

Booklet 1: What is family

Headlines:

- The word “family” refers to a basic social unit (specific group of people) that can provide parenting support.
- Family support can help to reduce the risk of parents feeling isolated and without help.
- If you feel isolated / lonely this can contribute to depression, anxiety, hopelessness and even risk of suicide.
- Research indicates there are benefits for finding support, as it can reduce feelings of isolation and so improve the parenting experience.

In general, families refer to a basic “social unit” consisting of parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and others. How family is defined may vary between individual people, however there is strong agreement that the family is important for children’s wellbeing and development (Lee & McLanahan, 2015). Given the stress of parenting and the demands of modern life, family is a crucial source of support when raising children. Without it, parents may feel isolated and lonely.

Covid-19 brought a spotlight on to the negative effects isolation can have on people’s mental health (Ollivier et al., 2021; Thorell et al., 2021; Westrupp et al., 2020) but there is lots of research from before the pandemic showing the negative emotional impacts isolation can have (e.g., Coyle & Dugan, 2012; Jeong et al., 2016). Feeling isolated and lonely have been shown to link with depression, generalised anxiety, and suicidal tendencies (Beutel, 2017). Studies have shown that children with parents who suffer these effects were also at risk of other difficulties such as major depression, anxiety disorders, and poorer functioning (e.g., Beardslee et al., 1983; Billings & Moos, 1983; Connors et al., 1979).

It is therefore crucial to encourage parents to access their familial support systems (i.e. family, friends, neighbours). Telleen et al. (1989) investigated the impact of a family support programme on mothers’ support and parenting stress. For their research they provided a fake family support system by creating a self-help discussion group, parenting education programme, and linking parents to services when necessary. They found that after just three months, mothers felt less isolated and experienced a reduction in parenting stress. These results were compared to those of a “control group”, which carried on as normal and experienced no improvements. This suggests there are benefits to having a support system.

Another study that had similar findings was done by Kane et al. (2007). Their research suggested that getting support from other parents enables parents to regain control and feel more able to cope, the result of which is: a reduction in guilt and feelings of social isolation, increased empathy for their children, and confidence in coping with their children’s behaviour.



All the research (on the previous page) indicates that encouraging parents to seek social support from their family or wider community helps reduce stress, feelings of isolation, and chances of poor mental health whilst increasing confidence and connection with their children, and so creates a stronger family to raise children in.

Useful links

- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10567-019-00307-y>
- <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2007.00750.x>
- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592452/Helping_Parents_to_Parent_report.pdf

Booklet 1: What children need

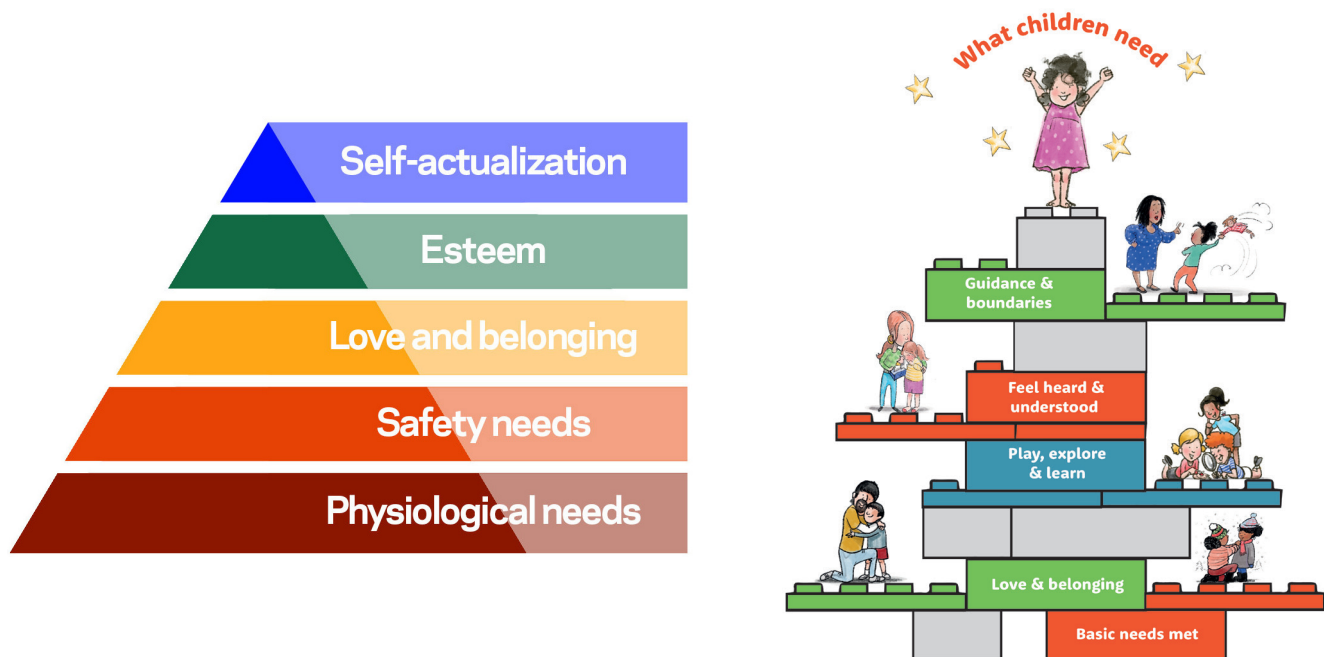
Headlines:

- There are five key elements that are critical to a child's development:
 - Basic needs
 - Love and belonging
 - Play, explore, and learn
 - Feel heard and understood
 - Guidance and boundaries
- When these five areas are covered well, a stable and good parent-child relationship can be built, which in turn contributes to building resilience.
- Resilience is the ability to adapt in the face of adversity, tragedy, and other significant sources of stress.

What is resilience? And why is it important?

Resilience is defined as: adapting in the face of adversity/hardship, tragedy, and other significant sources of stress. Resilience is the ability to stay optimistic and focused even during distressing events. Greater resilience has been associated with better learning achievements (Kwek et al., 2013), reduced risk-taking (e.g. drug usage, smoking; Beauvais & Oetting, 2002; McCleskey & Gruda, 2021; Rawas et al., 2020), better involvement in the community (Tschann et al., 1996), increased physical health (Schure et al., 2013; Yi et al., 2008), and psychological health (Davydov et al., 2010; Southwick et al., 2011).

We will now look at the five pillars in more detail:



Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory showing what motivates us as people. The theory suggests we are motivated by five levels of need, with the most important being at the bottom of the pyramid.

Starting at the base of the pyramid, these needs are: physiological needs (e.g. water, sleep, food), safety needs (e.g. emotional and physical security), love and belonging (i.e. the emotional need for relationships), esteem (i.e. self-worth, accomplishment, respect), and self-actualisation (i.e. the realisation of personal potential and growth).

Maslow suggests that the needs at the bottom of the pyramid may need to be met before an individual can progress to the ones above. Although this may not always be true, it is useful to consider when thinking about the many needs of a parent or family. For example, if a family is hungry, they are more likely to be focused on getting their next meal, rather than making new friends.

This theory is useful in showing that people need more to survive than we might think. It also shows us that if a need is not met, then that person will not be able to lead a truly fulfilling life.

Human children are different to the young of other species because they need adults to help them for a large amount of time. Children require years of supervision and adult care to survive. However, the priority is not just to survive but to grow into healthy, happy, contributing members of the community. Parents/carers are needed to create an environment where children's needs are met until they reach independence.

We will now explore several needs suggested by Maslow (above), which are found in the Kids Matter material:

1. Basic needs

This refers to basic survival needs such as food, shelter, protection from harm, and sleep. All living things have basic needs. Survival is unlikely when basic physiological needs (e.g. food, water, sleep) are not met for long periods of time. Because children are unable to care for themselves and unable to access the necessary resources to meet these needs (as they have no income), their parents/carers need to meet these basic needs for them.

Noltemeyer et al (2012) suggest that meeting basic needs is required before other needs can be met, such as meeting a higher-level 'growth need' through, for example, academic progress. All of the basic needs must be met; having lots of one need met cannot compensate for another that lacks attention (Woodhead, 2014).



2. Love and belonging

There is much written on how important it is to feel loved and have a sense of belonging. This refers to how much an individual feels accepted, included, and supported by others in their social environment – the people that make up their friends, family, and other contacts (Frederickson et al., 2009; McLeod, 2007).

Many different studies have been done, using different research techniques and looking for different things, to check what the impact is of people experiencing love and belonging. The research all points to: when these needs are met (when people feel loved and have a sense of belonging), positive cognitive and emotional outcomes take place (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).



On the other side, a lack of love and belonging has been associated with higher reports of insecurity, lack of trust, low self-worth, and depression in children that can impact them into their adulthood (e.g., Luke & Coyne, 2008; Prince, & Hadwin, 2013; Schofield, 2002).

- 3. Play, explore & learn (Please refer to notes for booklet 3)
- 4. Feel heard & understood (Please refer to booklet 3)
- 5. Guidance & boundaries (Please refer to booklets 4 and 5)

These five pillars are critical to developing the relationships between a parent and their children. Building a strong parent-child relationship ensures a steady development of resilience in children (McArdle et al., 2013; Stewart & Sun, 2004).

5 Core emotional needs

The Schema Therapy Model (Bach et al., 2018) has identified five broad emotional needs that need to be met to give a child the best chance to develop well and to their potential. The five emotional needs are believed to be absolutely essential and apply to everyone. They are:

1. A secure attachment to others
2. Autonomy
3. Spontaneity and play
4. Freedom of expression
5. Realistic limits and self-control

Not meeting these needs as a child grows can play a part in an individual developing psychological issues such as anxiety or low self-esteem. Being aware of these needs, is useful as it makes it possible to figure out where problems might be arising and to then do something about that.

This model, has created a way of helping people to overcome difficult behaviours and thought patterns that have not been overcome by other treatments. It also helps us to think about how our early childhood experiences and relationships impact how we go on to relate to others and the sorts of relationships we have in adulthood.

Creating an environment where children have their basic needs met, feel a sense of love and belonging, are able to play, explore & learn, feel heard and understood, receive guidance and have clear boundaries, allows children to grow at their potential. Parents creating this environment will be able to build healthy relationships with their children, which helps children to grow up with resilience as well as having many other benefits!

Useful links

- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-what-is-resilience/>
- <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF00922773>
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

Booklet 1: Pressure on ourselves

Headlines:

- All parents face multiple demands in modern life.
- Living in poverty increases the pressure individuals can feel as parents due to not having access to things that could help meet their children's needs.
- Good starting points for empowering parents to meet their children's needs include: accessing suitable support alongside acknowledging stressors and creating room for them to be dealt with.
- Poverty-stricken parents have traditionally, and unfairly, been represented in the media as lacking in parenting abilities (Cooper, 2020).

All parents face many demands and can come up against numerous difficulties in areas such as financial stability, employment and education (Kruesmann et al., 2003; Vincent & Maxwell, 2016). Experiencing poverty (and other difficult life situations) can amplify the pressure parents feel.

Poverty is not just lacking money and resources. It also links to a lack of other factors that help with family success, such as family stability and access to resources (Garbarino, 1992). Poverty can affect parents in lots of ways that can damage their capacity to develop healthy relationships with their children. Living in poverty can directly lead to psychological distress (Patterson et al., 1989; Crnic & Acevedo, 1995), increased aggression from adults within their family (Liebow, 1967), and inconsistent behaviour in adults (Sampson & Laub, 1994). Poverty also has the potential to amplify the aforementioned stressors if they already exist in homes.



Stress can stop parents raising their children well and can lead to worse consequences for the family. Studies have shown a strong association between high levels of stress in poverty-income households and violence toward children (Gelles, 1992). Moreover, the overall environment provided for children in poverty tends to be less safe (Coulton & Pandey, 1992) and contain fewer materials, playful activities, and routine (Garett et al., 1994). Parents in low-income families also report being less successful at guiding and regulating their children's behaviour (Sampson & Laub, 1994). They also have greater difficulty meeting the basic nutritional and health needs of their children. The struggle to meet such needs understandably increases the pressure they place on themselves and often leads to a vicious cycle of further challenges for parents.

It is therefore essential to address the pressures that parents are facing to help reduce the significant impact these pressures can have.

Useful links

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07dwIKOiLj8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4f8ntZfGBI>
- https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01619569609595129?casa_token=yI_05v_3v8AAAAAA%3A9qzqJG6VJR9TRWYhjDEKUDHTAzNIF2yo3qjvtMPSCs_N_rT5ETb5CDJDIBOG7pEaKqaYjAkb83mxVw&journalCode=hpje20

Booklet 1: Looking after ourselves

Headlines:

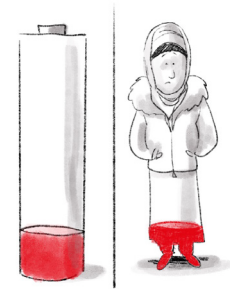
- Raising a child can be physically demanding and requires consistent contact (e.g. feeding, bouncing, rocking, cradling).
- If parents are physically unwell, it can be difficult to maintain ongoing physical support for their children.
- Mental illness in parents can also affect children.
- Parental mental illness can affect a child's ability to: form attachments, and develop emotionally, socially, and behaviourally.

To be able to parent effectively, self-care is key. To look after children whilst not looking after yourself is counter effective. Adequate self-care can maintain both the mental and physical health of parents.

Physical health

Physical health in parents is important. Raising a child can be physically demanding and requires consistent contact (e.g. feeding, bouncing, rocking, cradling). If parents are physically unwell, it can make it difficult to maintain ongoing physical support for their children and might also cause undue stress for the children themselves (Pedersen & Revenson, 2005).

Mikhail and Von Baeyer (1990) looked at children with healthy parents and compared them with parents who had chronic headaches. The children (ages 9-17) of parents with chronic headaches had more symptoms of anxiety and depression than children with healthy parents. Hough et al's (2003) study suggested that how severe the illness in the parent is affects how much the child experiences symptoms (e.g. anxiety, loneliness). The study looked at middle childhood children whose mothers were HIV+.



It is therefore important to encourage and support good physical health in parents with young children.

Mental health

Mental illness in parents can impact a child in many ways. Parental mental illness (e.g. depression, anxiety) can have a profound effect on the lives of dependent children. Parental mental illness has been shown to negatively impact attachment formation (Atkinson et al., 2000; Fonagy et al., 1991).

Children impacted by parental mental illness are also at increased risk of developing psychiatric disorders in adolescence and in adult life (Rutter & Quinton, 1984; Ramchandani & Stein, 2003). Given this, supporting parental mental health and using effective methods early on has the potential of improving both parents' and children's life experiences for their whole lives.

In summary, it seems both the mental and physical health of parents impact their children's wellbeing. When parents feel mentally and physically well, they are better equipped to cope with the pressures they face and care for their children, whatever the circumstances.

References for whole of Session 1

All references used in this booklet can be found in the separate 'References Booklet'.

Selected references:

- Maslow, A., & Lewis, K. J. (1987). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Salenger Incorporated*, 14(17), 987-990.
- McLeod, S. (2007). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Simply psychology*, 1(1-18).
- Fonagy, P., Steele, M., Steele, H., Moran, G. S., & Higgitt, A. C. (1991). The capacity for understanding mental states: The reflective self in parent and child and its significance for security of attachment. *Infant mental health journal*, 12(3), 201-218.