

Webinar 19**Overcoming communication challenges to engage children**

7:15 pm to 8:30 pm AEST
Wednesday, 7th April 2021

**Emerging
Minds.**

**National Workforce
Centre for Child
Mental Health**



Emerging Minds and MHPN wishes to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Australia upon which our webinar presenters and participants are located.

We wish to pay respect to the Elders past, present and future for the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Indigenous Australia.



Welcome to series three

This is the fifth webinar in the third series on child and infant mental health, presented by Emerging Minds and the Mental Health Professionals' Network.

Upcoming webinars in 2021:

Shrinking problems with children and families in June

Series 4 will be:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Making children visible in work with parents
- Looking back, to the present, and forward in work with children and parents

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How to use the platform

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-  ask the panel a question
-  access resources including the case study, panel biographies and supporting resources
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Learning outcomes

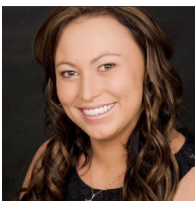
At the webinar's completion, participants will be able to:

- Describe the key strengths and vulnerabilities which influence the mental health of children with complex communication needs.
- Discuss how communication difficulties in children can be interpreted by professionals/parents/family.
- Identify ways of engaging and supporting children with complex communication needs.
- Outline examples of practice which has allowed a strong focus on the mental health and social and emotional needs of children who experience complex communication need.
- Outline examples of practice that has helped parents to support their children to communicate their social and emotional wellbeing needs.



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Tonight's panel



Felicity Kime
Child & Family Partner,
NSW



Mandy Flint
Social Worker, SA



Melissa Saliba
Speech Pathologist, SA



Dr Daniel Moss
EM Workforce Development
Manager, SA



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Changes can create uncertainty



Felicity

Changes

- Absences and changing people in child's life
- Professionals changing – new person each week or every session
- Different assessment and advice from different workers – even from the same profession



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Changes can create uncertainty



Felicity

Impact of changes

- Child has to learn new ways of working and adjusting – can be destabilising, etc.
- Not getting much out of sessions – no progress
- Starting from scratch with each new worker, re-starting and re-informing others
- Repeating our story and trying to remember everything.
- Re-starting work at home based on new worker's advice
- Frustration with content of one hour session that is repeated over time with different workers



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Context can help consistency



Felicity

- Context changes everything – understandings and environments
- Workers see behaviour differently to parents.
 - Check in with the parent first before making an assumption
- Sessions at a service can create uncertainty and instability
 - Engage where the child is comfortable – natural environment, at home
 - Reduce distractions
- Unfamiliar environments can introduce other behaviours that have to be managed while trying to address the behaviour that is the main focus
 - Reduce issues associated with a new environment



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Consideration and collaboration



Felicity

- Acknowledge parents are not trained and don't always know what is being done with their child.
- Engage parent in the process – all steps, not just assessment – so they can learn and contribute to treatment and support.
- Tell parent what you are doing and what the treatment and support should look like.
- Tell parent exactly what is needed for their child – in treatment provided by the worker and at home by the parent.
- A report with detail about what the worker did so that the parent can follow at home after the session
- Consider other workers' assessments and actions to save some overlap and confusion.



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Catching what works



Felicity

Parents can see what a worker is doing is “right” and what “works” from changes they see in their child, for example:

- Speaking more
- Able to do imaginative play
- Learned to take turns



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Catching what works



Felicity

Personal experience of moving between homes (like when Kevin's parents separated):

- Move was easy – only asked to “go home” once because we:
 - Started routine immediately
 - Created his personal space and filled room with familiar items
 - Put familiar play equipment in the outdoor space
 - Spent more time with him which meant more certainty and parent knowledge about behaviour and strategies



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Considerate communicating



Felicity

Demands of initial information gathering and paperwork can be challenging, for example:

- Need to remember everything about child which has to be written into various application forms.
- Workers spend a lot of time collecting information before time is spent with the child.
- Parents can find it difficult to understand what their child is saying, as well as relay that to another person
- Explaining home life adds another dimension and pressure in telling our story



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Child & Family Partner's perspective

Considerate communicating



Felicity

Suggestions for workers:

- Follow up to check if there is additional information that the parent may have forgotten.
- Explore information more in conversation – which also means you can be more engaging.
- Consider parent literacy issues, as well as comfort with talking versus writing and ease of remembering details.



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Social Worker's perspective

Kevin's strengths and vulnerabilities



Mandy

Strengths

- Expressing his needs through picture exchange and behaviour
- Relationship with his mother – safe person?
- Wants to be heard – frustration
- Connected to school
- Mum proactive in identifying that Kevin is not coping and wants him to attend therapy

Vulnerabilities

- Communication skills – needs not met?
- Family tension and separation – Kevin's world feels unsafe, unpredictable
- Father's parenting capacity and relationship with Kevin



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Social Worker's perspective

Interpretation of communication difficulties for Kevin



Mandy



Behaviour is a form of communication – expression of unmet needs.

Communication difficulties does not mean the child doesn't have feelings, thoughts, needs....

Consider the 'unsaid' information!

For Kevin:

- Home may feel unsafe due to tension in the home?
- Grief and loss?
- Self blame about the separation – is it my fault?
- Fear, worry he may not see his father again?



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Social Worker's perspective

Engaging and supporting Kevin



Mandy

- Safety and relationship is key
- Understand Kevin's history and developmental/sensory needs, including his triggers, likes and interests/dislikes – anchor points
- Setting up the space to meet his sensory needs/safety. Utilising picture-based resources such as emotional literacy tools, picture books, talking mats, etc
- Considering neuroception of safety – nervous system (polyvagal theory)
- Engagement with mum as the safe person, acknowledging Kevin and inviting him to join us to ease into the first session



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Social Worker's perspective

Examples of practice



Mandy

- Meet child where they are at
- Tapping in to interests as anchor points for therapy – favourite TV show, soccer etc
- Collaboration – transparent, articulate in developmentally appropriate ways, explicit and concrete understanding
- Role modelling
- Naming emotions, issues, strengths and vulnerabilities – using pictorial tools – cartoon strips, visual stories



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Social Worker's perspective



Mandy

Examples of practice that has helped parents to support their children to communicate their social and emotional wellbeing needs

- Psycho-education – Emotions, neuroception of safety and window of tolerance, safety, behaviour as communication
- Psychosocial supports – whole of family
- Parent wellbeing – what does mum need? Can dad re-engage with support if safe?
- Advocacy and resourcing
- Parent-child relationship repair



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Speech Pathologist's Perspective



Melissa

Communication and Behaviour

Language and behaviour problems often co-occur



- 81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders had significant unidentified communication needs Benner, G.L., Nelson, J.R., & Epstein M.H., (2002)
- 57% of children with diagnosed language deficits had emotional and behavioural disorders Hollo, A, Wehby, J.H. and Oliver, R.M. (2014)



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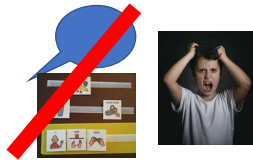
Speech Pathologist's Perspective



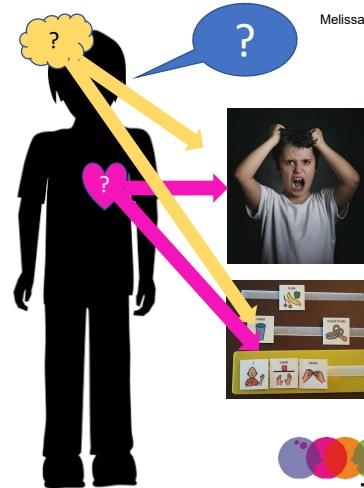
- Recent changes at home
- Possible exposure to verbal/physical aggression from Dad



- Behaviours are worse after school
- Day to day frustrations with communication barriers



- Thoughts/emotions he can't articulate verbally/via PECS
- Thoughts/emotions communicated through behaviour



Melissa

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Speech Pathologist's Perspective Communication Assessment

How?

- In partnership
 - discussions with mum, dad, siblings, school, Kevin, care team
- Observation in different contexts
- Informal/formal communication assessment

Why?

- Understand & establish communication abilities
 - Areas of strength
 - Areas of need or potential skill development
 - Is PECS meeting Kevin's needs?
- Kevin's communication partners
 - How do others interact with him?
 - Impact of different environments
- Unpack the connection between communication and behaviours of concern



Melissa



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Speech Pathologist's Perspective

What is the Function Behind Kevin's Behaviour?



Melissa

Frameworks/principles

- Functional behaviour assessment
- Competing behaviour pathway model
- Multi-disciplinary
- In partnership with key stakeholders

Process

- Information gathering and analysis
- Develop a hypothesis - why is Kevin frustrated/aggressive/reactive?
- A planned, informed and considered approach
- Monitored, evaluated, adjusted



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Speech Pathologist's Perspective

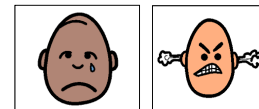
Skill Development & Environmental Modifications



Melissa

Kevin's communication skills

- Expand Kevin's communicative repertoire (vocabulary, gesture, PECS)
- Alternative Augmentative Communication (e.g. PECS/Other device)
- Verbal expression and comprehension



Increase emotional vocabulary (PECS, verbal, gesture) so he can use words instead of behaviour

- Pick a couple of powerful emotion words and play games (utilise his interests) e.g. toys, puzzles, matching
- Introduce these words to his PECS board and model its use during the day

Family and school staff's responsive communicative interactions

- Responding appropriately to his communication
- Noticing Kevin's bids for communication (be it behaviour, PECS, vocalisation, gesture) and responding to them
- Targeting requests and expectations at a level we know Kevin is capable of understanding (e.g. don't give long instructions if he can only understand 2-3 key words)

Adjust the environment to suit his needs and reduce the likelihood of frustration

- Sensory (OT input)
- Adult responsiveness
- Expectations matched to capabilities (with slight stretch ok)



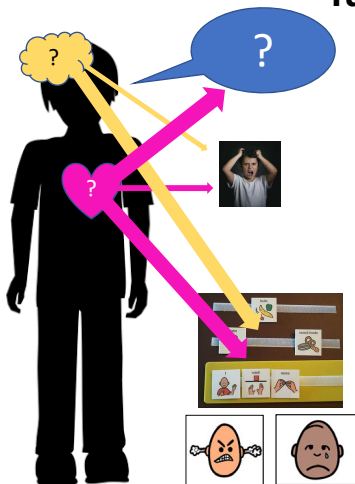
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Speech Pathologist's Perspective



Melissa

Take Home Messages

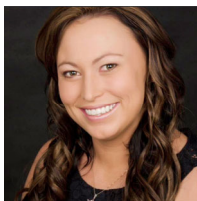


- Behaviour is a form of communication and there is always a reason behind the behaviour
- Thorough assessment informs intervention
- Intervention can include
 - Direct skills development with Kevin
 - Increased adult responsive interactions
 - Education and capacity building for care team/family
 - Environmental modifications
- Aim to reduce the circumstances that lead to frustration and increase Kevin's ability to express emotions in safe and effective ways



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Q&A Session



Felicity Kime
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Resources and further reading

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Upcoming webinars in 2021:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children



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- Statements of Attendance for this webinar will be issued within four - six weeks.
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This webinar was co-produced by MHPN and Emerging Minds for the Emerging Minds: National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (NWCCMH) project.

The NWCCMH is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program.



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Would you like to continue the discussion with local practitioners?

Or perhaps start discussing issues of local relevance? MHPN Project Officers are available to help you establish and /or join interdisciplinary mental health networks across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia, either face to face or online.

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Thank You



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