



MODULE 1

Overview: Experiencing Mental Health Challenges While Parenting Young Children

**best start
meilleur départ**

by/par health **nexus** santé

When Mental Illness Becomes Part of the Family

“In 2004 my family suffered tremendously at the hands of my depression and anxiety disorder. It consumed our life. Thankfully we were surrounded for the most part by caring, accepting and giving human beings... Imagine feeling that you are in a deep dark pit, and the dirt is falling down around you.... You can't stop crying as you fear you are lost forever and no one will find you. Isolated with no hope you feel that there is no way out. THAT is a very short synopsis of what I experienced and felt like.”

Comment from a parent affected by mental health challenges

Service Provider Survey Themes

- Not knowing enough about mental illness, in particular concurrent disorders.
- Feeling overwhelmed by needs of parents and children.
- Experiencing frustration with clients who are reluctant to access or follow-up with treatment.
- Lack of resources for mental health referrals.
- Difficulty in communicating with other health care providers.

Module Goals

Education about mental health challenges to assist service providers in:

- Understanding and mitigating the impact on families
- Facilitating professional help and a circle of support.
- Caring for oneself in a compassionate role

Module Content

- Education for Service Providers
- Mitigating the Impact of Mental Health Challenges on the Family
- Understanding the Healing Relationship
- Facilitating Professional Help
- Helping to Create a Circle of Support for Families
- Caring for Oneself in a Compassionate Role

Mental Health Challenges

- Postpartum depression or anxiety
- Prenatal depression or anxiety
- Other mental health disorders or symptoms occurring during the perinatal period or while parenting young children
- Chronic or acute mental illness
- Symptoms of a mental health challenge while experiencing a concurrent mental illness

Education for Service Providers

- Each year, up to 1 in 10 Canadians, 25 – 44 years old, suffer from anxiety, depression, or substance use.
- 20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.
- Occurrence of anxiety and/or depression during prenatal and postpartum periods for mothers and fathers can be higher than in the general population (about to 1 in 5).

Education for Service Providers

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) – Mental Health and Addiction 101
 - 16 self-directed tutorials including:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Bipolar Disorder
 - Personality Disorders
 - Addictions
 - Psychoses & Schizophrenia

Case Example



“Tami” is a married mother of a three year-old. She seems really anxious when you first meet her; she smiles nervously, and fiddles with her fingers frequently as you chat. She lets on that she was really nervous about your visit today; that she has always

been shy and a “worry wart” since she was little. She also tells you that she has had a history of anxiety. You sense that she is sensitive to criticism. When asked, she relays symptoms that sound like anxiety attacks, and she has much more worry than usual about something awful happening to her child.

Impact of Parent's Mental Health Challenge on The Family

Feeling:

- Overwhelmed
- Frightened
- Isolated
- Confused

Challenged by:

- How and where to find help
- Lack of compassion
- Long wait times
- Stigma and discrimination
- Disruption of household and family routines

Understanding The Healing Relationship

- Service providers are important supports
- Opportunity for discussing health and family concerns
- Empathic listening can reduce a client's reluctance to share concerns

Key Messages for a Healing Relationship

- Go slow
- Remain non-judgmental
- Ask for permission about asking questions and providing information
- Offer hope
- Provide access to information and support
- Include clients and their families/supports in decision making

Some Reasons for Not Seeking Professional Help

- Struggle with their experience and not acknowledge they need help.
- Find speaking about mental health not acceptable within their family or culture.
- Fear being judged a bad parent.
- Fear that child protection services may take their children from them.
- Be afraid they may fall apart and never recover.
- Be too sick to ask for help.
- Think there are no services available.
- Not speak or understand English or French.

Facilitating Professional Help

– *E.g.:* “Would you like to hear about some possible next steps?”

Question for reflection:

What could those steps look like?

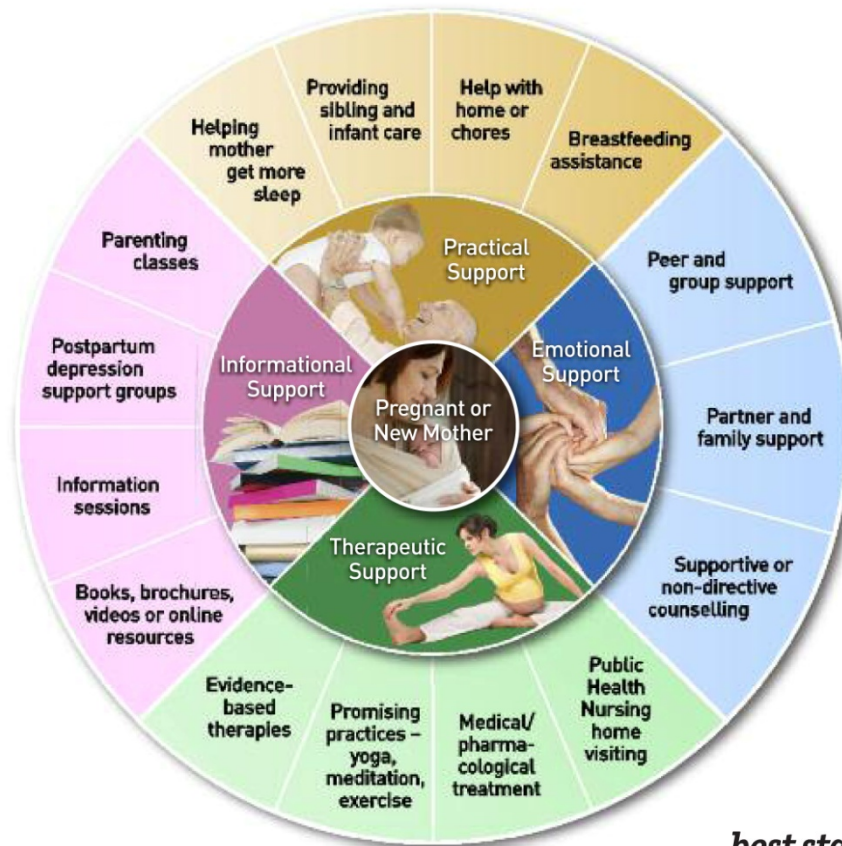
Key Messages for Facilitating Professional Help

- Create a safe environment for discussion
- Communicate with respect
- Offer hope for recovery
- Provide access to information and support
- Include clients and their families/supports in decision making

Helping to Create a Circle of Support for Families

- Practical help
- Information for the client and the family
- Social and emotional support
- Professional support

Creating a Circle of Support



*best start
meilleur départ*

Care of Oneself in a Compassionate Role

- Organizational supports
 - Program
 - Supervisor
 - Peers
- Apply self-care strategies
 - Eat well
 - Stay active
 - Do things you enjoy
 - Take time for yourself
 - Connect with others and build relationships

Resources

- Education for Families
 - Learning about Your Family Member's Illness
 - Coping Tips (Family, Children & Teens)
 - Supporting Recovery
- Other Resources
 - Telephone & Online Support
 - Service Providers

Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre Health Nexus

www.beststart.org and www.healthnexus.ca

This ready-to-use workshop has been prepared with funds provided by the Government of Ontario. The information herein reflects the views of the authors and is not officially endorsed by the Government of Ontario. The resources and programs cited throughout the workshop are not necessarily endorsed by the Best Start Resource Centre or the Government of Ontario.

December 2012