should be able to provide a family room when children can see their parent safely, outside the ward environment. It is advisable to explore whether or not there are child-friendly arrangements prior to the visit in order to prepare the child and where appropriate to request a risk assessment is completed by hospital staff.

Identifying support networks

Although some parents with a mental health issue and/or their children do not want others to know their circumstances, where possible, it is helpful to work with the parent and child to identify individuals and organisations that can provide informal support for the family, for example, relatives, teachers, other adults, friends, another caregiver who does not have mental health problems, voluntary, community or faith organisations.

Discuss with the child and parent if they will agree to a referral to the Early Intervention panel for a Young Carers Assessment in line with the [Children and Families Act 2014](#). Individual (specialist) and social support can help children and young people to cope with their parents' ill health. Young carers' groups can offer them a chance to meet up with other young carers, talk to people who understand what they are coping with, and enjoy trips and activities that they can't usually join because of their caring responsibilities.

These factors contribute to building and maintaining a child's resilience to difficulties.

Expressing Feelings

Some children and young people may live with a parent with mental health problems who has difficulty expressing or regulating their own emotions. The adult may present as 'flat' or emotionally unresponsive, for example, due to the effect of medication or their mental health condition; they may present as anxious or hypervigilant etc. In these circumstances, the child may not have had opportunities to learn the significance of different emotions or how the expression of feelings can impact on others.

Children and young people affected by parental mental health may experience a range of emotions that contribute to confusion, frustration, anger, despair, guilt. They may need help to accept this is 'normal'.

If children have learnt to suppress emotions, for example, to avoid upsetting their parent, fear of getting into trouble or 'exposing' the family circumstances, being blamed or ridiculed by others etc, they may need help to identify and express emotions safely and to recognise that feelings are a natural, human response which can help to release tension and promote good mental health.

Supporting children to develop a 'feelings' vocabulary, to recognise cues for different feelings and to create strategies to manage intense emotions will promote emotional intelligence and better equip them to express feelings safely in the future.

Other Ways to Support Children

Calderdale is well-resourced to respond to the emotional well-being of children and young people, providing on-line support as well as a range of face to face initiatives. Resources include:

- [Open Minds Calderdale](#) is a website that helps to answer questions about emotional health and wellbeing
- [Kooth](#) – is a resource for young people
- [Healthy Relationships](#) - a website that provides ideas and resources for direct work with children and young people.

If several unmet needs are identified (including those of the adults and any other children in the family), discuss the benefits of a Family Group Conference with the parents/carers and or start the Early Help Journey if necessary.

What helps parents?

In order to receive a service in most circumstances, the parent will need to give their consent for a referral. In Calderdale, there are several organisations that provide support directly to adults which are self-referral. For example,

- [Healthy Minds](#) – a Calderdale mental health charity providing support
- [Recovery College](#) is open to any adult who wishes to improve their emotional wellbeing
- [Andy's Man Club](#) – a peer support group for men
- [Unmasked Mental Health](#) – a local mental health support group for anyone going through a difficult time
- [Calderdale Credit Union](#) for help with money worries

Other sources of information and support include:

- [Mind](#) – the national mental health charity providing advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem
- [NHS - steps we can take to improve our mental wellbeing](#)
- [Samaritans](#) offer a free, confidential service, 24 hours a day, on 116 123

For advice or to refer a parent (with consent) who needs more focused or intensive support, contact Single Point of Contact (SPA): 01924 316830 Hours: 8am - 8pm, Monday – Friday.

Or Visit:

- [Single Point of Access \(SPA\)- Calderdale and Kirklees](#)
- [In crisis](#) – for what to do in a crisis.

Who helps Adult Carers?

[Making Space](#) is a local support service for carers who provide emotional support, offer advice and guidance; and support to enjoy life outside of the caring role.

They will also:

- Signpost to other relevant services and organisations
- Provide information about mental health conditions, treatments and local services
- Offer support to help communicate with mental health services

[Calderdale Carers Project](#) can also provide support to carers following an assessment of needs. This includes information and advice, emotional support, support groups, social activities, sitters and transport (dependent on funding and availability), newsletter, advocacy etc.