Emerging Minds.

Practitioner guide: Connection and belonging resources

Emerging Minds' collection of connection and belonging resources has been created with families who have been through tough times: from poverty and homelessness to domestic violence and illness.

We hope the fact sheets in our Getting through tough times series have something to offer all families, but recognise they are simply a snapshot reflecting the lived experiences of the families who helped us create them – other families will have different experiences and stories.

We also intentionally create resources that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of *knowing, being and doing* with guidance from our National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultancy Group and partners.

For more information please see emergingminds.com.au/working-with-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples

What do we mean by connection and belonging?

Connections are the psychological, physical and financial supports accessible to a family through social ties to other individuals, groups and the larger community. By generating a sense of belonging connections can provide a buffer against adverse life events, foster resilience and overall health and wellbeing.[1]

Exploring obstacles

Instead of asking 'What's wrong in your family?', practitioners can instead consider reframing the question: 'What's getting in the way of living the way you might want to, and what might help?' This reframing shifts the focus from the family and children to reposition the constraints (what's getting in the way) as the issue. This makes it easier for everyone to talk about the issue without anyone feeling a sense of blame and shame.

By using this approach therapeutic work can become a collaboration between the practitioner and family to help family members identify and address the obstacles they are facing. Families can unite to problem solve together rather than being pitted against each other, because issues are no longer tied to their individual or family identities.[2,3]

Understanding structural barriers

Understanding structural barriers involves understanding the challenges facing families by examining the context and circumstances around the family that are obstacles to them living differently. You may like to read further information about structural competency, which calls for a new approach to the relationships among race, class, and problems faced by children and families.

How to use these resources

These resources and the following reflection questions have been created using an approach informed by collective narrative practice. The questions are designed to support you to use this resource in your work with families in a way that:

- explores what they already know, what skills they already have, and the values which inform their choices and actions

- is attentive to the structural barriers they're facing that can make change and preferred ways of living less available

- expands what might be possible for them through connecting with the stories and ideas shared by other families; and

- reduces experiences of isolation, blame and shame.

Reflective practice

We encourage you to think reflectively about your practice and propose asking the families you work with and yourself the following questions in using the connection and belonging resources.

> ### Note
>
> The stories in these resources are snapshots of the lived experiences of the families who helped us create them – other families will have different stories to share. We encourage you to adapt how you use these resources to ensure they are culturally relevant for the families you work with.

Reflection questions to ask families

– What stands out to you in this resource? Why did that stand out compared to other parts of the resource?

– Do you have stories linked to the stories in the resource? What skills or responses reminded you of your family?

– Is there anything you didn't like or had a strong reaction to?

– Is there anything you would like to explore in more detail?

– What might you do differently after reading the resource? What (if anything) might be more possible for you and/or your family?

– What would you add to this list of wisdom shared by other families? What are your ideas?

Reflection questions to ask yourself

– What do you know about what the family are up against, e.g. poverty, food/housing insecurity or transportation access? How can you respond to these barriers through collaborative practice or appropriate referral?

– What did reading this resource have you thinking about differently? In what way might your practice be shaped by the wisdom shared in this resource?

– If you found this resource useful, how might you share it with your team or organisation, or incorporate it into your practice?

– How can your team or organisation support all carers and parents in your community in their efforts to access meaningful connection in the face of structural barriers or other adversities, and in ways that don't create blame?

References

1. WHO Enhanced Well-being Team (2021). *Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021*. World Health Organization.

2. Madsen, W. (2007). *Collaborative therapy with multi-stressed families* (2nd ed.). Guilford.

3. Madsen, W., & Gillespie, K. (2014). *Collaborative helping: A strengths framework for home-based services*. Wiley.

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