

Handy Hints for Community and Day Services

Promoting Mental Health and Social Inclusion for Parents with Mental Health Difficulties and their Children.

When a parent has severe or continuing mental health problems the children and the rest of the family can be affected, and in some cases they can benefit from outside support. Stigma and social isolation affect the parents and children in different ways. It is important not to forget the children as they are the least powerful and the most dependent.

This briefing describes some of the concerns that parents and carers have and gives ideas for how modern community and day services can help.

"We need places for the kids to go, help to keep families together, support for mums and dads. I was lucky, another mum might have been stuck in the house."

(Parent, Keeping the Family in Mind.)

What are the effects on parents and carers?

Parents and carers often have many worries with regard to parenting and some fear that their children will be taken away from them. If this happens, a parent is likely to experience distress and heartache and they will often not know when they will have their children back again or if the separation is temporary or permanent. They may feel "on trial" about their parenting abilities, need reassurance and feedback about the quality of their parenting, and help with the practical aspects of parenting and childcare. They may be put off from asking for help from professionals for fear of being seen as not coping. Anxiety about children can be a set back to recovery. Both children and parents tell us that they worry that in later life the child will go on to develop the same illness as the parent.

How can community and day services help?

- Create a culture where it's ok for a parent to talk about their children and being a parent.
- This will make it easier for parents to confide in staff and other service users when they don't feel confident.
- Remember that every parent and carer has good and bad days with their children.
- When arranging activities, don't forget parents may need to drop the children off at school or childcare, and pick them up afterwards.
- This means thinking about start and finish times fitting in with childcare and school timetables.
- This is really important when organising women only sessions - because lots of women will have children at home and still need access to day services.
- Recognise that the same may apply to fathers.
- Make contact with nearby early years and play services - explore how it would be useful to work together.
- If relocation of day services into a community integrated building is possible, include childcare/play services as a potential partner.
- Make sure you've got the telephone numbers for Children's Information Services (CIS) handy. CIS will know where parents can get help with child-care and after-school services.
- Ask your organisation what they are doing to ensure that parents and their children have the same access to services and support as other service users.

"When I get older I worry that I will become ill like my mum."
(Telling it Like it is. Barnardos Action with Young Carers.)

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