

Practice example: Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland

(Recommendation 3 - assessment)

Background

The UNOCINI (Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland) is a regional comprehensive assessment process also used as the basis for referrals to statutory children's services to identify the needs of children, based on 12 domains. A review of the UNOCINI guidance for staff highlighted that parental mental health wasn't explicitly covered. It did not provide for the detailed elements of parental mental health that staff need to consider when completing an assessment and the factors affecting parenting when a parent has mental ill health, for example, nature of illness; compliance with medication; frequency of illness; insight into condition; insight into children's needs; supports that are available to the family etc.

Intended outcomes

As part of the project, we wanted to revise the UNOCINI and associated guidance to better reflect what should be included in an assessment when a parent has or may have mental ill health. The aim being to ensure the Think Family approach would be incorporated into all assessments and therefore embedded into practice.

Practical actions

A working sub-group was formed which included representation from relevant agencies and services who were tasked with writing an addendum to be added to the guidance.

What actually happened

Given that the UNOCINI is a regional policy document, it was tabled at the regional Reform Implementation Team (RIT) for approval and subsequently sent to the DHSSPS for authorisation.

Advice for others

You need representation of frontline practitioners from relevant services on the sub-group. It is essential to consult with senior level management prior to the commencement of work, to ensure the review of policy/procedure will be supported and authorised.