

Parent / Carer Wellbeing and Resilience: Evidence Briefing

This briefing paper supports the 'Parent / carer wellbeing and resilience' section of the [Early Years Mental Health Improvement Framework](#) which has been developed by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. It demonstrates the importance of work that promotes parent / carer wellbeing and resilience by outlining available evidence on the impact on babies, young children, and their families. This includes impacting their learning and development, mental health, and risk of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

1. Introduction

Babies and young children are wholly dependent on their caregivers and the environment in which they are living. It is therefore important to consider the social determinants of health relating to the whole family, as well as the particular situation, challenges and physical and mental wellbeing experienced by care-givers.

If care-givers face several challenges (especially at the same time), it can be difficult to provide children with safe and loving care, particularly if care-givers are isolated or aren't getting the support they need.

2. Impact of parent/carer wellbeing and resilience

This section provides an overview of some of the key areas through which care-giver wellbeing and resilience can influence the capacity to provide care, and the impact it can have on babies and young children.

Coping with the routines and pressures of daily family life

Many care-givers with mental wellbeing concerns are able to manage their situation and minimise any negative impact on their children or family life. However, sometimes care-givers may need to be supported to strengthen nurturing family environments, address difficult life circumstances, build social support networks, and manage children's behaviour appropriately, especially if other challenges are present:

- Divorce or separation
- Unemployment
- Financial hardship
- Poor housing
- Discrimination
- Domestic abuse
- Lack of social support
- Substance misuse
- Experience of trauma.^{1,2}

Some care-givers may benefit from support to organise and sustain everyday domestic tasks and family routines (e.g. housework, mealtimes, bedtimes, taking

children to school, medical and dental appointments) which strengthen family relationships. If care-givers don't get the support they need from family, friends, neighbours and / or family support services, these challenges may escalate and they may find it more difficult to:

- Control their mood and emotions around their children
- Recognise and respond to children's physical and emotional needs
- Engage socially with their children
- Set and maintain safe and appropriate boundaries and manage their children's behaviour
- Plan tasks and activities in advance²

Good quality family support programmes and services for care-givers should adhere to the following guiding principles:

- Non-judgemental, inclusive and flexible
- Able to build and maintain relationships with families
- Families feel safe and listened to
- Identifies family strengths and assets
- Enables families to manage their own lives, finances and plan for their future³

Child learning and development

Both maternal and paternal mental wellbeing is strongly associated with child development outcomes. Bonding with babies can be more difficult for care-givers experiencing depression and anxiety; depression affects 12-13% of women during pregnancy, and 15-20% / 8% of mothers / fathers respectively in first year after childbirth.^{4,5} Care-givers experiencing depression are less likely to play with their babies, make eye contact or speak in an engaging voice; as a result, babies may become anxious and fearful. In addition, depressed care-givers may see themselves as inferior, inadequate and less competent than non-depressed peers.⁶

Child development is strongly shaped by the interactions children have with care-givers. It takes energy and patience to care for babies, toddlers and young children, but care-givers experiencing challenging situations (e.g. mental health concerns, stress related to money worries) may have impaired ability to be attentive and responsive to their children and are more likely to feel drained, irritable, and frustrated during interactions.^{6,7} Inconsistent and / or lower quality engagement and stimulation may result in children finding it more difficult to regulate mood and behaviour, cooperate with requests, master problem-solving skills and develop language.

Mental wellbeing of children

Various elements of family life (below) are important to supporting children's mental wellbeing and resilience but these may be undermined if care-givers experience health and wellbeing challenges:

- Clear and open communication between care-givers and children

- Family bonds – emotionally close relationships within the family
- Spending time together with joint activities (e.g. play, reading and family routines)
- Family involvement and connection with wider community and social networks
- Adaptability – family’s capacity to meet obstacles, be flexible and change course if necessary
- Positive ways to solve problems and manage conflict between family members. ¹

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