





Emerging Minds

National
Workforce
Centre for Child
Mental Health

Engaging Parents: An Introduction

-  Focused on supporting practitioners to actively and effectively engage with parents to understand their child's social and emotional wellbeing
-  Part one of two, *Engaging with Parents in Context* is coming soon.
-  Aimed at all professionals in the health and welfare sectors including frontline practitioners and senior practice leaders in both child and adult-focused services
-  90 - 120 minutes in length

What is this course about?

This course focuses on the practitioner-parent relationship as a foundational component of understanding children's social and emotional wellbeing. It is through this relationship that practitioners and parents can work together to explore challenges and issues that impact on children's wellbeing, including issues impacting on parenting.

Who would the course benefit?

The course is for practitioners working in the health and welfare sectors in both clinical and non-clinical roles. Both frontline practitioners and senior practice leaders would benefit from this course.

It is particularly designed for those employed in service settings where:

- parenting is not a routine focus of support or treatment (i.e. an adult-focused service)
- active partnership with parents and children's mental health are not a routine focus of support or treatment (i.e. a child-focused service)
- clients are parents in Parenting Support programs.

Why was this course developed?

Both this course and its companion *Engaging Parents in Context* are intended to support practitioners to actively and effectively engage with parents about their children's social and emotional wellbeing by strengthening practitioners' understanding of factors and circumstances that impact on parents' family and social relationships and their relational capabilities.

The introductory course focuses on providing important foundational rationale, space to reflect on the practitioner's current practice knowledge and outlines best practice principles in relation to parental engagement.

In the companion course practitioners put into practice what they've learnt in the introductory course through opportunities to explore more deeply the contextual factors that influence engagement with parents including their circumstances, family situations and the professional factors influencing collaboration with parents. Approaches and skills consistent with the principles covered in the introductory course are showcased.

How was this course developed?

This course was developed using current Australian and international research evidence about engagement, parental and professional factors impacting on this, and the role of the parent child relationship on children's mental health.

This research evidence was used to develop written content. Practitioner interviews helped to further shape and build a broad curriculum, now presented as dual introduction and companion courses. The now regular feature of an Actors Workshop process run by Artist Made was pivotal in the creation of the scenario of support.

Regular input, feedback and guidance was sought from practice leaders and people with intergenerational experiences of mental ill health (i.e. their parents and/or their children) which also helped to shape the course.

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What are the learning outcomes of this course?

The learning outcomes for this course relate to five areas:

- the importance of parental engagement to the social and emotional wellbeing of children
- the principles of effective parental engagement
- factors that affect the parent-practitioner relationship
- recognising opportunities and barriers to talking with parents and exploring their concerns
- the interdependent and intergenerational nature of family adversity impacting on children's mental health.

What is the learning theory informing the course?

This course is informed by the theory behind Kolb's learning cycle, which proposes that effective learning occurs through a four-stage cycle: reflective observation; abstract conceptualisation; active experimentation; and concrete experience.¹

How was evidence used to inform the course?

As with Building Blocks, the evidence base for this course reflects the three pillars of evidence-based practice: best research evidence, practice wisdom and client values and preferences.²

The research evidence informing the course was drawn from a range of authoritative sources. Staff from within the Workforce Development team developed the specific content, and this was then reviewed by experts and practitioners to ensure it aligned with prevailing practice wisdom and accurately reflected current best practice and evidence.

While this introductory course further utilises the narrative of a fictional family from earlier EM courses, the companion course provides a number of new fictional families from a diversity of contemporary Australian family circumstances and cultural backgrounds (i.e. client preferences and values).

What are the features of this course?

This introductory course consists of one module that learners should be able to complete within a 90 to 120-minute window.

¹ Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as a source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

² Centre for Community Child Health. *Evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence: What does it all mean?* (Policy Brief No. 21). Available at: https://ww2.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ecconnections/Policy_Brief_21_-_Evidence_based_practice_final_web.pdf

It includes features designed to engage adult learners including videos of experienced practitioners and service managers, researchers and parents with lived experience, a fictional family narrative and reflective exercises.

The introductory course features a fictional family we have met before in the *Child Mental Health* course – Haley and Lewis – who are first time parents to three-year-old Crystal.

A scenario of support in which Haley and her GP explore the cause of Crystal's persistent tummy pains and unhappiness was developed. Rather than feature in the course itself, the scenario of support will be developed into a specific resource to bridge the two courses and support CMHC's face-to-face learning events.

Ideally individual completion of the e-learning course followed by group learning using the scenario of support to facilitate shared discussion would be ideal.

Who are the practitioners who appear in the course and how were they chosen?

The core team developing both this and the Building Blocks courses, provided and asked for recommendations from other members of the consortium about practitioners with relevant knowledge and expertise. A list of potential interviewees was developed and prioritised (according to which practitioners were most suited to the task).

Featured practitioner bios

The following is a list of the backgrounds of some of the practitioners and parents who feature in this course.

Dr Penny Burns

Penny is a General Practitioner who has worked with children and their families in rural and urban communities for 30 years. She worked at Sydney Children's Hospital for several years as well as in paediatric departments in Cali, Colombia and Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Penny has worked with Professor Beverley Raphael as a committee member of the Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma Loss and Grief Network. She has worked with teachers and GPs supporting children following disasters.

Dr Melinda Goodyear

Melinda is employed as a Senior Implementation Specialist at the Parenting Research Centre. She is currently leading a randomised control trial of "Let's Talk About Children" for vulnerable families in mental health and family services across Victoria, in conjunction with Monash University. Melinda has

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over 15 years of experience working with policy-makers and practitioners to improve the practice of government and non-government services to address the intergenerational impacts of mental illness in families. Melinda has led a number of research projects investigating the needs of children, young people and parents from vulnerable families, and has particular expertise in sensitively facilitating the engagement of families, children and service providers in research and evaluation.

Michelle Hegarty

Michelle Hegarty is an Occupational Therapist working with the Eastern Health FaPMI Program (Families where Parents Have a Mental Illness). Michelle's background includes clinical mental health, health promotion and service development roles. With an interest in working with children and young people, Michelle completed her Masters of Primary Teaching and subsequently worked in school and community education for a period before returning to her passion for family mental health in 2017.

Dr Rochelle Hine

Dr Rochelle Hine is a mother, social worker, researcher and feminist and is currently the manager of the Warrnambool Adult Mental Health Service, in regional south west Victoria. Rochelle has over 20 years' experience working within mental health, foster care, education and health promotion sectors. In 2009 she completed a Master of Social Work undertaking research exploring the relationship between the media, self-image and mental health. Rochelle then worked as South West FaPMI (families where a parent has a mental illness) Coordinator at South West Healthcare for six years. In 2017 she completed a PhD, applying a gendered lens to view women's experiences around issues of identity and connectedness. The PhD study explored the relevance and fit of a personal recovery framework, to Australian mothers with mental illness who live in rural locations. Rochelle is dedicated to increasing knowledge and understanding of the issues faced by parents who have a mental illness, developing and implementing strategies to foster personal recovery and improve outcomes for children, parents and families.

Robyn Humphries

Robyn Humphries holds a Bachelor of Social Work and a Master of Business Leadership and has worked in public sector mental health services in Victoria for more than 40 years. Robyn is currently the Director Clinical Operations, Mental Health Program at Monash Health Dandenong Adult Program and Youth Mental Health. Prior to commencing at Monash Health in November 2018 Robyn worked in the Mental Health Branch, Department of Health and Human Services, and prior to that was Manager of the Northern Area Mental

Health Service for 12 years. Robyn has a long history of involvement in initiatives to improve responsiveness particularly of adult mental health services to families. These have included Family Consultation Sessions, Single Session Family Therapy within crisis response, Supported Playgroup, Parents and Children's Peer Support Programs, Multiple Family Groups, Carer Support Groups and the 'Let's Talk About Children' program.

Rachael Lovelock

Rachael Lovelock is a manager, advocate and family/carer leader who draws on her own lived experience and background in community development to lead, design and implement advocacy strategies, community and peer education programs at Wellways Australia. She advocates for platforms that ensure lived experience is heard, rights are upheld, and principles of co-production are at the heart of policy, quality systems and services provision. Rachael has experience in direct service, group facilitation, program coordination, training and project management and her work has contributed to policy development, service design and advocacy.

Dr Tim Moore

Dr Tim Moore is a developmental psychologist who heads a small Research and Policy Team at the Centre for Community Child Health with responsibility for monitoring, reviewing and synthesising research literature on a wide range of topics relating to child development, family functioning and service systems. A frequent speaker at conferences and seminars, Dr Moore is lead writer on many reports, conference papers and policy briefs; and develops training and resource packages for early childhood and family support services. He has also taken a leading role nationally in the development of policy and training in the early childhood intervention field. His work has had a significant impact on practice and policy in the early childhood intervention and early childhood fields both nationally and internationally.

Michael Naughton

Michael Naughton has worked with children and families for over 20 years. He has a BA in Sociology and a BA in Psychology. His master's degrees focused on family engagement in welfare services, and child and youth empowerment in Child Protection. He is currently in his final year of a PhD through Monash University investigating the Bidirectional Impact of Mental Illness in Families. Michael worked for a number of years in the UK before moving to a rural child mental health service in NZ. For the past eight years he has worked for Latrobe Regional Hospital in Gippsland with his current role being Clinical Specialist Children and Infants. Michael has trained in a wide range of

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therapeutic approaches including: Family Therapy; Solution Focused Brief Therapy; Strengths-based Therapy; Psychodrama; Narrative Therapy; CBT, Solihull and Motivational Interviewing techniques.

Sian Pietsch

Sian had experienced depression and anxiety over a 20-year period beginning when she was only 14 years of age. Several years ago, Sian's life finally fell on its feet and she felt determined to use her lived experience to aid, support and advise both consumers and other health care professionals. She is currently employed as a Peer Support Worker and Lived Experience Consultant within Eastern Health's Mental Health Program, developing a huge passion for improving Mental Health services for Families. Sian is a co-facilitator of 'Let's Talk' training and a participant in the CHAMPS review committee. Sian is forever seeking opportunities to challenge stigma and discrimination around trauma, Mental Health, Parenting and Addiction.

Dr Rhys Price-Robertson

Rhys is a Workforce Development Officer at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, where he works as part of the Emerging Minds: National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health. He has published original research on topics such as mental health, fathering, family life, child maltreatment and social theory. He also has over seven years' experience translating child and family welfare research into accessible resources for practice and policy audiences. His PhD, completed in 2018, focused on families in which the father experiences mental health difficulties.

Louise Salmon

Louise is a mental health advocate, drawing on her lived experience, with a focus on prevention, intergenerational and relational recovery, and hope. She has collaborated with the RACGP, AIFS, the COPMI National Initiative, and the Mental Health Australia National Register and is currently a community member on the RANZCP Community Collaboration Committee. Louise is also a clinical social worker with a Master of Applied Mental Health Studies (Child and Adolescent), employed in a senior role with the Family Law Courts of Australia, producing forensic child and family assessments. Mental health has long been part of Louise's psyche and a very important facet of her past, how she enjoys the present, how she sees the future. It impacts everything; how she relates to her children, and how she works. Louise's hope is that, by sharing her experience, she may assist in other's mental health journeys - private and professional - to the benefit of Australia's children.

Elena Schiena

Elena Schiena has been a Clinical Social Worker at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre for the past 12 years, with previous employment in Out of Home Care and Family Services. Elena currently works as Canteen-auspiced Parent Support Worker within the Psychosocial Oncology Program at Peter Mac. She has considerable expertise in working with families dealing with a cancer diagnosis to support and strengthen positive parent-child relationships and minimise adverse outcomes for children. Elena has conducted practice research into the needs of parents experiencing cancer - an article outlining these findings is currently in press.

Felicity Sloane

Felicity has worked as a Consumer Peer Support Worker within Victorian Public Mental Health services over recent years and contributed to a variety of initiatives supporting responsive approaches to parents with mental health issues.

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