

# Children of parents with mental health problems



## Introduction

The term 'mental health problem' in itself does not have a singular, clear definition, and, therefore, the existence of mental health problems should not be taken as a risk factor without contextual information. The state of a parent/carers mental health can vary according to several factors; accordingly, this can impact on their capacity to parent safely. Not all children who are cared for by a parent who has a mental health problem will experience difficulties or be at risk of harm, however an understanding of the risk factors and the need to 'Think Family' is vital when carrying out any form of assessment.

## Where can I find additional information?

- [WM Child Protection Procedures – 2.12 Children of parents with mental health problems](#)
- [Early Help in Warwickshire](#)
- [Warwickshire's Think Family Protocol](#)
- [Mental Health Support Services in Warwickshire](#)

## Why is it important?

Periods of poor mental health might affect the parent's ability to think, feel and react in ways that people need and want to live their lives, and the challenges of daily life can feel difficult, or even impossible to cope with. In some cases, mental ill health may prevent a parent from offering consistent care to their child or unable to prioritise their needs.

## What can I do?

If there are concerns, speak to the parents GP or mental health professional to see if extra support can be arranged. At an early stage the child and family may find Early Help services supportive and an Early Help Assessment should take place. If you are concerned that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm, contact the [Children & Families Integrated Front Door](#).

## What are the indicators?

The following are indicators that a parent's mental health may be impacting on their ability to parent\*:

- A child taking on inappropriate roles and responsibilities within the home.
- Neglect of their own and the child's emotional and physical needs. Missing appointments and school.
- Chaotic structures with regard to meal and bedtimes etc.

## What else should I consider?

Parents with poor mental health may also be experiencing other issues such as substance misuse and domestic abuse. The 'multiplicative' impact of combinations of factors have been found to increase the risk of harm to children. Professionals need to be mindful of how these issues interlink and assess the impact of the issues both together and separately to ensure the interventions put in place are as effective as possible in promoting the safety and wellbeing of all members of a household.

## When could a child be at risk?

A child can be at risk of suffering emotional and physical harm due to parental mental ill health when they are\*:

- [Neglected](#) physically and/or emotionally by an unwell parent or becomes a target for parental aggression or rejection.
- Involved in his/her parent's compulsive behaviours or delusions.
- Witness disturbing behaviour arising from the mental illness.

\* This is not an exhaustive list. For more indicators and risks, please review 2.12 Children of Parents with Mental Health Problems of the WM Child Protection Procedures in box 7