

About Family Action

Family Action has been a leading provider of services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families for 140 years. We work with over 45,000 families every year providing practical, emotional and financial support through over 100 services based in communities across England. We build on families' strengths, supporting them to fulfil their potential and make a positive contribution to their community. We use this experience to campaign for a society free from disadvantage and social isolation.

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family
action

Parental
Mental
Health

supporting families since 1869

Parental Mental Health

Approximately one in four adults will experience mental health problems during their lifetime; many of these adults will have dependent children. Whilst research (Cassell & Coleman 1995, Aldridge & Becker 2003) has found that many parents/carers with mental health problems have strong and effective relationships with their children, some experience considerable stress, often due to the fear and stigma surrounding mental ill-health, and may find it difficult to respond to their children's needs.

Parents with complex needs can be supported to be effective parents to their children, enabling families to stay together and children to thrive.

Family Action operates a number of mental health family support services across England. Uniquely, Family Action services work with the whole family (parents/carers and children); ensuring all get the support they need.

Who Do We Work With?

Family Action's Building Bridges model meets the needs of families where parents have severe and enduring mental health problems. Our Building Bridges services work with the whole family unit, usually on an outreach basis, and seek to meet the individual needs of each family member, supporting the need of the adult in their role as a parent or carer and responding to the related but separate needs of the child(ren) at all stages.

Family Action's Newpin model is centre-based, working with parents and their children under five where there is a significant difficulty in the parent-child relationship and/or an identified mental health problem. This is a long-term intensive service providing successful interventions for some of the most troubled families that come into contact with statutory services.

Both models of service support families to access and coordinate with other agencies and professionals, improving communication and relationships.

What Do We Do?

- Services are tailored to meet families' needs and circumstances, and are flexible and holistic.
- Family support workers help with practical issues and provide emotional support.

- We manage risk and assess safeguarding issues – regular contact means we are aware of changing circumstances and able to alert and liaise with other services when necessary.
- We are available at times when other services often are not, e.g. early morning, evening, weekends, bank holidays.
- We reach parents and their children at home and in the community who may not otherwise engage with support services.
- We promote positive attachments – for all family members - by identifying support resources and encouraging sustainable community links, e.g. children's centres, parenting support groups, volunteering opportunities
- We improve children's understanding of their parents' mental illness and encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- We improve family relationships by enabling parents and children to have a better understanding of each other's needs.
- We use internationally validated clinical tools to measure the effects of intervention.
- We work in partnership with other agencies to ensure effective multi-agency collaboration.
- We provide culturally sensitive services - our staff teams reflect the communities they serve.

Outcomes

An independent evaluation of Family Action's Building Bridges services was published in September 2007. It demonstrates the effectiveness of this service model in improving outcomes for families where parents have mental health problems and other complex needs. Additional recent analysis continues to uphold the strength of this model of work. Successful aspects of the service identified include:

- working with families where significant concerns about children's welfare exist
- close attention to 'getting', 'keeping' and 'engaging' parents
- a strong theory base
- more than one method of delivery
- working with both parents and children
- practical, flexible and partnership approach which research indicates is valued by parents
- valued by other agencies for this approach and positive professional working relationships.

Please download the evaluation at www.family-action.org.uk

The Family Action Newpin service has been identified as the best UK example of a parenting programme in the Policy Research Bureau review of international evidence, 'What Works in Parenting Support?' The service was independently evaluated (The Evaluation of a Home Visiting and Befriending Scheme: NEWPIN Cox, Puckering, Pound, Mills and Owen 1990) and shown to improve parents' mental health, self-confidence and understanding of others. In addition, it demonstrated improvement in parents' abilities to recognise and meet their children's needs leading to improved outcomes for children.

Our Building Bridges and Newpin models of service are included as good practice examples in the SCIE publication 'SCIE guide 30: Think child, think parent, think family' (July 2009) which provides guidance on policy and practice in working with families affected by parental mental health problems.

Achieving the five outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM) for children and young people living with mentally ill parents is a particular challenge for both the family and the professionals working alongside them. A child's well-being is best ensured by supporting adults to care for their children. Family Action's parental mental health services meets the following ECM outcomes:

Be Healthy

Parent and child needs are addressed to reduce the likelihood of future mental health problems. This is through practical support to ensure a safe and healthy home, and emotional support for parents to develop their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing

Stay Safe

Safeguarding is at the heart of Building Bridges and Newpin services: we work with the impact of adult mental health on the family, and remain flexible to meet changing needs and parents' ability to care for their children. Our services reduce the numbers of children looked after or placed on child protection registers.

Enjoy and Achieve

Services help parents and children to rebuild relationships and have fun together. They support children to develop and maintain social and community activities and parents to cope with their children's behaviour.

Make a Positive Contribution

Parents and carers join groups to support them to build their confidence and self-esteem, often leading to further involvement as volunteers. Young carers' groups offer opportunities to share anxieties and fears about their parents' mental health problems as well as play and enjoyment.

Achieve Economic Well-being

We provide a personal development programme with modules on parenting and making choices for education and work. Services place a strong emphasis on children going to school and school achievement.

For more information about Family Action's Parental Mental Health Services please contact:

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Visit our website at www.family-action.org.uk/parentalmentalhealth