

Project Air Strategy Parenting Program – Overview



Parents with a mental illness deserve our support, particularly those struggling with personality disorder who can also suffer considerable stigma. The NHMRC clinical practice guideline for the management of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) (2012) states "People with BPD who have infants or young children should be provided with interventions designed to support parenting skills and attachment relationships" (recommendation 62). Significant to this project is the NHMRC guideline statement "Having BPD does not mean a person cannot be a good parent" (p.3).

Project Air Strategy Parenting Program is designed to provide a brief parenting intervention for mental health workers to assist people with BPD to strengthen and enhance their parenting skills and is a collaboration between Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, MH- Children and Young People, Local Health Districts and Community (families, carers and consumers) to contribute to improving wellbeing of people with personality disorders and their families, in line with the Children of Parents with Mental Illness (COPMI) framework.

The prevalence of parental mental illness in Australia is estimated to be 21 – 23%. For children of parents with a mental illness, their risk of also experiencing mental health difficulties has been found to be as high as 41% to 77%. Addressing parenting difficulties within the context of the mental illness can improve mental health functioning, reduce family stress and increase competence and fulfilment from the parenting role. This in turn not only improves outcomes for clients, but is an essential component in providing care and protection for children and young people.

Personality disorder or significant traits impacts on the capacity to effectively parent, due to core features of personality disorder such as impaired sense of self and impaired capacity to relate to others. Intervention programs for parents and caregivers with mood, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders have been shown to be helpful, however, interventions for personality disorder have yet to be developed. To develop such a program was the impetus for this project. A need was identified to support adult mental health clinicians to enhance the parenting capacity of adult consumers with a personality disorder. As a result Project Air Strategy has developed a suite of evidence-based resources and training for NSW health professionals working with people with personality disorder.

The following resources are available at the Project Air Strategy website www.projectairstrategy.org:

- Parenting with Personality Disorder Intervention Manual
- Parenting with Personality Disorder training film resource
- 3 help sheets- Family Crisis Care Plan; Keeping on Track: Goals for Parents; Identifying Relationship Patterns
- 9 fact sheets- Parenting with Personality Disorder; How does Personality Disorder Impact on Parenting?; Talking to Children about Personality Disorder; Creating Safety: Setting Limits with Children; Connecting with Children at Different Ages; Strengthening Attachment: For Parents and Caregivers; Mindful Parenting during Child Play Time; Understanding and Responding to Children's Feelings; What Else can I Read?

"The tools are great and the structure {outlined in the manual} is achievable in an acute setting."

"I found the video excellent in highlighting issues for parents with BPD. Could see this as a very useful tool."

"Confidence in knowing evidence based practice and that I am able to do it – i.e. the basic principles are relatively straight forward."

"It was helpful to consider children and that their safety is core... Even with difficult clients I feel more confident to approach it."

"It was helpful to see things from the perspective of a parent with personality disorder, and I feel more equipped to talk to parents about how their behaviour affects their children."

In May 2015, six face-to-face training workshops were provided to NSW Health staff working with parents with personality disorder. This training focused on prevalent issues for parents with personality disorder and clinical skills for working with people with personality disorder on their parenting. Training was held in Orange, Coffs Harbour, Sydney and Canberra. A total of 170 Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol and Justice Health staff members attended. Staff feedback indicated that 100% would recommend the training to a colleague. In regards to working with people with personality disorder, 95% found the training helpful in improving treatment, 85% of the staff found the training useful in improving their knowledge, and 88% found the training useful in improving their clinical skills.

The Project Air Strategy Parenting Program will be incorporated into the Project Air Strategy training being implemented throughout LHD's across NSW in order to maximise the reach of these principles and resources to clinicians who work with people with personality disorder who are parents.