

Practice example: Planning, providing and reviewing care – North Somerset complex case discussions

Background

Children's centre staff have long held monthly meetings with health visiting teams. They requested adult mental health input into these meetings, to break down silo working and improve their understanding about mental illness and how best to support families where parents have mental health problems.

Intended outcomes

The aim of the case discussions is to prevent or mitigate the deterioration of mental illness in parents and carers, and any attendant risks to children. This is done by improving communication between agencies, and developing joint assessments and interventions. In turn, this means staff develop new skills and experiences, and feel supported as they tackle complex case work.

Practical actions

Regular meetings take place across North Somerset between children's centre staff, health visitors and adult mental health specialists who work within the children's centres. The support of senior management in children's social care in encouraging children's social workers to also attend the meetings has been key to their success.

What actually happened

Most usefully, people actually got together. Information is shared, and coherent joined-up plans have been developed. The adult mental health specialists within children's centres are able to liaise between adult mental health and children's services, and put children's centre workers in touch with Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) care coordinators. This improved liaison and signposting has led to better attendance at joint meetings and more joint working.

The case discussions are evaluated on a simple scale (1 = useless – 10 = very helpful) and people are asked to explain why they chose the score they did. To date, evaluation is extremely positive, with all agencies agreeing that discussions are constructive in managing risks, supporting families to move forward, and understanding the wide family context in which individuals live and operate. Staff also report feeling supported and validated in what they are doing, and develop a greater understanding of the pressures and constraints of colleagues in different agencies.

People from the wider services system, such as the police, Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services, drug and alcohol services and so forth are invited to contribute as appropriate.

Advice for others

Getting support from managers, so that people are freed up to attend meetings like this, is crucial to making them work. Similar multi-agency engagement can be achieved in different ways, for example having children's centre staff attend CMHT meetings. Either way, it is a straightforward and effective method of breaking down barriers and improving joint working with families.