

Parental Mental Health

1. Background

Parental mental ill health is not in itself a child safeguarding concern, but without the right support a parent with poor mental health can sometimes struggle to look after their child. Local and [national case reviews](#) have identified that parental mental ill health is a significant factor in many safeguarding children incidents. Professionals from adult and children's services need to work together to safeguard children when there are signs that mental ill-health is impacting a parent's ability to care for a child.

2. Coping with challenges

Some parents experience mental health needs along with other challenges such as divorce, separation, unemployment, financial hardship, poor housing, lack of social support, discrimination, domestic abuse and substance misuse. Research has found that there is a greater risk to children's safety if parents with poor mental health are also experiencing domestic abuse or substance misuse. Some parents may need support to cope with daily routines such as housework, bedtimes, the school run and appointments, in order to ensure that the family thrive.

3. Impact on children

Parents coping with poor mental health and challenges may find it hard to:

- Regulate their emotions around children
- Recognise and respond to children's physical and emotional needs
- Engage socially with their children
- Set and maintain safe and appropriate boundaries and manage behaviour.

Without support, challenges may escalate and children may experience abuse and / or neglect.

4. Babies and younger children

If parents experience mental health needs in pregnancy or the first year of a baby's life, this can affect the way they are able to bond with and care for their child. This can have an impact on the child's intellectual, emotional, social and psychological development. Practitioners should be able to recognise if a new parent is struggling with mental health and access support.

5. Signs a child or young person might need support

- Being worried about their parent
- Taking on a caring role for parent or family
- Putting needs of family above their own
- Having negative feelings about parent's condition
- Feeling anxious, low in mood, isolated or being bullied
- Not being able to talk about worries with a parent or trusted adult

6. Barriers to seeking support

Parents may not realise they are struggling, or find it hard to speak out and ask for support if they experience cultural stigma, or feel shame, or:

- Are worried that sharing mental health concerns may make people think they are incapable of looking after their child
- Feel unable to talk about mental health because issues are minimised and not listened to
- Feel that they should be enjoying being a parent or being pregnant

7. Resources

[Parental Mental Health | Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

[SSCP Think Child Practice Guidance](#)

[SSCP Think Child YouTube briefing](#)

[Early Help for families in Salford](#)

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

[CVS MH Support](#)

[Mental health training and courses | Partners in Salford](#)

[Emotional Health Service Directory | Partners in Salford](#)

Additional Information

This 7MB was created using resources at nspcc.org.uk

Visit: <https://safeguardingchildren.salford.gov.uk/>

Email: SSCP@salford.gov.uk

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