

## Guide for Questions, Assessment, Review & Planning Considerations

### Early Childhood

For any child, but especially for children who are yet to commence school, the main thing to remember is to ask them how they are feeling about what is happening/has happened. Many conclusions about safety, growth and development will need to be based on observation of very young children or checking with caregivers (see examples below).

<b>Risk Area: Health and Safety</b>
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Failure to thrive, regression to immature behaviour for age and/or poor growth and development for age (eg lack of language development) and/or no sign of distress or protest when the young child is separated from the parent may indicate rejection, neglect or abuse. Some young children also become hyper-vigilant; watchful of their parents mood or behavioural changes.
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<b>Risk Area: Social Interaction</b>
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Check if the child has any opportunities to play and mix with others. Are there any barriers to attendance at playgroup, childcare etc.? (eg transport, cost, lack of parental motivation/energy to get them there, parental concern that seeking child care may be viewed as a sign of an inability to cope)
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# Primary School Children and Adolescents

Risk Area: Health and Safety		
Example Prompt Questions	Assessment	Plan & Review
<b>Do you ever feel unsafe/scared because of your parent's illness?</b> (If they have felt unsafe/scared in the past - do they have a plan for what to do if it happens again or to prevent it reoccurring?)	<b>If you have concerns about the safety</b> and well-being of a child/young person <b>contact your local child protection service.</b>	Work collaboratively with the child/young person and with their family and other agencies to <b>develop a safety plan</b> for any child/young person assessed to be at risk of neglect or maltreatment with regular monitoring with a nominated child protection case manager.
<b>Do you have people you could call upon to talk to or to help out if things get tough, apart from your parent/s?</b>	<b>Check if the child/young person has any 'significant adults'</b> who they can trust.	<b>Explore ways in which the child/young person could access supportive adults</b> or peers. <b>Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800</b> is accessible all hours - encourage children/young people to stay on the line - many give up if their call is not answered within 45 seconds.
<b>Are you worried about your own mental health?</b>	<b>Assess for any early warning signs</b> of mental health problems.	

Risk Area: Lack of Information		
Example Prompt Questions	Assessment	Plan & Review
<b>Do you know what sort of mental health problem/s your parent has?</b>  Can you describe your parent's mental health problem as you see it?  Do you think you might inherit or catch your parent's problem?	Check and <b>correct any misconceptions.</b>  Check with parent first for permission to discuss their illness in a simple way if the child/young person wants more specific information.	Whilst respecting the right to privacy of the person with the mental illness, <b>invite the child/young person to ask questions</b> about the impact of mental health problems or illness and associated treatments.  The <a href="#">Family Talk</a> booklet contains answers to questions commonly asked by children of parents with a mental illness. (Also available are listings of <a href="#">age appropriate literature</a> and ' <a href="#">cool sites</a> ').
<b>Do you know where you could get more information about mental health problems?</b>	Ascertain information needs and resources.	<b>Help the child/young person clarify questions they may like to ask</b> their parent's treating mental health professional/s and support their efforts to meet with these people if they wish to (given parental permission).
<b>CAUTION:</b> As the young person passes through different developmental stages remember to <b>re-check their information needs.</b>		

**Risk Area: Social Participation & Support**

Example Prompt Questions	Assessment	Plan & Review
<p><b>Do you sometimes feel like you're the only one who has a parent with a mental health problem?</b></p>	<p><b>Check for bullying/harassment or social isolation.</b></p>	<p>Reassure that many parents have mental health problems. Some states run programs for young people who have parents with a mental illness (<a href="#">Check for information about your state/territory</a>).</p>
<p><b>Do you worry about what might happen if your parent has to go to hospital or can't look after you (or your brother/s and sister/s) for some reason?</b></p>	<p><b>Check support needs</b> and if family have a plan in place for emergencies.</p>	<p>Suggest that the child/young person <b>participates in making a plan</b> for times when their parent may be unwell or hospitalised - see the '<b>Supporting Our Family</b>' kit for a downloadable example plan <a href="http://www.howstat.com/comic">http://www.howstat.com/comic</a>.</p>
<p><b>Do you have to do more around the house than other kids your age because your mum/dad isn't well sometimes?</b></p>	<p><b>Check care-giving burden</b> and social support needs.</p>	<p>Advise those who are providing care for their parents about <b>young carer support group/services</b> (Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre. Freecall: 1800 242 636).</p>
<p><b>Do you ever miss school because you are looking after your parent?</b></p>	<p><b>Check school attendance</b> and performance.</p>	<p>With parental permission, <b>suggest that the school be advised</b> of the general circumstances with a view to gaining support from the school. A sample letter to schools is downloadable from the COMIC website <a href="http://www.howstat.com/comic">http://www.howstat.com/comic</a>.</p>
<p><b>What sort of things do you do (apart from school)?</b> Do you have many friends?</p>	<p><b>Explore reasons for any lack of active participation with peers.</b></p>	<p><b>Explore ways in which the child/young person could access activities with others of their own age.</b> Respond to the reasons for any poor social participation.</p>