

# The Diagnosis of a Psychiatric Illness: What does it actually mean for Parenting Capacity?

Chair: Her Honour Judge Anne Demack, Federal Circuit and Family Court of  
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# The Impact of Psychiatric Illness on Parenting Capacity

- ▶ Shame and stigma
- ▶ Dependent on individual factors
- ▶ Dependency
- ▶ Changed interaction, availability, and responsiveness
- ▶ Changed perception of the child
- ▶ Impaired ability to provide physical and emotional care
- ▶ Impaired ability to teach and support child development
- ▶ Disrupted parent child relationships



# The Impact on the Person and Co-parenting situations.

- ▶ Stigma and Shame
- ▶ Public / Private
- ▶ Fear and Mistrust
- ▶ Communication challenges
- ▶ Lack of certainty and Safety concerns
- ▶ Access to medical opinion and treatment
- ▶ Boundaries
- ▶ Both parents need support and Reassurance
- ▶ Higher levels of parent conflict
- ▶ Media



# The Impacts and Risks to Children

- ▶ Let's do Frank things



# The Impacts and Risks to Children

- ▶ Increased risk of maltreatment / illness / harm, neglect
- ▶ Poor role model and skewed understanding of social norms and rules
- ▶ Higher risk of developing mental illnesses (genetic and environment)
- ▶ Increased risk of adverse developmental outcomes / failing to reach potential
- ▶ Children caring for children or parents
- ▶ Attachment disorders
- ▶ Social, Emotional, Behavioural problems
- ▶ Reduced resilience, internalized negative self-beliefs
- ▶ Lack of predictability and safe feelings
- ▶ Increased stress and risk of trauma / cumulative harm
- ▶ Socioeconomic and lifestyle disadvantages



# Assessing Parental Capacity.



- ? History
- ? Risk and Protective factors
- ? Insight and function
- ? Individual Adult factors
- ? Child factors
- ? Co-parenting relationship
- ? Social isolation versus support
- ? stability
- ? Access to services and support
- ? Who will see

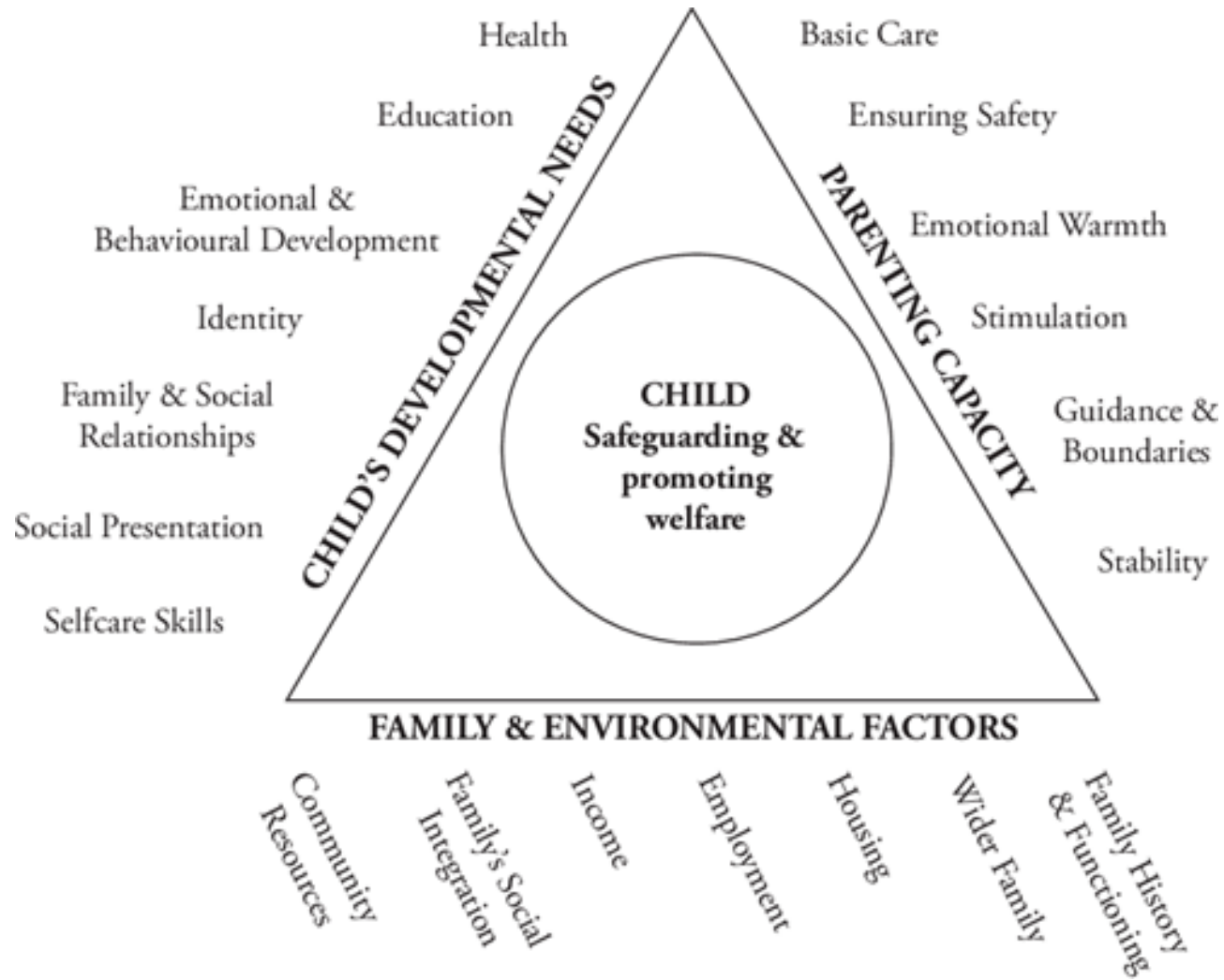


# Protective Factors

- ▶ Insight, responsiveness, connection
- ▶ Treatment and treatment compliance
- ▶ Personal resources of parent and child
- ▶ Support network
- ▶ Proactive help seeking
- ▶ Openness to monitoring
- ▶ Mental health literacy
- ▶ Quality child care
- ▶ Parenting programs
- ▶ Home visits
- ▶ Healthy routine and diet and exercise / Self-care



# A Framework for Assessment



Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their families.

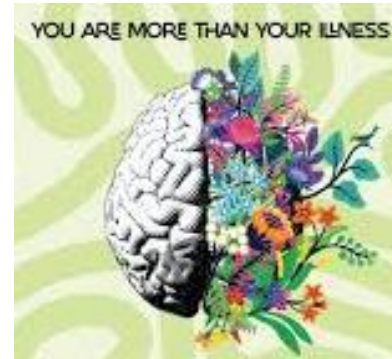
(Adapted from the Department of Health UK 2013 and quoted in Hammond & Lipsedge Assessing Parenting Capacity in Psychiatric Mother and Baby Units: A case report and review of literature Psychiatria Danubina, 2015; Vol. 27, Suppl. 1 pp 71 - 83



# Working and Communicating with a Person who has a mental illness

## Do:

- ▶ Person first
- ▶ use language that is easy to understand
- ▶ focus on strengths and abilities, not just issues and problems
- ▶ check you and they have understood what's been said
- ▶ ask, never assume
- ▶ Clarify needs and support before jumping in to help
- ▶ Be kind and respectful
- ▶ Educate them on expected behaviour and boundaries that can assist them
- ▶ Check if there is a support person
- ▶ Carefully manage any stated threats or changes in the person's state



## Try not to:

Pretend to know how someone else feels

Use terms that show pity

Use inappropriate words like psycho and crazy

Blame the person for their condition or their circumstances

Use jargon

Be judgemental or argumentative

Show anger or hostility

Be sarcastic or make jokes

Treat someone like they are inferior.



# What useful information or documentation can you obtain and provide to an assessing psychiatrist or a family report writer where the existence of a psychiatric illness is an issue in dispute?

- ▶ Current treatment report and opinion
- ▶ Past history and medical records
- ▶ Information about treatment compliance
- ▶ Information about from family
- ▶ Information about and from trusted supports who might be available to help

## Help for clients:

<https://www.sane.org/>

<https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/>

<https://www.copmi.net.au/find-resources/order-free-materials>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

Lifeline 13 11 14

Suicide call back service Call 1300 659 467

Mental Health crisis line 1300 642 255

# Some References

Further training for conversations with clients: <https://emergingminds.com.au/>

<https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2013/199/3/children-whose-parents-have-mental-illness-prevalence-need-and-treatment>

<https://www.ranzcp.org/news-policy/policy-and-advocacy/position-statements/children-of-parents-with-mental-illness>

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<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/psychosocial/strategies/Pages/communicating-language.aspx>