

Think CHILD

Salford
Safeguarding
Children Partnership

Assessing the impact of parental mental health on the child - Practice Guidance

2023 (updated from 2020 guidance)



Introduction

This is brief guidance to support professionals when they are working with a parent or carer that experiences poor emotional and mental health along the mental health continuum.

When is completion of this tool / conversation guide required?

Where the mental health needs of a parent and carer are not known or understood, the appropriate professionals should be collaborating with other professionals (such as GP, 0-19 health service, mental health services) to develop a timely understanding, in line with the presenting impact on the child.

The tool can be used by any practitioner at any time when working with a family.

The completion of this tool is required when a professional is working with a parent or carer that experiences mental health difficulties. Recognising that there is likely to be some level of impact upon the child and that this should be explored with the parent. An identified parent / carer mental health need should be a trigger to exploration (Think **CHILD**). Recognising that mental health is on a continuum and can fluctuate. This tool should be used as a conversational framework.

Wherever possible, consideration should be given in how to support the parent / carer through this conversation. This should be done in collaboration with them and with the intention of support utilising the identified strengths, assets and networks that we are aware of. For example, if the parent has good support from a neighbour, consideration should be given to how they can support the discussion (can they be in attendance & support post conversation). We do not want to increase the mental health needs of the individual during the discussion.

What is the purpose of the Think CHILD tool?

The purpose of the Think **CHILD** tool is to stimulate family and professional curiosity regarding the child's lived experience. Parental mental health difficulties are not the sole focus of intervention. Think **CHILD** guide is a tool to help structure conversations with parents and carers; exploring the impact that parental emotional and mental health difficulties can have on the child; and establishing the level of support provided by family and friends.

The Think **CHILD** 'tool' is **not** to be used to assess mental health difficulties, but rather to assess impact of those difficulties upon the child.

Who should complete it?

Any practitioner working with children or adults.

Completion of the Think **CHILD** tool should achieve the following:

- A summary of the strengths and difficulties experienced by families, how this affects everyday life, and what the impact upon the child is.
 - Reassurance for families regarding the mental health continuum & that help can be offered
 - A collaborative & SMART action plan
 - Consideration of support networks
 - Consent to share information with other professionals
 - Consider threshold of need in relation to safety and wellbeing of the child/young person
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Think CHILD - A conversational framework

- **C**an you tell me the strengths and difficulties that you identify? (Systemic)
- **H**ow does this affect your everyday life?
- **I**mpact (Question if there is an impact on the child)
- **L**ook through the child's eyes, what do they see, think, and feel?
- **D**ecide together what would be helpful at this point (Not forgetting statutory duties)

Can you tell me the strengths and difficulties that you identify? (Systemic)

Encouraging the practitioner to have a holistic view. Recognising that there can be strengths and difficulties that present in the systems that wrap around a child. Take time to explore 'the good stuff' building upon hope and optimism. It promotes practitioner attempts to understand the sequences that take place allowing for discussion with regards to situations that can increase or decrease risks.

Some supportive questions may be:

- Describe how 'supported' you feel by others around you – your friends, family, or otherwise?
- Have you experienced a week or longer of lower-than-usual interest in activities that you usually enjoy?
- Is there someone else in your family who has a mental health difficulty or other problem that you are trying to manage?
- What makes things better/worse?
- Can you tell me about your hopes and dreams for the future? What feelings have you had recently about working towards those goals?

How does this affect your everyday life?

This allows the practitioner to explore specifics of a 'day in the life' with the parent. It can help the parent focus on what they may want to change and begin to build the motivation to do it. Additionally, it will assist to identify moments where risk or protective factors are more prevalent or allow a spotlight to be placed on opportunities to increase strengths / assets.

Conversational prompts:

- Talk me through a day when you're struggling
- Who is around to help you?
- Is there anything in particular that might lead to having a difficult day?
- Are there any moments of pressure?

- How do you know things are building up?
- What do you do when you are struggling? Is there anything that makes it better or worse?

Impact (Question if there is an impact on the child)

This section allows the practitioner to explore the impact of parental difficulties on the child's wellbeing. Any caring responsibilities of the child can be explored here. Time should be spent exploring what helpful strategies have been put in place and encouraging/supporting these. Sensitively identifying unmet needs (including basic needs/education/hobbies) for the child is vital here, with an accompanying plan of how to meet these using all support structures around the child.

Some questions may be required to establish facts if the family or child is not fully known to the practitioner.

- What are your child(ren) names / age(s)?
- Hobbies and interests?
- What school / nursery do they go to?
- Do you think they know about your emotional or mental health difficulties?
- Do you feel they are affected by your emotional or mental health difficulties? If so, in what way?

(Remember that parents and carers are important people in a child's life.

Children are likely to notice when things aren't okay but may silently worry rather than talk about how they feel)

- How does the environment affect them at difficult times?
- Do they help care for you or anyone in the family (cooking/cleaning/caring for younger children)?
- What age-appropriate strategies do you have as a family to help manage any impact on children? For example, reassurance or simple explanation. Children need to know it is not their fault or their responsibility to make a parent better. They need help to understand their parents' behaviours to make sense of things.
- What support structures are there around the children?
- Do they have any health needs? Do you as a family have any difficulties managing these?

Look through the child's eyes, what do they see, think and feel?

This section is to help the parents and practitioner empathise with the child's perspective. Caring responsibilities can be a source of pride and empowerment as well as difficulty for children. This section is an opportunity to explore what caring responsibilities feel like to the child. This section is a chance to think about how the child may want to be supported. The practitioner should also try to understand the voice of the child in an age-appropriate way, with feedback of this to the parent if needed.

Appreciative & compassionate enquiry is required to establish:

- How do you think they feel?
- What do you think their experiences are at difficult times?
- Do you talk to them about your mental health difficulties?
- Do they talk to you about how they feel regarding your mental health difficulties? How do you respond?
- Do they talk to people about what they are experiencing?
- Do they have any other trusted adults around them?

Decide together what would be helpful at this point

This is the point practitioners can reflect on the discussion and summarise key areas of strengths but also where additional support may be beneficial to address unmet or ongoing needs. The identification of needs should result in a collaborative plan where both the practitioner and the parent can set **SMART** goals with clear timescales for review and include key support networks. In some cases, this may include the child or young person so relevant support for young carers must be considered. Consideration of consent to share information with other professionals/agencies needs to be clearly discussed, agreed and recorded. It is important for the practitioner to remain non-judgmental and reassure that mental health difficulties can affect many people in various ways. However, it is vital to keep the **CHILD** at the central point of the discussions and as such the practitioner needs to consider the impact on the child in relation to safety and wellbeing and ensure safeguarding opportunities are not missed. Remember **thresholds of need** document to support in this decision.

The key points at this stage:

- Summarise & reflect on the previous discussion
- Reassure
- Develop a collaborative & SMART action plan
- What would make things easier? What would help?
- How do you think this can be achieved?
- Consider support networks
- Consider, discuss & record consent to share information with other professionals
- Consider threshold of need in relation to safety and wellbeing of the child/young person

Self-Evaluation

It is recognised that parents may need some time and space to reflect on the impact that their mental health has upon them and their children, or that they may not be able to verbalise their situation in a conversation. A self-evaluation prompt sheet has been developed to aid with regards to this (Appendix 1). The prompt sheet provides a continuum to measure impact whilst also recognising that parents may actually see some aspects of their mental health as strengths, protective or positive. The self-evaluation has free text boxes to enable a narrative. It may be appropriate for the self-evaluation sheet to be completed away from professionals and in a familiar environment. The parent may wish to get views of their family and people that they trust.

In addition, Appendix 3 directs to web-based resources that parents and carers can be signposted to. This offers non-judgmental supportive guidance on the impact that emotional and mental health difficulties can sometimes have on parenting and on children.

It is important however that if you feel that the child may be at risk of harm, ensure you follow safeguarding procedures, using your professional judgement. Do not allow the need to complete a self- evaluation or to signpost to resources, to override the need to protect the child.

Appendix 1 – Child Questionnaire

Can you say a little about the strengths & difficulties that you identify?

- a. There are many strengths
- b. There are some strengths
- c. There is a balance between strengths and difficulties
- d. There are some difficulties
- e. There are too many difficulties

Comment: _____

How does this affect your everyday life?

- a. It enhances my life
- b. It has no effect on my everyday life
- c. It has a minimal effect on my everyday life
- d. It has a moderate effect on my everyday life
- e. It affects my everyday life greatly

Comment: _____

Is there an impact on your Child(ren)

- a. It impacts my children positively
- b. There is no impact on my child(ren)
- c. There is a minimal impact on my child(ren)
- d. There is a
- e. Moderate impact on my child(ren)
- f. There is a significant impact on my child(ren)

Comment: _____

From your child(ren)'s perspective, what do you think they see, think, feel?

Comment: _____

What support would be helpful at this point?

- a. No support needed
- b. Support that is easily available in my community is needed
- c. Some extra support is needed
- d. A high level of support is needed
- e. A very high level or specialist support is needed

Comment: _____

Appendix 2

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Think CHILD

A conversational framework

- **C**an you tell me the strengths and difficulties that you identify?
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(Not forgetting statutory duties)

Appendix 3 - Helpful Resources

For support for children and young people who may have a caring role or identify as a young carer

[Young carers – Gaddum](#)

[Our Time – for children of parents with a mental illness](#)

For support and guidance for parents who may be struggling to support their child, or who may be worrying about the impact their emotional or mental health is having on their child, the following resources may be helpful

[Parental Mental Illness | Guide to Support | YoungMinds](#)

[Parenting and mental health | Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Parents and carers with mental health difficulties | Early Years in Mind | Anna Freud Centre](#)

[Children of parents with a mental illness – Our Time](#)

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