

Webinar 34

Supporting children's mental health when working with separated parents

7:15 pm to 8:30 pm AEST
Tuesday, 26th September 2023

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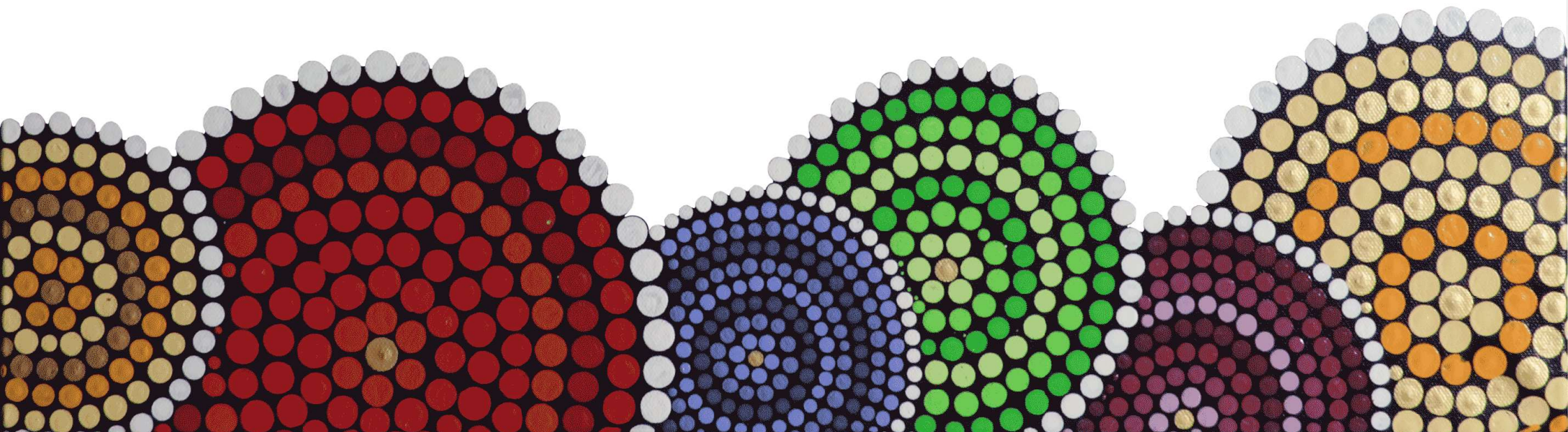
**National Workforce
Centre for Child
Mental Health**



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National Workforce Centre
for Child Mental Health

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Welcome to Series Six

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

Upcoming webinar topics will include:

- Child mental health and ADHD (November, 2023)
- Child mental health in First Nations' communities (February, 2024)
- Understanding children's mental health in culturally diverse communities (April, 2024)
- Practice strategies for children; bullying behaviour (June, 2024)

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Learning outcomes

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

- Outline strategies for supporting parents' wellbeing during separation.
- Discuss strategies for engaging parents to explore, understand and respond to their child's experience of separation.
- Discuss strategies for supporting parents to take a child-focused approach to parenting.

Tonight's panel



Vanya Libardi de Almeida
Child and Family Partner,
SA



Helen McMullan
Service Manager, SA



Roxanne Nathan
Social Worker / Family
Dispute Practitioner, SA



Facilitator:
Chris Dolman
Senior Practice
Development Officer,
SA



The lived experience perspective



Vanya Libardi de Almeida

Strategies for supporting parents' wellbeing during separation

- Build a strong rapport with the parent
- Be observant and curious
- Pick up on signs that the parent may be struggling
- Delve deeper into what may or may not be going on
- Sensitivity is vital
- Focus on the positive actions already being taken by the parent
- Create an action plan and schedule a follow up session
- Provide a variety of support options

The lived experience perspective



Vanya Libardi de Almeida

Strategies for engaging parents to explore, understand and respond to their child's experience of separation

- Discuss ways the parent can speak with their child in an age-appropriate way
- Encourage the parent to not only think about the present situation but look to the future
- Provide information about support groups that the child could become involved in
- Discuss the different approaches to parenting that may be taken
- Provide positive feedback on how the parent is helping their child through the separation

The lived experience perspective



Vanya Libardi de Almeida

Strategies for supporting parents to take a child-focused approach to parenting

- Remind the parent that the focus is on the best interest of the child
- Provide resources that will assist the parent to make appropriate choices regarding parenting
- Build a strong and positive relationship with the child
- Allow the child to speak for themselves
- Create a plan that both the parent and child agree
- Follow up to ensure the parent and child is coping with all the changes that come with separation



The service manager's perspective



Helen McMullan

Strategies for supporting parents' well-being during separation



- **Legal Advice** (Community Legal Centres) – navigate separation to help make informed decisions, reduces stress
- **Family Relationship Centres** for care arrangements and property settlement, individual & family support, information, referrals
- Understand what they will need for themselves to be parenting well – counselling, DV support / safety planning, Conflict Coaching, Parenting Courses, GP, friends and family networks

- **What keeps you going?**
Use your strengths.



The service manager's perspective

Exploring, understanding and responding to their child's experience of separation



Helen McMullan

- Children may have, as a result of high conflict between parents – poor attachment, lost trust, lost confidence in themselves, overwhelmed by their feelings, show distress in bad behaviour, have trouble with friendships, schoolwork
- Have trouble long-term, making healthy adult relationships
- Child Inclusive Mediation – their voice and their experience of separation
- Believing your children
- They will see, hear and feel your stress



The service manager's perspective

Taking a child-focused approach to parenting



Helen McMullan

- Children must be reassured it was not their fault, that both parents love them and will be helping them understand their worries
- To be a good parent to your child, you also need to show your child respect for the other parent (not the conflict) – 1 in 6 children from high conflict families will suffer from poor mental health – higher than the national average of 1:15
- Being future focused – keeping the children's needs as central to their plans
- Co-operative Parenting vs Parallel Parenting vs Conflicted Parenting
- Parenting Groups
- The rights of the child and the responsibility of parents



The social worker / family dispute practitioner's perspective



Roxanne Nathan

Working with parental distress at disclosure

When I read the case of Anne, I'm drawn to the discussion about disclosure to services and professionals who are not post separation, DV or even children's professionals. How can you support distress and disclosure when you are not well versed in this area.

- Be the secure base as a professional
- Don't dismiss the distress
- Get other services involved, don't try and manage alone
- Form collaborative relationships with other service providers particularly the community services and family relationship centres



The social worker / family dispute practitioner's perspective



Roxanne Nathan

What can you do?

- Let the person know you have heard them.
- “This must be a hard time for you, I'm glad you have let me know”.
- “Are you and the kids ok? Is it safe for you to go home today”.
- “If it's not safe to go home, do you have some where safe you can go?”.
- “Do any of your family or close friends know what is going on?”.
- “What would be helpful today?”.



The social worker / family dispute practitioner's perspective



Roxanne Nathan

What if the person is . . .

- Asking questions about separation
- Asking what it might look like
- Asking for general information
- Talking about relationship problems
- Generally testing the water so see how you might react, but they aren't talking about being unsafe or worried about violence.

"Sounds like you have some things happening for you right now, would it be ok if I gave you some information and you can talk to some professionals in the area about how you're going?"

The social worker / family dispute practitioner's perspective



Roxanne Nathan

What are they disclosing, fear of safety or family violence?

- Is there a space in your office where a person could stay and call 1800RESPECT, police or DV hotline?
- Can you make a plan to check in with the client/patient at an agreed time?
- Can you make a time for the client to meet a DV worker at your office?
- Can you make a plan for if that person does not return at the agreed time? Such as a welfare check calling an agreed family member.



The social worker / family dispute practitioner's perspective



Roxanne Nathan

How to support children and young people

- For all children the best support for them is the support of their parents to manage the situation.
- Kids need their parents to be ok and to let them know they and other adults are working on the situation.
- If the parent is telling you that their child is expressing suicide ideation and the child has a plan for self-harm, I typically direct to the ED for urgent assessment.
- If the child is expressing that they are just not coping with what's going on, referrals to school counsellor and/or family relationship centres are useful first referrals.
- If your worried about medical needs, then of course GP is best starting point for further medical referral.
- Kids Helpline is also a great one stop shop for kids in need of some support.



Q&A Session



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Child and Family Partner,
SA



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Future Webinars

Thursday 19th October: *Trauma-informed care: The impact of trauma on the physical body.*

Wednesday 15th November: *Identifying and treating panic disorder.*

November/December (TBC): *Primary health strategies for working with children who present with ADHD concerns.*

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Visit www.mhpn.org.au to join your local network, a number bring together practitioners with a shared interest in young people's mental health.

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