



Support & Information for Parents and Guardians



Introduction

St Patrick's Mental Health Services takes a holistic approach to the care and treatment of our service users. When a parent/guardian is coping with psychological distress, it can be quite a worrying time for children. Parents/guardians often worry about the effects of their condition and its treatment on their child(ren). This leaflet has been developed to give some information that we believe can be of help. It is also important for you to know that you can discuss any concerns you might have with the multidisciplinary team and with the social worker on that team in particular. Below, we have outlined some frequently asked questions and related information that we hope will be of help to you.

Should I tell my child(ren) about my illness?

Research clearly supports the view that children respond well to being given information. This helps them to understand what is happening in relation to both the illness and to recovery. The information concerned should be age-appropriate and be communicated sensitively.

I worry about my child(ren). Will I get help?

When a person is admitted to hospital for treatment, consideration is given to their needs and to the needs of their family. It is possible that families may need additional support during this time. When you are admitted to hospital, we ask for a description of your family. This is to consider what help could be provided to you and your family. Each member of the multidisciplinary team views your needs from the perspective of their professional role so that, working together, they make a multidisciplinary assessment. One of the tasks of the social worker on your team is to consider what might be helpful in supporting your role as a parent/guardian of a child(ren) under the age of 18 years. The multidisciplinary team's social worker screens the medical records of all parents/guardians of a child(ren) under the age of 18 years who are admitted to hospital for treatment by the team concerned. This is in order to identify cases of service users that may require social work involvement.

If I am to meet with a social worker, what can I expect?

The multidisciplinary team's social worker will engage with you to assess what supports would best suit your family's needs. Then the social worker can provide relevant information, advice and/or counselling, and can help you to access potentially beneficial services and resources in the community.

It is important to note that each family is unique in some respects at least. The social worker will take the particular circumstances of your family into account and will work with you to find solutions that promote the best interests of *your* family.

What happens when there is a concern in respect of a child(ren)?

Parents/guardians have primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children. However, there are of course times when it is important for professionals to actively promote the safety and wellbeing of children. From time to time, parents/guardians require help and support with carrying out their parenting role.

St Patrick's Mental Health Services, along with all health care providers, has a Child Protection and Welfare Policy in place. This policy promotes the safety and wellbeing of children. It is important that children have a secure and positive environment that promotes their wellbeing and growth.

It is our aim to join with parents/guardians in promoting the best outcomes for children. Our Child Protection and Welfare Statement is presented in this leaflet. This Statement is also available on our website, in the Service User Information Booklet and on all wards.

In order to promote the welfare and protection of children, if a concern arises, St Patrick's Mental Health Services will liaise with Tusla Child and Family Services and/or with An Garda Síochána, as may be relevant. This is not a breach of confidentiality. You will be kept fully informed if a concern needs to be addressed, if it is in the best interest of involved children, which it usually is. The welfare of children is of paramount importance. It is everyone's responsibility to protect and nurture children.

What happens if I experienced trauma as a child?

We are aware that a significant proportion of service users will have experienced trauma in their own childhood. It is important that you discuss this with your multidisciplinary treating team. It may help in informing a course of treatment and intervention that will aid your recovery. You will also be given information about help in the community.

It is important that, as far as possible, we all work together to protect children. If there is any possible current concern in respect of a child(ren) arising from disclosure by a service user about trauma that he or she experienced in childhood, St Patrick's Mental Health Services will liaise with the statutory authorities to consider risk in order to promote protection of the child(ren). Since December 2017, health professionals are mandated by law to report concerns above a defined threshold.

Again, this is not a breach of confidentiality. It is important that we all ensure the safety of children.



Child Protection and Welfare Statement

It is the policy of St Patrick's Mental Health Services to safeguard the welfare of all children by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional harm and from neglect. The welfare of children is of paramount concern.

St Patrick's takes all possible care in its recruitment processes to employ people who will not abuse or neglect users of our services. St Patrick's provides ongoing training to staff and volunteers so that they are aware of signs and risks of abuse and neglect of children and so that they know the reporting structure of St Patrick's Mental Health Services.

When reports of concerns or allegations of abuse or neglect, past or present, are made to staff, these will be followed up and, if reasonable grounds for concern are established, these will be reported to Tusla Child and Family Services and/or to An Garda Síochána for assessment and investigation.

Any form of behaviour that harms a child such as neglect, physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse is unacceptable. All concerns will be followed up in a fair and impartial manner and in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

Children have the right to be protected, treated with respect, listened to and have their views taken into consideration, regardless of all other considerations.

A space for those in hospital and their children

The Wishing Well Family Room is located on the corridor to the garden in St Patrick's University Hospital and is open to families with children each day between 10.00am and 9.00pm.

To access the Wishing Well Family Room, please collect an access card from Reception.



Information

We recognise that parents are best placed to help their own child(ren), and to assist you in this task we are pleased to provide useful information about how to communicate carefully with your child(ren) in relation to your condition and your temporary stay in hospital.

St Patrick's Mental Health Services is pleased to provide a free-of-charge information pack for parents/guardians that includes booklets and information sheets that deal with the following subjects:

- Talking with children of different ages about mental illness and its treatment

- Enabling children to understand the mental illness of their parent/guardian

- Helping children with their feelings and to feel safe and secure

- Assisting children to learn effective verbal and behavioural responses

- Learning from tips given by people with mental illness who have raised children, and from tips given by children and young people whose parents/guardians have mental illness.

There is a stock of this information pack in the Information Centre and in the Wishing Well Family Room at St Patrick's University Hospital. The pack is also available from the Nurses' Office at St Edmundsbury Hospital and from the Nurses' Office in Willow Grove Adolescent Unit. Please feel free to acquire an information pack for your own use!

At the Information Centre which is located in the front hall of St Patrick's University Hospital, you will also find child-friendly literature in relation to a variety of mental health conditions.

If you require more specific information or wish to talk to someone about what would be appropriate, please contact the social worker on your multidisciplinary team.

www.stpatricks.ie

Useful websites

www.copmi.net.au

www.aicafmha.net.au/

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/expertadvice/parentsandyouthinfo/parentscarers/

www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk

<http://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/parenting-information/positive-parenting/>

Support & Information Line

The Support & Information Line provided by St Patrick's Mental Health Services is a free and confidential telephone and email service staffed by experienced mental health nurses. This service is available from 9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday inclusive, with a facility to record your message outside those hours.

You can contact the Support & Information Line by calling 01 249 3333, or, if you would like to email your query (please send this to info@stpatmail.com), we will endeavour to get back to you within the aforementioned working hours.

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