

Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing in Children and
Young People: Making it Happen



Parents, Family and the Early Years

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Plan

- Background – why parenting matters
- Opportunities to improve mental health and wellbeing through parenting
 - Policy
 - Interventions/programmes

‘Parenting’

- Sensitivity and attunement
 - Attachment
- Parent child relationship quality
 - Hostility/rejection
 - Support/warmth
 - Empathy/respect/honesty
- Behaviour management
 - Positive discipline
 - Boundaries
 - Appropriate control
- Abuse and neglect

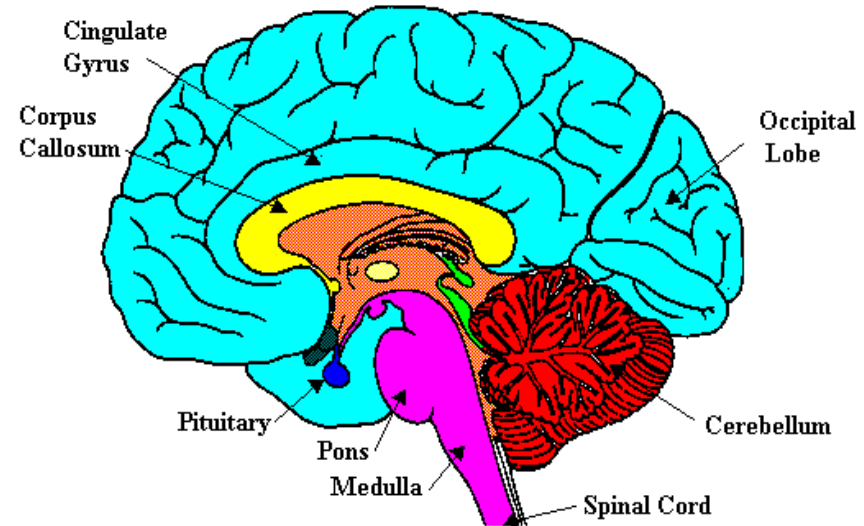


Why parents and families matter

- Attachment theory
- Neuroscience
- Epidemiological and sociological studies

Neuroscience

- Animal studies
 - Relationships and bel
 - Brain architecture
- Human studies
 - Development of mid brain
 - Stress response



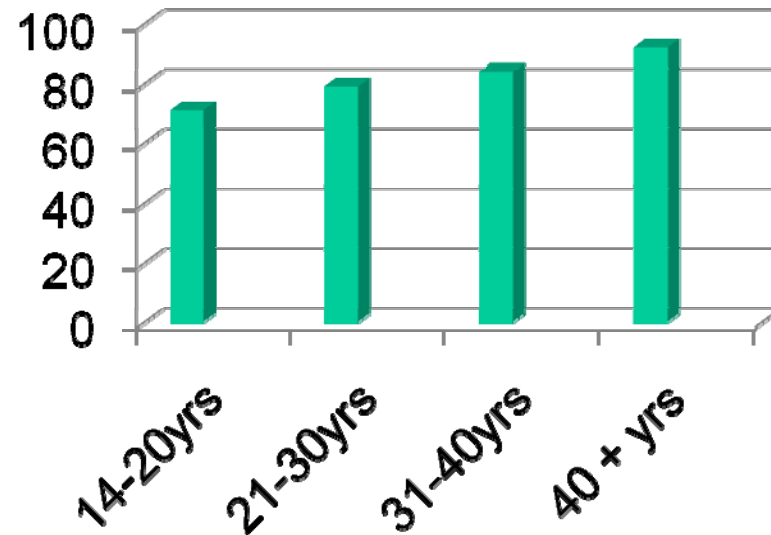
Epidemiological and Sociological studies

- Parenting as a predictor of health
 - Behaviour problems
 - Depression, anxiety
 - Personality disorder
 - Resilience
 - Physical health
- Parenting as a predictor of social and educational outcomes
 - School achievement
 - School drop out
 - Criminality, violence, delinquency

‘Parenting’

- Parental feelings of irritation, anger, hostility, powerlessness towards children are both
 - normal and
 - unhelpful for children
- Setting limits and boundaries, and consistently maintaining these are
 - Fundamental for children’s development
 - Do not require anger or force to maintain
- Children thrive on attention and approval

Prevalence of hostile/rejecting parenting



What influences parenting?

- **Risk Factors**

- Poverty, social exclusion
- Parental mental health, drug and alcohol misuse
- Family structure

- **Protective Factors**

- Relationships with others outside immediate family

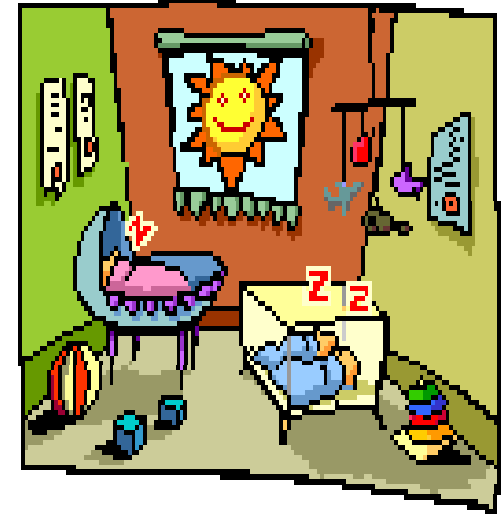


Policy arena

- Parental leave
 - mothers
 - fathers
- Benefits, taxation
- Supportive communities
- Physical Punishment
- Child care

Centre Based Day Care

- **High quality day care** improves cognitive and language skills – especially in deprived families
- High quality day care is rare
- **Long hours** in day care of **any quality** impairs emotional and social development
- Centre based day care raises cortisol levels in under 2's.



Interventions and Programmes

- A combination of both universal and targeted approaches to support for parenting is needed:
- Universal approaches are important because:
 - improvements in ‘normal’ parenting are necessary to promote mental wellbeing
 - they minimise stigma which influences uptake of targeted interventions
 - they enable identification of families at risk
- Targeted approaches are necessary to work on more intractable problems
 - Teenage parenting
 - Abusive parenting
 - Parenting in families with mental illness and drug and alcohol misuse

Parenting interventions need to adopt key principles

- Positive framework
- Staff development is critical to develop:-
 - Skills – non judgemental, strengths based, empathetic, respectful, genuine, group work skills, attention to process,
 - Realistic expectations
 - Personal wellbeing which is important for this work
 - This involves training/supervision
- Ecologically based

Unequivocally effective interventions exist to support parenting throughout childhood

– low cost universal:

- Skin to skin contact at birth
- Media based parenting programmes
- Perinatal programmes to Increase parental awareness of infant capabilities

– to more costly targeted programmes for high risk groups:

- Long term, home visiting and multicomponent programmes starting antenatally offering both support for parenting and support for parents
- Prevention and treatment of postnatal depression
- Parent-infant interaction guidance with video support
- Manualised group based and one to one parenting programmes addressing behaviour management and parent child relationships

Some evidence for many additional programmes

- Infant massage
- Universal group based parenting programmes
- Kangaroo care

- Parent infant psychotherapy
- Programmes for parents who are abusive, mentally ill or abuse drugs or alcohol

Summing Up

- Support for parenting especially early years is a very key component of mental health promotion
- Support for families (financial and social) is an essential backdrop to support for parenting
- There are many evidence based interventions to support parenting
- Potential gains extend beyond mental health
- More could be achieved with greater investment in research

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