

Guide for Questions, Assessment, Review & Planning Considerations

Risk Area: Children's Health and Safety		
Example Prompt Questions	Assessment	Plan & Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are you managing as a family with your/your partner's mental health problems? • Does your/your partner's mental health problem, medication and/or treatment affect your ability to be the parent/s you want to be? In what way? • How are your children coping? • How are you coping? • Do you ever find it difficult to spend special time with your baby/children? 	<p>Ascertain any support needs and strengths the person may have in fulfilling their parenting role.</p> <p>Check growth and development of babies and young children (eg failure to thrive may indicate the parent is psychologically unavailable to the infant).</p>	<p>If you have concerns about the safety and well-being of a child/young person as a result of the parental mental health problem and/or of any treatment approaches contact your local child protection service.</p> <p>Work collaboratively with child protection services, the family and other agencies (including the school as required) to develop a safety plan for any child or young person assessed to be at risk of neglect or maltreatment. Consider referring the partner to a carer's support service (Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre Phone: 1800 242636). Affirm the parenting strengths of the person. Reassure them that parenting is always challenging.</p> <p>Work with family members and community service providers to support families to improve their capacity to support, protect and care for their child/ren if required. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • domestic support (eg Phone Commonwealth Carelink Centre for information about local services 1800 052222) • childcare or respite support (eg Phone Child Care Access Hotline 1800 670305) • parental support groups or skill development programmes • counselling to support the partnership of parents • referral to a social worker to access financial support. <p>Support parent-child attachment and early childhood development through advice or referral to maternal & child health services or early childhood centres.</p>
<p>What happens to your children if you are temporarily unable to care for them?</p>	<p>Check if a plan is in place for continuity of care for the children.</p>	<p>Assist the parents to plan whilst the parent is well for continuity of care for the child (see Resource Information for children 0-6 yrs for sample care plans).</p>
<p>Are you pregnant or planning to have a (another) baby?</p>	<p>Check needs regarding contraception or pregnancy.</p>	<p>Support people with a mental illness who intend to have children or are currently pregnant, to access early antenatal care and to prepare for the care and support of their infant/s. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revision of medications and their impact on pregnancy and/or breastfeeding • planning with the parent/s for temporary care of the infant should the parent become ill after childbirth (see Baby Care Plan) • strategies to assist the parent/s to gain appropriate supports prior to the baby's birth. <p>Support access to advice regarding family planning.</p> <p>Offer a copy of The Best For Me and My Baby booklet, developed for people with a mental illness.</p>

Risk Area: Lack of Information

Example Prompt Questions	Assessment	Plan & Review
Does your/your partner's mental health problem affect your/their parenting?	Check awareness of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • side effects of medication • co-morbidities • genetic factors 	Assist parents to access information about the possible implications of their mental illness, treatment and/or co-morbid factors (e.g. substance abuse) on their parenting.
How have you explained your/your partner's mental health problem to your children? Do your children have lots of questions about your/your partner's mental health problem?	Check for children's possible information needs.	Encourage the parent or caregiver to discuss the mental illness and its affect on the parent with the child. Encourage the family to seek further information through local mental health services, non-government agencies, mental health support organisations or the SANE website http://www.sane.org/
Have you been able to use any books written for children about mental health problems to help explain things or answer their questions?		Offer a copy of Family Talk , developed for families in which a parent of dependent children has a mental illness. Offer a list of books and resources suitable for different ages and/or assist them with words they might feel comfortable with e.g. 'mum's thinking gets muddled sometimes'.

Risk Area: Social Support

Example Prompt Questions	Assessment	Plan & Review
Do your children ever miss any school because of your mental health problem? (eg Do they arrive late if your medication slows you down? When you are in hospital, can they still attend their normal school?)	Check school absenteeism and school progress.	Where appropriate, encourage the parent to speak to the school or write a letter to them - see the 'Supporting Our Family' kit for a downloadable example letter for parents to write to the school http://www.howstat.com/comic
Do your children take on more responsibility than other children their age?	Check care-giving burden.	Children/young people who are providing care for their parents may gain support from programs for young carers (Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre, Freecall 1800 242 63). Discuss other ways in which practical and emotional support may be provided.
Do you and your children get out much? What's it like for your family in the school holidays?	Check social participation of family and individual members.	Support respite for the parent and/or children. In some states school holiday and weekend activities are conducted for young carers and/or for children of parents with a mental illness. Check programs and services in your state :
How often do you get to see your child/ren? (if parent separated from child)	Check for separation, grief and loss issues.	If the person with the mental illness is separated from their child/ren, explore possible grief and loss issues and refer for counselling as appropriate.