

Communication – Context - Curiosity

Many parents will experience challenges with their mental health, with the majority continuing to provide their children with safety, support and love. Sometimes the mental health problems experienced by parents can have an adverse impact on their capacity to parent. Sometimes support from family or friends ensures their children are safe and well looked after. However, in some instances because of the severity of the mental health concerns or the lack of other protective factors children may be affected.

- ☐ When working with children it is important to be aware of the mental health of their parents.
- ☐ When a parent or carer is known to have a concern about their mental health professionals should offer support, signposting and referrals as appropriate.
- ☐ It is essential that professionals consider the potential impact on parenting capacity. Professionals should consider the child's age, stage of development and other needs to help understand the [impact on the child](#).
- ☐ The severity, duration and type of mental health condition should also be considered to help understand the impact on the child.
- ☐ It is also important that professionals understand the strengths of the family and understand what other support may be being offered from families and friends to reduce the impact on the child.
- ☐ Mental health is not static and may vary over time. Professionals should be aware of changes in this and explore the impact of parenting capacity and the child's experience of safety.

What can cause parental mental health to deteriorate?

- ☐ Divorce or separation
- ☐ Unemployment and financial hardship
- ☐ poor housing
- ☐ Discrimination (racism, homophobia...)
- ☐ A lack of social support and isolation
- ☐ Domestic abuse
- ☐ Substance misuse
- ☐ Death of a family member or friend

Whilst it is important to talk to parents about their mental health and to support them, professionals must ensure they do not lose focus on **the needs of the child**.

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Impact on Parenting

Sometimes parents and carers with mental health problems may find their parenting capacity impacted and need additional support to cope with day-to-day tasks including housework, shopping and food, bedtimes, taking children to school, and taking children to medical and dental appointments. They may find it:

- ☐ Difficult controlling their emotions around their children
- ☐ Difficult both to recognise and respond to the physical needs of their children
- ☐ Difficult to engage socially and emotionally with their children
- ☐ Difficult to set and maintain safe and appropriate boundaries for their children
- ☐ Difficult to provide appropriate care and support for their children

Impact on Children

Children can be affected by changes to their parents' mental health and parenting capacity. They may present as or experience:

- ☐ Worries about their parent or carer's mental health
- ☐ Taking on a caring role for parents and other family members
- ☐ Putting the needs of their family above their own
- ☐ Having negative feelings about their parent's condition
- ☐ Finding it hard to make friends, feeling isolated or being bullied
- ☐ Not feeling able to talk to their parents or another trusted adult about their worries.
- ☐ Not having their basic needs met.
- ☐ A lack of supervision and safety.

If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on 999. If you have concerns that a child may not be receiving the care they need but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.

Professionals should explore the most appropriate support to ensure the child is safe and their needs are met. This might involve initiating an Early Help Assessment and Plan or a referral to children's services.