

1 in 4 adults in England will be affected by a mental health difficulty at some point in their lives. People's lives are changeable and affected by many factors, therefore their capacity to parent safely may also be variable. An understanding of the factors which may increase need and risk is an important part of any assessment.

What affects our mental health?

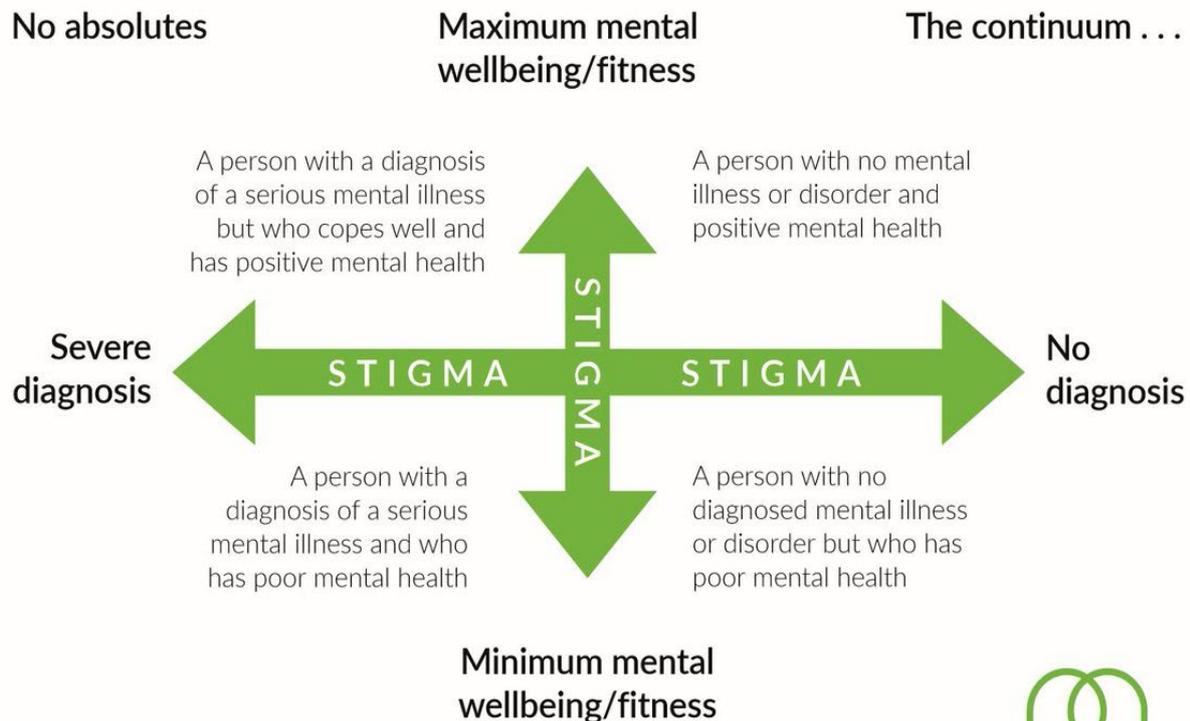
Upbringing and environment, life experiences and genes

The challenges that we may face throughout our lives often include;

- Personal life and relationships
- Money, work and housing
- Life changes
- Health issues
- Traumatic life events

Some of us are more deeply affected by events than others, and how we deal with things can also depend upon how well other parts of our life are going or well supported we feel

(www.nhs.uk)



Be curious

Living with parental mental health needs doesn't automatically mean a parent/carer is unable to safeguard their children from serious harm, furthermore, adequate support can reduce the risk of children experiencing long-term negative effects.

When poor mental health sits alongside other issues like substance use or domestic abuse the risk is likely to increase. A key message that has emerged from serious case reviews is that practitioners



need to gather and analyse more information; they "must be encouraged to be curious, and to think critically and systematically" to understand how the difficulties affecting families interact (Brandon et al, 2008 p98)

Key questions to explore?

A good assessment of the parental needs and impact upon the child needs to take place, this should be supportive, curious, and with empathy. Consider the parenting ability, their strengths and the child's development needs. Key questions should include;

- Does the child take on roles and responsibilities that are inappropriate for their age? Do they need to be assessed as a young carer?
- Does the parent/carer meet their own and their child's physical and emotional needs?
- Is there stability and structure/routine in the home? i.e meal times, routines, bedtimes?
- Does the parent/carer's mental health impact upon the child attending nurse, school or health appointments etc?
- Is the parent able to keep the child kept safe? Have you noticed any accidental injuries? (research suggests this is more common for babies under 12 month olds)
- Does the parent/carer recognise how their own mental health and emotions impacts on the child i.e. availability, attachment/rejection, aggression, agitation?
- Can they manage their own emotions in a healthy way that doesn't hurt themselves or others?
- Are there repeated incidents of hospitalisation for the parent/carer or other occasions of separation from the child?
- Is the child included within any delusions of the parent/ carer, are they involved in the parents obsessional compulsive behaviour, or are they witnessing any disturbing behaviour?
- Does the wider family understand the mental health need of the parent/carer, and the impact of this on the parent/ carer's ability to meet the child's needs?
- Is the wider family able and willing to support the family so that the child's needs are met?
- Is the parent pregnant? Consider if they have experienced previous mental health needs? An unborn can be effected by their parent's mental health.

Protection and Escalation

- Where it is believed that a child of a parent with mental health needs may have suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm, a contact to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- Please see the contacts page on this toolkit for information on how to refer a concern.
- It is essential that staff working in adult services and children's services work together collaboratively to ensure the safety of the child and to provide effective support to the parent/carer to meet their mental health need.
- Children's social care must assess the individual needs of each child and within this incorporate information provided by mental health workers.

For further information:

HIPS Family Approach Toolkit - <https://www.hampshirescp.org.uk/toolkits/adopting-a-family-approach-joint-toolkit/adopting-a-family-approach-joint-toolkit-landing-page/>

HIPS guide on Children of Parents with Mental Health Problems - <https://hipsprocedures.org.uk/hkyysl/parents-who-have-additional-needs/children-of-parents-with-mental-health-problems/#s3791>