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## Parents instrumental in child mental health treatment

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Awareness of mental health issues among children is growing, with increasing numbers of children seeking treatment for a variety of conditions.

But when it comes to treating children, it's important for mental health professionals to foster relationships with their patients' parents, in order to facilitate long term healing.

"When children seek and require psychosocial treatment, it's beneficial to bear in mind it's a family system and not a child alone that's being treated," says [Psychotherapist, Julie Sweet](#).



"Parents having identified an area of concern, whereby their children are involved, can begin open and transparent communication with their child.

"Dependant on the child's age, once identified, parents can start the process of seeking support through mental health services and family therapy, as well as therapeutic intervention for the child."



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According to Ms Sweet, parents play an instrumental role in the success of their children's mental health treatment.

"If defensiveness, guilt and fear can possibly be suspended by parents, and instead replaced with openness, emotional agility, empathy and compassion, outcomes can greatly vary."

Ms Sweet says we do better when we know better, so parents educating themselves and utilising resources not only enables improved skill sets to develop, it provides children with the best care and treatment.

"Parents are encouraged to ask for help, lean in to their supports and broadened their network in gaining mental health assistance.



are as I am, a psychotherapist, or perhaps they may be a clinical psychologist, or a family therapist, it will be the mental health service that will advise parents as to their best practice.

“Often clinicians meet with parents, separately to the child and gather information, then with a clear care plan established between clinician and parents, the therapeutic process may commence with the child directly.

“Again services function differently and other child focused services may meet with the child solely when the process commences and once rapport, trust and a therapeutic alliance is formed between the therapist and child, parents may later be included in the process.”

“It’s in the best interest of the family that they engage with a service they feel comfortable with the treatment plan.”

Ms Sweet says while each therapist will need to make their own decision, it’s in everyone’s best interest to make an effort to establish rapport with all parties.

“My therapeutic practice is for the individual so in this case I’d work directly with the parents, separately.

“Referrals and additional services may need to also be used collaboratively which I’d incorporate in my work with the parent, such as couples therapy, mental health services specifically for children, specialised trauma informed clinicians, drug and alcohol support services and other crisis centres and mental health support.”

When it comes to confidentiality, rules depend on the child’s age, and whether or not there is risk of harm to self or others, however overall confidentiality laws do apply to minors.

Regardless, parents need to have an inane understanding of the process, and be willing to be transparent with treating therapists.

But Ms Sweet says while parent response does have an impact, it’s natural for parents to present with feelings of angst, angry, uncertainty, fear, confusion, overwhelm and anxiety.

“Parents often do the very best they can with the tools they use, so if parents can be guided, supported, seek treatment without stigma and do so safely with a road map, they are in a better position to make an informed decision to their child’s treatment.

“If parents are provided with a treatment plan they feel they can adapt to or implement, it’s going to be more viable, not only for them yet their child as well.

Ms Sweet says therapists need to be mindful of their patients’ parents and consider offering therapeutic services to them too, should they identify any worrying signs.

“Sometimes people forget to ask, who is caring for the carer?”

“Therapists can offer parents wrap around holistic support, and refer further support services to the family system so their needs are met.

“They can help parents learn more about the brain, trauma, emotional intelligence, behavioural change and a new way to function.

“So much can be achieved if the family is willing to support the child, seek help and accept support.”

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