



## Considering the welfare of children whose parents have mental health needs (Practice guidance for adult mental health practitioners)

### Principles:

- Children whose parents have severe and/or on-going mental health needs will usually be children in need in their own right. As part of the assessment of an adult with mental health problems practitioners need to consider how the adult's illness impacts on their children or those children with whom they have regular contact.
- By law, "the welfare of the child is paramount" – this means that children's needs always override those of the adult and that the welfare principle enshrined in the Children Act 1989 takes precedence over the Mental Health Act 1983 in all events.

### ASSESSMENT STAGE

#### Adult practitioners will consider

- ❖ Who is in the family? (include age, gender, full names of dependent children)
- ❖ Does the child have special needs?
- ❖ Does the client have parental responsibility?
- ❖ What symptoms and behaviours does the adult exhibit and what may the impact of these be on children when acute/when chronic?
- ❖ What other adults are involved in parenting?
- ❖ Is the client pregnant?
- ❖ Is the family known to children's services (CAMHS or Social Services)? if so what current involvement is there?
- ❖ Are there any previous or current concerns and do these relate specifically to mental illness in the parent?
- ❖ Does the client have insight and willingness to accept support / services?
- ❖ Discuss with the client the availability of support for their parenting role from family or other services e.g. health visitor, CAMHS, Social Services, Parental Mental Health Service

#### If other children's services are involved

- ❖ Discuss with the client inviting key staff from other services to CPA meetings e.g. CAMHS, Health Visitors, children and families social workers
- ❖ Discuss with the client liaison/communication with those professionals outside of the CPA process.

### WHAT TO DO

#### If you have no concerns for the child/ren

- ❖ Record
- ❖ Include parental issues in care plan at every review

#### If you have minor concerns for the child/ren which are not shared by the adult client, incl. pregnancy

- ❖ Discuss with a senior colleague or line manager and agree plan
- ❖ Informal discussion with Children and Families or Parental Mental Health Service to decide whether referral is indicated and level of urgency
- ❖ If appropriate, discuss again with client
- ❖ If concerns are shared by others consider referring without client's agreement.
- ❖ In most instances, the client should be informed of the referral even if it is not with their consent

#### If you have major concerns about the welfare and safety of the child/ren

- ❖ Discuss with manager/supervisor
- ❖ Seek advice from the Trust-named nurse or doctor in Child Protection if you are not sure
- ❖ Refer to children & families team
- ❖ Agree with children and families team when and how to inform client that referral has been made

### FOR ADULTS IN CRISIS

#### If the adult is admitted

- ❖ Consider how the impact on children can be minimised e.g. agree how contact can be maintained, what support and information the other carer and children need; who will explain the situation to the children and how
- ❖ Discuss with Children and Families Social Services as early as possible when it has been identified that admission may be required.
- ❖ Ensure written information on the children and arrangements for their care is passed to ward staff and there is ongoing communication between all professionals and services involved
- ❖ Refer to the Trust policy on children's visiting to inpatient areas, if relevant
- ❖ As part of discharge planning, ensure support for the parenting role is included

#### If the parent is being looked after at home

- ❖ If the child remains at home, it must be remembered that **the welfare of the child is paramount.**
- ❖ Ensure there is ongoing communication between all professionals and services involved
- ❖ As part of discharge planning, ensure support for the parenting role is included
- ❖ The safety and welfare of the child should be kept under constant review, **and consideration should be given to involving specialist child care services**