

Siblings' mental health

RESPONDING TO THEIR SUPPORT NEEDS



ISSUE

Siblings of young people experiencing mental ill-health can face their own psychosocial challenges. Most services are focused on the unwell young person and their parents/guardian.

SOLUTION

A family service connection is an opportunity to identify a sibling's support needs. An approach that is acceptable and adaptable is required to support their engagement.

ACTION

Fund the trial of a two-session sibling support model in six youth mental health services.

Session 1: psychoeducation and screening for potential support needs.

Session 2: a follow-up phone call or appointment to explore available options.

OUTCOME

An evaluation of the two-session support model, including feedback from siblings, clinicians and services informs model refinement and Department consideration of program implementation.



An opportunity for early intervention

Young people can be impacted by a sibling's experiences of mental ill-health. This impact can include disruptions to education and/or employment, social isolation, financial strain, and family conflict. Siblings might also provide an unacknowledged caregiving role. Siblings can find it difficult to talk about their needs within their family and can feel their experience differentiates them from their friends. These challenges can leave siblings vulnerable to their own psychosocial difficulties. Despite these difficulties, siblings of young people accessing youth mental health services are largely overlooked.

WHY

Evidence

Siblings of young people with mental ill-health can experience elevated distress and burden, especially during illness onset and relapse.(1) The level of distress is related to the severity of symptoms and illness. Factors such as poor mental health literacy, family communication barriers, and pressure to compensate or take on extra responsibilities can all have an impact on a sibling's wellbeing.(2) Conversely, the ability to balance caring for themselves and others, and to acknowledge positive outcomes like personal growth is linked with increased wellbeing. The focus of family-inclusive practice is often parents and guardians. A service response that recognises the specific and individual needs of siblings is required.

CHALLENGES

Supporting siblings

Family inclusive practice should include siblings. Engagement with siblings is an opportunity to provide them with information and start a conversation about their needs. A two-session model would begin with psychoeducation and screening for support needs, followed by a second session to canvass support options. The option for videoconferencing or a phone call should be available to accommodate participation. The two-session model is a proactive early intervention for siblings.

WHAT

Policy solution

Trial a two-session early intervention model of sibling engagement across six Australian Government funded youth mental health services to test and develop an approach that is acceptable and accessible.

Next steps

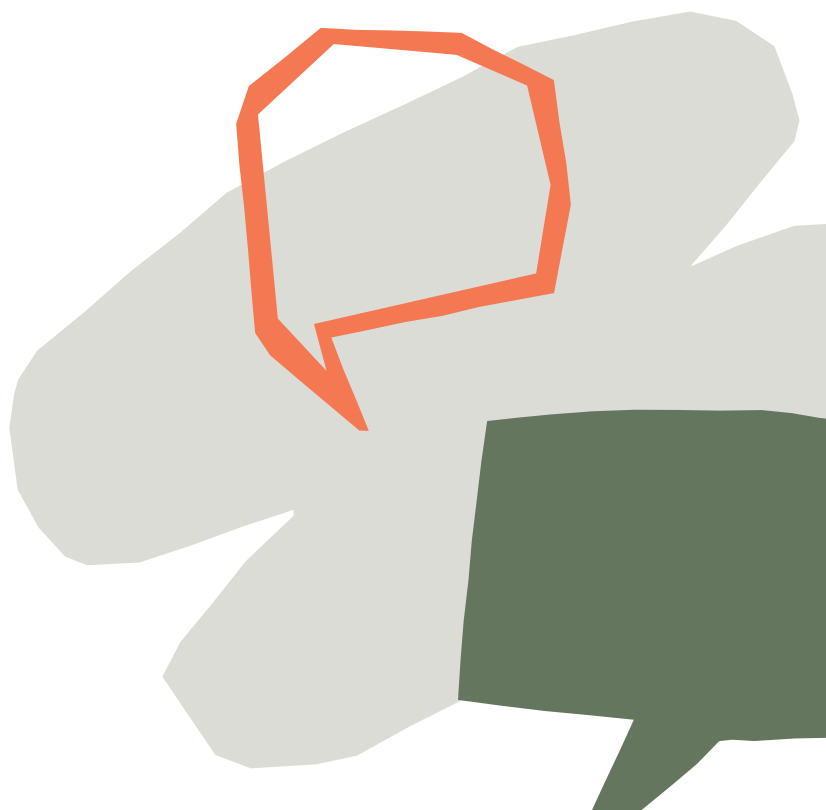
Implementation of existing family-inclusive practice models and guidelines provides a basis on which to provide appropriate information and support to siblings. A funded trial of a brief two-session model will provide evidence for the acceptability and benefits of providing support for siblings.

1. **Fund** the trial of a two-session model providing psychoeducation and active follow up for siblings.
2. **Evaluate** service model and delivery, and family and sibling experiences within the context of youth mental health services.
3. **Assess** implementation evidence to inform a national proposal for consideration by the Department of Health and Aged Care.

Policy solution	Rationale	Outcome
Meeting the psychosocial needs of siblings of young people with a mental illness		
<p>Youth mental health services provide siblings of young people attending a service with psychoeducation and support options.</p> <p>Fund the trial of a two-session early intervention model over 18 months across six youth mental health services.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An initial brief psychoeducation session with their family or individually. 2. Follow-up brief appointment or phone call to discuss available options. <p>The trial evaluation should include a recommendation on the benefits of the initiative and required resources to scale up the model.</p>	<p>Strong sibling relationships are associated with positive psychological outcomes for both siblings. Unfortunately, siblings of young people experiencing mental ill-health are vulnerable to considerable psychosocial adversity.</p> <p>Existing family connection with youth mental health services is an opportunity to remove help-seeking and access barriers to support this important yet largely overlooked cohort.</p>	<p>Evaluation of sibling-focused service engagement in youth mental health services informs model development and Department decision-making.</p>

References

1. Jayasinghe A, Wrobel A, Filia K, Byrne LK, Melvin G, Berk L, et al. Psychological distress in siblings of people with mental illness: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. 2022;57(5):642-60.
2. Baker D. Circle of support: Supporting families and their involvement in youth mental health. Melbourne: Orygen; 2020.





© 2023 Orygen

This publication is copyright. Apart from use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 and subsequent amendments, no part may be reproduced, stored or transmitted by any means without prior written permission of Orygen.

Disclaimer This information is provided for general educational and information purposes only. It is current as at the date of publication and is intended to be relevant for all Australian states and territories (unless stated otherwise) and may not be applicable in other jurisdictions. Any diagnosis and/or treatment decisions in respect of an individual patient should be made based on your professional investigations and opinions in the context of the clinical circumstances of the patient. To the extent permitted by law, Orygen will not be liable for any loss or damage arising from your use of or reliance on this information. You rely on your own professional skill and judgement in conducting your own health care practice. Orygen does not endorse or recommend any products, treatments or services referred to in this information.

Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to Country, which continue to be important to the First Nations people living today.



**REVOLUTION
IN MIND** *ory
gen*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
ORYGEN.ORG.AU/ORYGEN-INSTITUTE

SEND US AN EMAIL TO
POLICY@ORYGEN.ORG.AU

ORYGEN LTD
35 POPLAR ROAD PARKVILLE
VIC 3052 AUSTRALIA

FOLLOW US ON

