

Preparing for the Preliminary Discussion

It is beneficial to ensure that talking about children becomes a routine part of discussion during any appointment with a parent. This approach reinforces that the parenting role is an important part of any parent's life.

If a parent is hesitant, it's important to address any questions or concerns they may have. It can be helpful to view the example script demonstrating how you might cover the Preliminary Discussion with them. Importantly, it should include a clear rationale regarding why Let's Talk is beneficial to both the parent and their child. 'A Letter from a Parent to Other Parents' (see Appendix A on page 18) and the introductory brochure (download from the ELearning Course Module 2) may also help this process.

When considering the example script, it will be necessary to tailor the content to the situation of the parent you see. For instance, for parents with infants or those who are generally anxious about sharing their information, the emphasis on 'talking with children about mental illness' may need to be initially modified. Over time you will develop your own script and words to fit into your work setting and the clients you see. Key aspects to cover in the Preliminary Discussion are bolded for quick reference.

Example Script

'Many parents who experience mental health issues have questions or concerns about their children. They often worry about things they have noticed or they may have questions about how to best support them. They may also worry about how their illness impacts on their parenting role. **Sometimes things go along quite smoothly, but at other times things can be much more challenging - and these things can be hard to discuss in families.**

Here at... we can **offer parents a program called 'Let's Talk'** which provides time to do just this. **Many parents have found it a very worthwhile process** as well as **workers who find that it deepens their understanding** of what is most important to their clients who are parents. So I wondered if you would like to spend time talking about your child and have the opportunity to discuss things that you think are going well or concerns that you may have? I can also provide you with **some information that other families in this situation have found helpful.**

My suggestion is that **we make two appointments to discuss things.** Of course we can meet more often if that is necessary, but let's start with the two meetings.

The first meeting is called **Discussion One** and it uses a document called a **'Log'** that helps us to really **focus on your child's daily life** and guides our discussion. Together we talk about **your child, what they're like, what they're interested in and how they're coping.** We will talk about their **strengths** – that is, the ordinary everyday things (such as regular routines and the time you spend with your child) that are powerful factors that contribute to resilience. We could also discuss their **vulnerabilities** – that is, the things that you feel would benefit from more attention or support. **We both take copies** of the Log and you then have time to process what has been discussed and perhaps talk about it with your family before we next meet.

The second meeting is called **Discussion Two.** In this meeting we spend time together **to reflect on Discussion One** and look at **ways your child's strengths can be sustained and increased.** We can also talk about other **challenges you might be experiencing.** We can talk about whether you think **other supports would be helpful for your family.**

We have also found that many parents have been wondering for a long time about how they should discuss their health concerns with their children. Some parents that I have spoken with feel that it's better not to talk about mental illness with their child, however it's natural for children from a very young age to try and make sense of what they notice, what they see and hear. One of the things we can do together is talk about **what you think your child understands about your mental illness and how you might approach having a conversation about this with them** and your family. What do you think about this?

As we are thinking about what is helpful for your family, **some parents have found it beneficial if their husband/wife/partner also participates**. Would you consider that as an option? My aim here is to work together to support you, your child and your family. I will **check regularly as we go along to see how you are feeling.**



Notes