FRAMEWORKS AND TOOLS FOR HAVING MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS WITH FAMILIES

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OUTLINE

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

• The conditions under which families are raising young children have altered dramatically over the past few decades

• While most families have benefited from these changes, some find the heightened demands of contemporary living and parenting overwhelming

• Despite continued growth in prosperity, there are more families experiencing multiple psychosocial problems

• These problems can compromise parenting and family functioning, resulting in worse outcomes for children
BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

- However, most services for families with young children are designed to address presenting (or foreground) problems, rather than the background causal problems
- If nothing is done to help families address the background issues, our efforts to help them with their presenting problems will be less effective
- We currently don’t have a way of finding out about and addressing these problems
- We need a systematic way of finding out what these are so that we can respond in a timely manner
DEVELOPING THE PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE

• In developing the PER, we used the Parents Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS) as a model
• The PEDS is a structured tool for eliciting parental concerns about their child’s development and for deciding what action, if any, should be taken to address these
• Research on PEDS has confirmed the utility of and validity of a parent-based method to elicit parent concerns about child development
• The PER uses a similar parent-response format and a family-centred approach that avoids making judgements or apportioning blame, and gives parents control over the decisions made
PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE (PER)

The Parent Engagement Resource (PER) is designed to help practitioners who work with the families of young children to have meaningful conversations with families about psychosocial factors that may be compromising parenting and family functioning.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE (PER)

The PER aims to:

• support practitioners to develop effective partnerships with parents
• identify early the wide-ranging and complex psychosocial issues that impact on children
• sensitively and safely raise and discuss these issues, and
• help promote effective responses to any concerns raised
PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE (PER)

- The PER is a discussion tool embedded in a practice framework
- The *discussion tool* consists of a set of questions addressing potential psychosocial concerns, each question matched by a decision-making algorithm
- The *practice framework* describes the family-centred nature of the relationship between the practitioner and the parent.
- The PER uses a needs-based rather than risk-based approach – the actions taken are based upon needs identified by the parents, not risks identified by the professionals
TRIALING THE PER

PER Feasibility Study 2010/11

- This involved two groups of experienced Maternal and Child Health (MCH) nurses in Victoria

- Parent feedback regarding application of the tool as part of the MCH program was overwhelmingly positive

- MCH nurses agreed that the PER was an effective tool to engage parents, but were concerned about the time required

TRIALING THE PER (cont)

PER National Trial 2012-14

• This took the form of a cluster randomised trial conducted in disadvantaged localities across Australia.

• The PER was effective in detecting psychosocial concerns, and filled a critical gap: the workers supporting families with complex needs in this study did not have access to a resource that systematically addresses the psychosocial factors that can compromise parenting.

• There was strong endorsement of the PER by the parents interviewed - all of them reported that they were pleased that they had been asked about their concerns.

TRIALING THE PER (cont)

The evidence from the two studies has provided answers to some questions:

• The PER is acceptable to parents
• There is no indication that it does any harm
• It can give parents new information about the impact of psychosocial issues on children, thereby helping the parents make more informed decisions regarding action
• It reframes relationships between professionals and parents in ways that can promote engagement and empower parents
• It gives professionals a way of asking the ‘hard’ questions
• It has value as a checklist, providing a systematic way of addressing the key psychosocial family concerns known to have an adverse effect upon children
EXERCISE 1

How do you currently find out about family psychosocial issues?
PARENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE (cont)

• The PER is a 16-item questionnaire, with two ‘lead in’ questions and two ‘lead out’ questions

• It addresses 12 psychosocial issues that are known to affect parental and/or family functioning and have an adverse affect upon child development and well-being

• Each of the 12 central questions focuses on parental concerns about the impact of the particular issue on the child or children

• The PER includes decision-making algorithms for each question to guide the professional in responding to parental concerns
THE PER QUESTIONS

Introductory Cluster

1. *What are some of the things that you and your child/baby enjoy together?*

2. *What do you think you’re good at, or do well as a family/parent?*
THE PER QUESTIONS (cont)

Social Support Cluster

3. Every parent needs someone to talk to, to do things with, or to help out or to look after their child.
   
   *Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected because you don’t have enough contact with or support from others?*

4. We know that parenting is more difficult if you don’t have enough money for everyday things such as food, clothing or bills.

   *Other financial needs you may find more relevant to list: heating, transport, health care, school and leisure activities, bills or debt repayment.

   *Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected because there is not enough money such things?*
THE PER QUESTIONS (cont)

Social Support Cluster (cont)

5. Raising a family can be difficult when you have problems with homelessness or housing. You might be worried about keeping your home or having to share your home, or having a house that’s too crowded, or in need of repair.

Do you have any concerns that your child or family is being affected because of such problems with housing?

6. It’s always worrying when someone in the family has problems finding or keeping a job, having insecure employment or a job that is not family-friendly.

Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected by such difficulties?
THE PER QUESTIONS (cont)

Parenting Cluster

7. Parenting can be more difficult if parents have any serious physical health issues or disabilities, such as chronic disease, child birth related issues, physical disability or caring for another person.

*Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected by your own physical health or disability or that of another family member?*

8. It’s not unusual for parents to feel emotional, depressed, angry, anxious, exhausted or even have strange thoughts such as harming yourself or others.

*Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected by you having any of these feelings?*
THE PER QUESTIONS (cont)

Parenting Cluster (cont)

9. Being a parent involves loving and caring for your child, managing daily routines, meeting your child’s physical and emotional needs, and managing your child’s behaviour.

*Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected by the way you and your partner manage these things?*

10. We know that children’s development can be disrupted or impaired by being neglected. This includes being left to look after themselves too much, not having their needs met, or being given too much responsibility for their age.

*Do you ever have concerns that your child is being affected by any of these things?*
THE PER QUESTIONS (cont)

Relationships Cluster

11. We have learnt that using drugs and alcohol can affect how well parents care for their children.

*Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected because someone in your family is drinking alcohol or using drugs?*

12. We have learnt that children’s development can be affected or harmed by repeated disagreements or conflict between family and loved ones, which may be left unresolved.

*Do you have any concerns that your child is being affected by conflict or tension between any members of the family?*
THE PER QUESTIONS (cont)

Relationships Cluster (cont)

13. We have learnt that children’s development can be affected or harmed by repeated exposure to frightening behaviour. This might be threats, bullying, yelling, screaming, putting people down, hitting, slapping, kicking, or punching.

*Do you have any concerns that your child might be seeing or hearing behaviour that frightens them?*

14. We have learnt that children’s development can be badly affected by direct physical, emotional and sexual harm.

*Do you ever have concerns that your child is being harmed or hurt by anyone?*
THE PER QUESTIONS (cont)

Closing Questions Cluster

15. Do you have any other concerns about your child’s or family’s wellbeing?

16. Thinking about what would most make a difference to your child, if you could change one thing in your life or in your family, what would it be?
EXERCISE 2

Practising the PER questions
THE PER DECISION-MAKING ALGORITHMS

Question 4
We know that parenting is more difficult if you don’t have enough money for everyday things such as food, clothing or bills. Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected because there is not enough money for such things?

No

Yes

Are the concerns significant?

No—less significant concerns
For example, there are minor or short-term problems. Validate parent’s decision to disclose concerns.

Yes—significant concerns
Discuss options available and agree on plan of action
Referral to family support services or other appropriate agency
Provide support to address other concerns.

No concerns
Acknowledge parent’s reply

Less significant concerns
Follow up at appropriate time and/or refer on if necessary.

Significant concerns—no referral
Acknowledge and support the parent’s decision. Counsel in area of concern, and organism/important follow up.

Significant concerns—referral
Acknowledge and support the parent’s decision. Arrange referral to appropriate services such as:
- family support and other related services
- services addressing child wellbeing.
THE PER DECISION-MAKING ALGORITHMS (cont)

Question 8
It's not unusual for parents to feel emotional, depressed, angry, anxious, exhausted or even have strange thoughts such as harming yourself or others. Do you have any concerns that your child and family are being affected by you having any of these feelings?

No

Yes - significant concerns
Validate parent's decision to disclose concerns.

Concerns of child safety
If there are concerns about the safety of the child, it may be necessary to contact Child Protection Services (note legal requirements for mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse in your state and your organisation's policies and procedures).

No less significant concerns
Validate parent's decision to disclose concerns.

Yes
Are the concerns significant?

Not urgent
Discuss options available and agree on plan of action
Referral to a health assessment for the affected family member, family support services, or other appropriate agency. Check for informal social support.

Urgent

No concerns/
Not ready to
discuss
Acknowledge parent's reply

Less significant concerns—
no referral
Acknowledge and support the parent's decision. Counsel in area of concern, and organise follow up.

Significant concerns—
referral
Acknowledge and support the parent's decision. Counsel in area of concern, and organise follow up.

Referral
Acknowledgement and support the parent's decision. Develop a safety plan with parent. Arrange referral to appropriate service, e.g.:
- a family doctor or a mental health service for an assessment
- services addressing child wellbeing.

Urgent referral
to an appropriate service for assessment, e.g.
- mental health service
- family doctor
- family support service.
Develop a safety plan with parent.
EXERCISE 3

Practising the PER decision-making algorithms
THE PER PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

The administration of the PER is based on three core practice principles and three core discussion tool principles.

The three core practice principles are:

- Always ensure that the parent is in charge – the final decision about what action to take rests with the parent.
- Always engage the parent with respect and responsivity.
- Always get feedback from the parents on whether these principles were observed.
THE PER PRACTICE FRAMEWORK (cont)

The three core discussion tool principles are:

• Always use the question format and wording
• Always use the decision-making algorithm
• Always cover all questions at some stage

Provided these six principles are observed, the PER can be administered flexibly.
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