

Mental Health & Children's Services Project Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family

Background

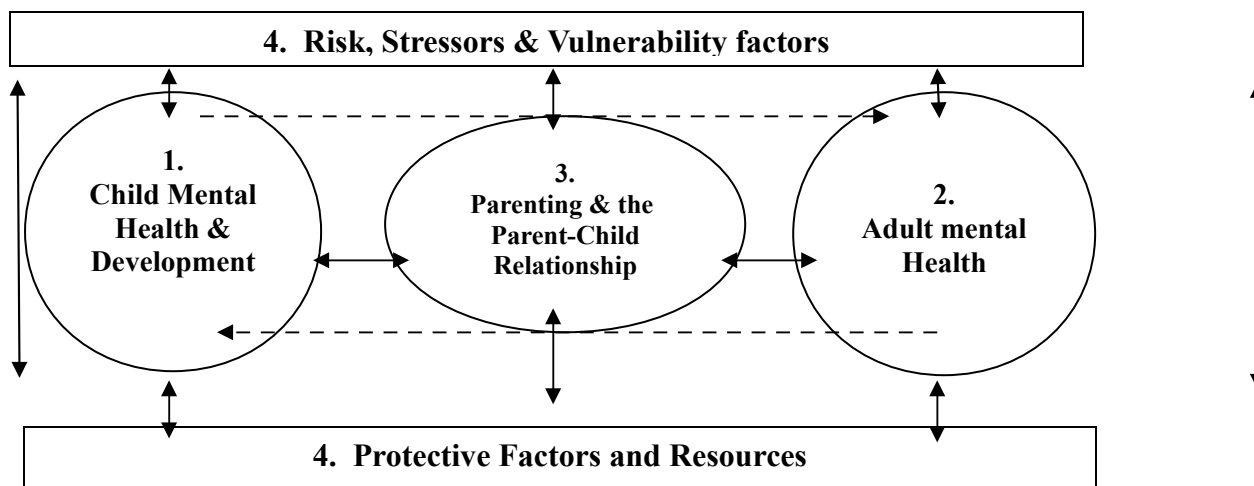
In Northern Ireland there have been a number of cases where children have been seriously injured or died and inquires into the circumstances surrounding these cases identified parental mental health and deficits in communication and joint working between professionals and agencies as contributing factors.

More recently the deaths of Madeline and Lauren O'Neill and subsequent McEihill inquiry brought into focus again, deficits in working relationship between mental health services and children's services, suggesting that the way in which these services work together needs to improve.

It is clearly recognised that many parents with a mental health illness, parent their children very well. However there are occasions when some parents with mental health illness will need additional support to care for their children. Meeting the needs of these parents, and their children, by promoting the capacity of the adult to parent is a complex task. It is expected that in the large majority of cases the task is to treat or manage the illness, strengthen parenting capacity, and build resilience in children, through a variety of supports including the involvement of the wider family circle. The safety of the child however, cannot become secondary to the treatment/management needs of the parent or carer.

The DHSSPS has funded two project managers to lead the "Mental Health and Children's Services project" for a 3 year period initially. The vision of the project is to improve the outcomes for parents with mental health illness and their children by establishing a '**Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family**' approach (figure 1) to planning and delivery of services. The project aims to enhance collaborative working and better understanding of multi-disciplinary roles and responsibilities of all staff working across this interface.

Figure 1.



The Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE), in consultation with National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE); are presently leading on a national initiative, also aimed at making improvements in the provision of services, when 'Working with parents with mental health illness and their children'. Northern Ireland has joined this national initiative as a regional, sixth pilot site. SCIE have published guidance on working with parents with mental health problems and their children to assist staff. The guidance identifies what needs to change and makes recommendations to

improve service planning and delivery, and ultimately to improve outcomes for these families.

<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide30/index.asp>

Project Approach

The structure of the project is outlined at (Fig 2). The Project Board has been established and membership is multi-agency adult and children's representation from senior level within statutory, voluntary and service users and carers. The Project Board will provide overall direction and guidance and have responsibility to influence and engage with their own organisations and beyond to ensure the change of culture to our thinking and practice encompass the Think Family model.

The Project Locality Teams (PLT's) have been established and the Chairs are as follows;

Belfast Project Locality Team Chair - Ms Elizabeth Bannon, Co Director Maternity Services

Southern Project Locality Team Chair – Ian Sutherland, assist Director Mental Health Services

South Eastern Project Locality Team Chair – Don Bradley, Assistant Director Mental Health Services

Western Project Locality Team Chair - Bernard McAnaney, Assistant Director Mental Health Services

Northern Project Locality Team Chair – David Gilliland, Assistant Director CAMHS

The project locality teams will explore current practices relating to;

- Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing
- Signposting and referral
- Assessment/Treatment/Interventions
- Family Supports
- Training

The teams will be using the SCIE guidance to make recommendations regarding service planning and delivery, standards of practice, communication and training, adding value to, and disseminating current models of good practice.

Communication will be key to the success of the project, ensuring all relevant stakeholders are informed and involved. Regular updates on the HSCB, Trust, and GP intranet will provide updates and progress of the project.

If you have any comments, wish to become involved or wish to discuss further, please contact Mary Donaghy and Judith Lees on 028 9055 3958 or at mary.donaghy@hscni.net / Judith.lees@hscni.net

Figure 2
Mental Health & Children's Services Project
(Think Child, think Parent, Think Family)
Structure

