

The Solihull Approach

Practical Tips

Containment

Here are some ideas, which may be helpful to use in your work with parents

- The professional needs to create a suitable environment and consider how best to enable a parent or young person to talk about what is really bothering them. Remember, this may not be the issue that they came to see you about in the first place.
- It is important to read between the lines of what is being said, not just respond to the actual spoken words.
- Sitting down together can help you both to attend fully to what is being said as well as helping the other person feel more 'secure', contained and potentially less hostile. Consider positioning of chairs and desk.
- Listen attentively at first, without interrupting, even if you have helpful things to say or might need to challenge the factual accuracy of what is being said at a later stage. The parent may not be ready to 'hear' what you have to say at this stage and it may raise the 'temperature' in an unhelpful way.
- Offering occasional calming comments may be helpful to lower the temperature eg. ***"that sounds really tiring..."***
- Asking brief questions to clarify the story give the other person the feeling that you are taking seriously what they have to say and that you want to understand them eg. ***"so he wakes up several times every night?"*** This will also help them to realise that you are not trying to impose your professional opinion.
- It can be helpful to show that you can put yourself in their shoes and that you can empathise with the feeling they are describing eg. ***"I don't think any of us can prepare for what it means to have a baby..."*** This can put some distance between the parent and the sentiments, which can help to be able to think about it. However it is important to avoid offering your own story or experience as this is likely to make the other person feel that they are not being heard and it may reflect your needs more than theirs.
- Seeking consent to hear more specific detail can prevent a sense of 'intruding' eg. ***"Can I hear a little more about..."***
- Empathy is important if sincere. For example ***"I can imagine that was really hard for you"***. Being empathetic towards someone helps them to develop a sense of empathy towards another, for example a parent may be able to be more empathetic towards their child.

- Just listening and showing empathy is not in itself a containing experience for the parent. You need to be able to say something, which will help the other person feel differently about the situation. For example, ***“It sounds as though you have had such a hard time just recently that you haven’t been able to manage a sleep routine..”***
- Try to link what the parent is saying with the child’s presenting problem

For example

- “It sounds as though if things change for you or for him that it can throw you out of rhythm with each other...”
- “Some infants need more help than others to get into a reliable pattern with their parents...”
- “It sounds as though you have got out of ‘sync’ with each other over the last few weeks..”
- “I wonder if this is something we could spend some time thinking about together?”
- The asking of questions can ‘open up’ the feeling of anxiety for the parent and provide a space and some distance for them to think about the problem. However, you may need to ‘close it down’ so that it feels manageable for the parent to be left with until you meet next time. **For example ‘It has been very helpful to hear what has been going on for you both’.** You may then want to link the feelings to the problem e.g. ***‘I wonder if the sleep disturbances are related to other changes in the family?’*** It could then be that you suggest that the family talk this through before you meet again or that the speaker may want to explore their feelings/issues further which could lead to a referral to Psychology or Psychotherapy Services.

Behaviour Management

3 Key Questions

- What is the exact age and stage of development of your child?
- What changes have taken place in your child’s/ your life recently?
- How well is your child able to communicate his needs to you?