

Developing a plan: Common practice challenges in child mental health

RACGP and Emerging Minds





Dr James Best

GP Host

RACGP chair, Child and Young Persons Health

Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands from where each of us are joining this webinar tonight.

I wish to pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.



Partner



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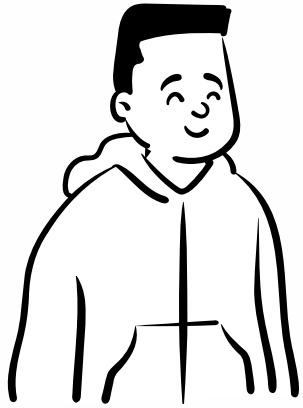
Poll

Had you heard of Emerging Minds before registering for this webinar?

Poll

Have you used the Emerging Minds website resources or previously completed an Emerging Minds eLearning course?

Who are we?



Nikko Menzel
Lived Experience



Dr Tim Jones
GP, Tasmania



Dr Caroline de Vries
Child and adolescent
Psychiatrist

Learning outcomes

1. Identify opportunities to work with families when developing support plans
2. Respond to a range of practice challenges when developing a plan using a child-centred and family-focused approach
3. Identify way to support families while they are on a waiting list for another service

Case Study





Lived Experience Perspective

Nikko

Father of a five and half year-old son

Background

- Five-and-a-half-year-old son who started school this year
- Sensory processing and energy regulation challenges
- Psycho-social challenges
- Son loves learning and going to school to study mathematics, art, science and reading.
- Some of you may recall that I was a part of the 2022 RACGP series.

Background

- Our family has had a proactive approach to supporting our son's mental health and development
- Finding GPs who understand our whole family and connect with our son has been key
- Planning supports for our son with our GP has been a positive experience **BUT** this has needed to include some interim supports while we wait for specialist services to be available



Barriers to access

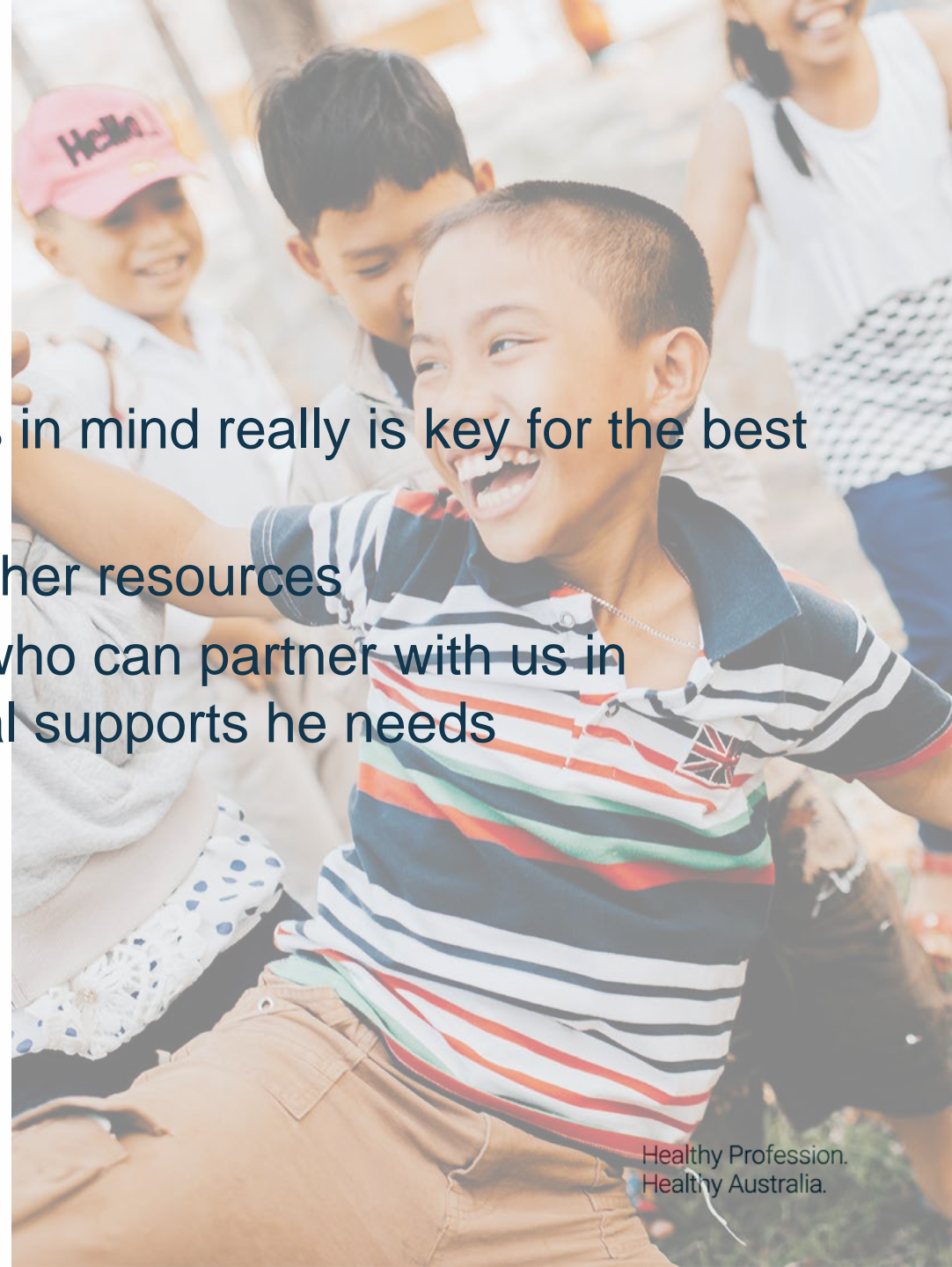
- Consistency in practitioners
- Wait lists for psychologist – public vs private
- School's lack of understanding of needs / unsupportive with no diagnosis, or not deemed acute enough for any support
- Costs
- The vicinity of the services or relevant specialists
- ...and the interconnectedness of all these factors!

What has made a difference in our planning

- Genuine rapport built with GP and other specialists
- Showing a genuine care for our son's needs
- Offering strategies, supports and services that are affordable and accessible to our family
- Finding interim solutions to support our son while we wait for ongoing support

Interim supports

- We are all aware of the waiting lists that exist
- From a family's perspective, planning with this in mind really is key for the best outcomes for a child
- There needs to be secondary solutions and other resources
- For our family, we just want to find someone who can partner with us in supporting our son while we wait for the formal supports he needs



Dr Tim Jones

GP

Elijah aged 10, Emily, John and Henry

The role of the GP

Working with the family

Being the ally and advocate

Co-ordinating the plan



What I'd be wondering at the end of the initial visit?

How many appointments?

How long?

How often?

What will Elijah benefit from?

What communication strategies may assist?

Key features for me:

Elijah is 10 so what does that mean for each parent in terms of autonomy, oversight and responsibility?

Does this dovetail with Elijah's emotional and social development?

There is (understandably) some parental conflict at the moment but how does Elijah view it?

The parents seem focused on Elijah's affect and focus at school, what is Elijah focused on?

Overarching goals for support

Children 'marinate in the soup' of their emotional surroundings so:

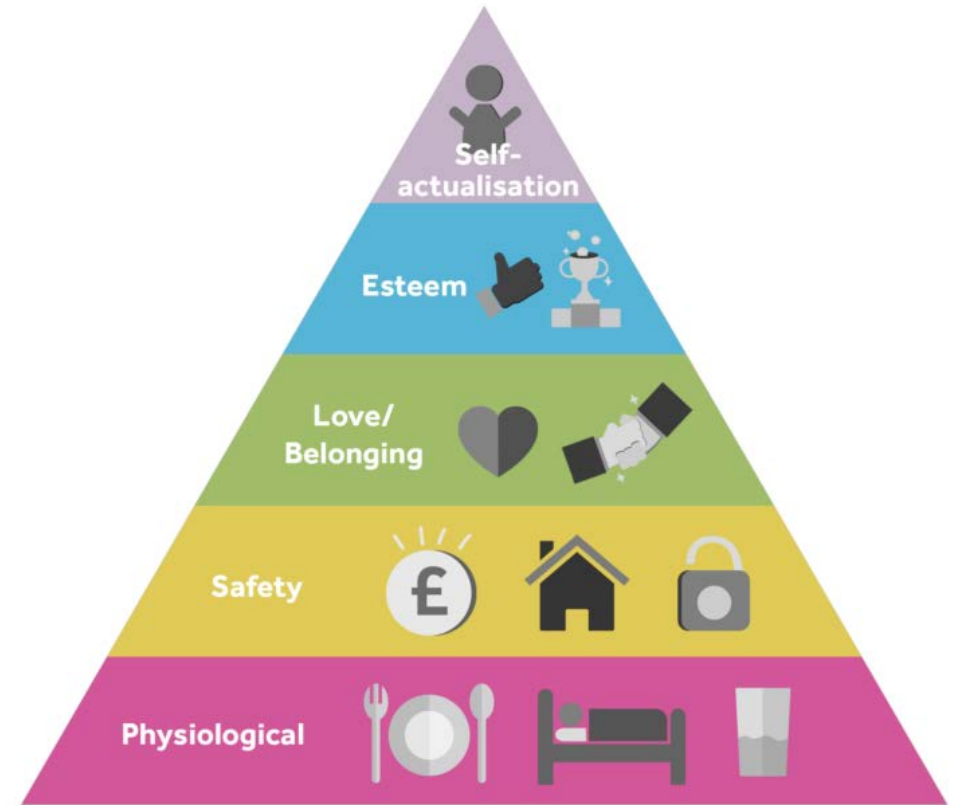
1. What opportunities exist to foster positive communication that is developmentally appropriate?
2. What opportunities exist for positive routines that Elijah can draw comfort and security from?
3. Who can be an ally/advocate/support person? Is it me?

Barriers for the GP

Uncertainty- 'am I qualified for this?'

Time- focus on micro changes

Overthinking- consider the fundamentals of health



Common practice challenges in child mental health

Webinar 3: Developing a plan

Dr Caroline de Vries
Child and adolescent psychiatrist



Collaborative planning

- Guided by the presentation
- Child psychiatry: often the child is presented as the “patient”
- Spectrum: from parents hesitant to engage in treatment to adamant. “Fix my child”.
- Inadvertently stressful for parents (shame, stigma)
- Where to start? Thank parent and child for being there. Normalise and affirm “this is hard”.
- Safe space- engage (both parent and child) - listen- explore- hold emotional space for parent
- Bio-psycho-social factors
- Explore biggest concern (expectations re this consult)
- Explore other concerns (shared by all?). Child may have different ideas. So may have ex-partner.
- Differential diagnosis plus: what is needed now and by who?
- Exclude risk, DV risk?



Case presentation 10-year-old boy

- Adjustment and complex emotions, loss and grief issues
- Separation can be paired with regression, anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, irritability, demanding and non-compliant behaviour, school attendance and learning issues, sleep and appetite changes
- Complex “ugly/ difficult” to bear feelings can surface as difficult behaviour
- Behaviour is communication
- Reassurance, affirmation “this is hard”
- What would make a difference?
- What does child/ mother/ father need?
- Affirm, normalise, empower, activate natural supports.
- Brief screen for their MH and may need to plan separate session



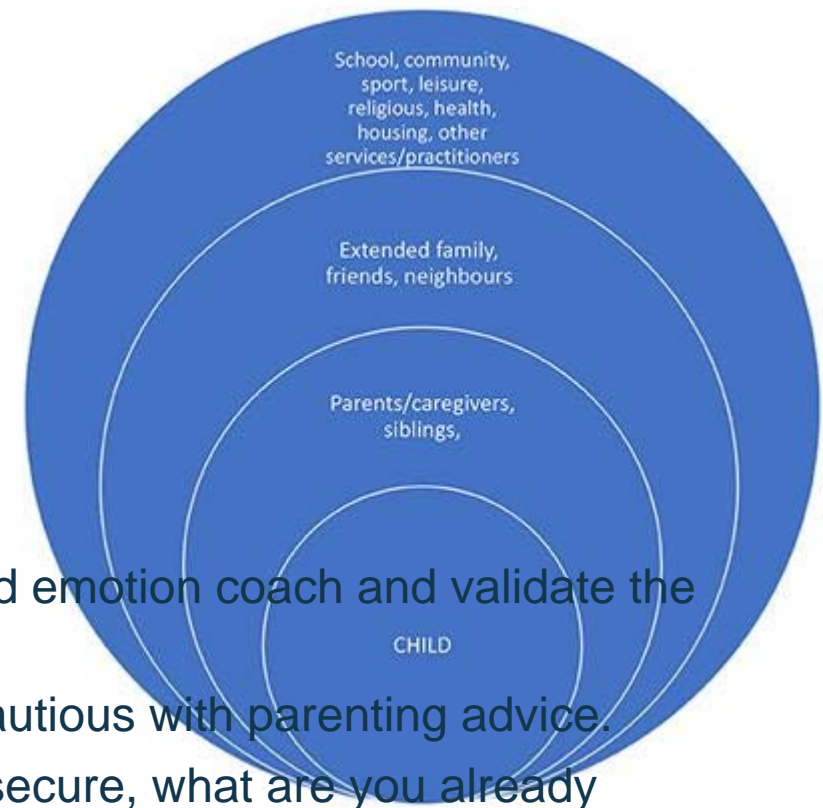
Caveat

- Support systems can be shaken, fractured, take sides, withdraw, be judgemental
- “good” advice is around
- Dealing with child’s distress: parental presence can be jeopardised, especially capacity to co-regulate
- Co-escalation is common
- Times of uncertainty judgement can be jeopardised
- “Am I still a good enough parent?” Parental guilt and shame.



Planning creatively

- What's needed most and by who and who can provide this?
- Who is in the village? Can the village expand?
- How to ensure collaboration in times of relational stress
- How to help the parent manage own emotions, co-parent effectively and emotion coach and validate the child.
- Education. Importance of voice of child, co-parenting in harmony. Be cautious with parenting advice.
- Empower the parent: “what could you do to make your child feel more secure, what are you already doing?”. Offer Hope.
- What are warning signs when normal responses shift to disorder (need for medical/ psychiatric treatment)
- Identify barriers to plan.



Resources

- [Working with separating parents to support children's wellbeing \(emergingminds.com.au\)](http://emergingminds.com.au)
- [EM Paper Separating Parents.pdf \(d2p3kdr0nr4o3z.cloudfront.net\)](https://d2p3kdr0nr4o3z.cloudfront.net/EM_Paper_Separating_Parents.pdf)
- [Parenting After Separation | Focus On Kids \(relationshipsnsw.org.au\)](http://relationshipsnsw.org.au)
- [Supporting kids through separation or divorce | Kids Helpline](http://kids.helpline.org.au)
- [Services for children | Family Relationships Online](http://familyrelationships.org.au)
- <http://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/family-diversity/parenting-after-separation-divorce>
- https://www.interrelate.org.au/programs/parents-not-partners?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI7srt09rR_wlVc8ZMAh0ZpQ8SEAAYAiAAEgl0wvD_BwE
- <https://www.readbrihtly.com/books-kids-whose-parents-divorcing-separating/#>
- <https://www.maggiedent.com/blog/top-tips-list-books-separation-divorce-help-kids/>

