

**FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN
WORKING WITH PARENTS/CARERS
WHO HAVE MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES**

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 Mental illness in a parent or carer does not necessarily have an adverse impact on a child, but it is essential always to assess its implications for any children involved in the family.
- 2 Those who have a role in working with these parents/carers must ensure that both the expertise of adult mental health workers and child care workers is used to inform any assessment regarding the welfare of the children.

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

- 3 In assessing whether the developmental needs of children are being met, the following areas should be considered.
 - Does the parent/carer generally anticipate the child's need for food, clothing, sleep, play and safety?
 - Does the parent/carer respond to the child's initiatives, offer warm interactions and respond appropriately to distress?
 - Does the parent/carer refer to the child positively, or describe them with warmth.
 - Does the parent/carer set age – appropriate boundaries to the child's behaviour?
 - Does the parent/carer expect to “look after” the child, rather than the child being expected to “look after” the parent?
 - Does the parent/carer offer a consistent and continuing relationship with the child over time?
 - Does the parent/carer manage any periods of separation taking into account the needs of the individual child?
 - As the child develops, is he or she supported in relationships with the world outside of the immediate household?
 - Is the child free from abuse?
 - Does the child attend school regularly (if relevant)?
 - Is the child's health and development that which is expected for that individual child?

PARENTING CAPACITY

- 4 The signs of parents/carers mental health difficulties.
- Does the parent/carer display inappropriate behaviour in front of the child?
 - Does the parent/carer appear to be hearing/responding to voices?
 - Does the parent/carer view the world as a friendly or hostile place?
 - Is the parent/carer experiencing any sleep or appetite disturbance?
 - Is the parent/carer's self-care adequate?
 - Is the parent/carer able to leave the house?
 - Does the parent/carer leave the house impulsively?
 - Is the parent/carer taking prescribed medication in relation to mental health needs?
 - Does the parent/carer leave the children without making adequate arrangements for their care?
 - Does the parent/carer display episodes of severe withdrawal or irritability?
 - Does the parent/carer display unusual and/or bizarre beliefs about the child?

FAMILY AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- 5 Family Social Network and Support System
- Is there another parent/carer who can provide compensatory care when needed?
 - Are close relatives including spouse/partner aware of any mental health issues?
 - Do they have the capacity to be supportive to the parents and/or the children and is their support accepted?
 - Is the parent/carer accepting of help and treatment offered from professional/voluntary agencies involved?
 - Is there parental/partnership conflict/family violence?
- 6 Accommodation and Home Environment

- Is accommodation adequate for children – e.g. clean, warm, safe, with enough food?
- Are parents/carers ensuring that rent and bills are paid?
- Does the family have a settled home base?
- Is the parent/carer using alcohol and/or drugs as well as prescribed medication?

7 What is the parents' perception of the situation

- Does the parent/carer acknowledge any mental health problems?
- Is the parent/carer able to think about and meet their child's needs?

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