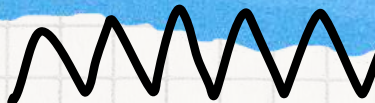


Parenting Assessment in Social Work



MENTAL HEALTH OF A PARENT



Checklist | Questions & Analysis

www.SocialWorkersToolbox.com

PARENTING ASSESSMENT IN SOCIAL WORK

Checklist/questions -

Mental health of a parent

1. History and Nature of Mental Health Difficulties

- How long have you experienced mental health difficulties?
 - Have you been given a formal diagnosis by a mental health professional?
 - What kinds of symptoms or difficulties do you usually experience?
 - Do your symptoms follow a pattern or come and go unpredictably?
 - Have you experienced any past episodes where you needed help or treatment?
 - Have you ever been admitted to hospital due to your mental health? What was that experience like?
-

2. Daily Impact and Emotional Wellbeing

- How does your mental health affect your day-to-day life?
 - Are there days when you feel tired, withdrawn, or overwhelmed?
 - Do you ever find it difficult to manage routines or make decisions?
 - How do your symptoms affect your energy, mood, or ability to focus?
 - Are there particular situations or times that tend to make things worse?
-

3. Parenting and Emotional Availability

- How would you describe your usual daily routine with your child?
 - Do you feel your mental health affects your ability to care for your child?
 - Are there times when it's harder to be patient or emotionally available?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your relationship with your child over time?
 - Are there moments when you feel distant, angry, or unable to connect? What usually causes that?
 - When you're struggling, who looks after your child?
-

4. Role of the Child

- When you're unwell, does your child take on any responsibilities?
 - Do they help around the house or support you emotionally?
 - How do you feel about the role they have when you're struggling?
 - Do you think this role is appropriate for their age?
 - Have you spoken to your child about your mental health in a way they can understand?
-

5. Medication and Treatment

- Are you currently taking any medication to support your mental health?
 - Do you experience any side effects?
 - How regularly do you take your medication?
 - Are there times you choose not to take it? If so, what are the reasons?
 - What tends to happen when you don't take it?
 - Have you tried any other forms of treatment or support (e.g. talking therapies, groups)?
-

6. Insight and Willingness to Engage with Support

- How would you describe your understanding of your own mental health?
 - Do you think it affects your parenting or your child's wellbeing?
 - Are you currently in contact with any professionals or support services?
 - Are you open to accepting help or engaging with services if things become difficult?
 - Have you ever felt unsure about whether to seek help when struggling?
-

7. Support Networks

- Who supports you when you are struggling—family, friends, professionals?
- Do you have people you trust who can help with childcare if needed?
- Have you ever had access to respite or a break from parenting when you were unwell?
- What role do your support people play in your child's life?

8. Impact on Other Parent/Carer (if applicable)

- Is there another parent or carer who shares responsibility for your child?
 - How does your mental health affect their role in the family?
 - Do they take on more parenting tasks when you're unwell?
 - How do you think this affects their relationship with the child?
 - Do they ever seem overwhelmed or overly focused on supporting you?
 - Do they carry the main responsibility for discipline or rule-setting?
-

9. Planning and Safety

- What happens to your child if you become very unwell or need to go to hospital?
- Have you made any plans or arrangements for their care during these times?
- Do you feel your home is safe and calm when you're experiencing mental health difficulties?
- Have professionals helped you plan for emergencies or times of crisis?

GUIDANCE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Analysing responses - **Mental health of a parent**

1. History and Nature of Mental Health Difficulties

What this might show about the parent:

A long history of mental health difficulties may suggest ongoing or recurring challenges that could affect the parent's availability and consistency. If the parent can describe their diagnosis and experiences openly, this suggests insight and willingness to engage. If they are vague, minimising, or avoidant, it may indicate discomfort, denial, or lack of understanding about their condition.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children may have experienced changes in routines, emotional unpredictability, or parental absence due to episodes of illness or hospitalisation. Without consistent, attuned care, children can develop anxiety or mistrust. A parent who lacks insight into the nature or impact of their illness may struggle to offer stable parenting, especially during relapses.

2. Daily Impact and Emotional Wellbeing

What this might show about the parent:

Describing day-to-day difficulties such as low energy, lack of motivation, or emotional withdrawal can reveal how much the parent's functioning is affected. Identifying clear triggers shows developing self-awareness. Downplaying symptoms may mask significant challenges or reflect avoidance.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Mental health difficulties that disrupt daily routines can lead to inconsistent parenting, missed meals, irregular bedtimes, and reduced supervision. Children may feel insecure or confused if they can't rely on their parent to be emotionally or physically present. They may also internalise blame for their parent's struggles.

3. Parenting and Emotional Availability

What this might show about the parent:

A parent who can acknowledge how their mood, energy or emotional state affects their parenting shows insight. Recognition of the need for support during harder times

indicates protective capacity. In contrast, parents who deny any impact may lack awareness of their child's needs or the emotional effects of their condition.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Emotional availability is essential for secure attachment. If a parent is often withdrawn, irritable, or overwhelmed, children may feel emotionally neglected or confused. This can affect their self-esteem, behaviour, and ability to trust others. Knowing who steps in when the parent struggles is key to understanding the child's level of care and protection.

4. Role of the Child

What this might show about the parent:

When children take on adult responsibilities (e.g. emotional support, household tasks), this may indicate role-reversal. Parents who are aware of this dynamic and express concern often show emotional insight. Those who see it as normal or helpful may overlook the burden placed on the child.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children who adopt a caregiving role may become anxious, overly responsible, or withdrawn. They may suppress their own needs, miss out on childhood experiences, and struggle in peer relationships. The risk of emotional harm increases when boundaries are blurred and the child becomes the parent's main source of support.

5. Medication and Treatment

What this might show about the parent:

Regular medication use with knowledge of its effects shows commitment to managing the condition. Side effects like fatigue or emotional numbness may also influence parenting. Choosing not to take medication without alternative support strategies may increase risk.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Unmanaged symptoms due to skipped medication can lead to emotional outbursts, low functioning, or hospitalisation, leaving the child without consistent care. Awareness and management of treatment needs improve predictability and safety for the child.

6. Insight and Willingness to Engage with Support

What this might show about the parent:

Openness to help and recognition of the impact on parenting are key indicators of protective capacity. Parents who express doubt about seeking support may face barriers

such as stigma, mistrust, or past negative experiences. Lack of engagement or denial can pose long-term risks to stability.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children benefit when their parent is linked into services and has a clear support plan. If the parent resists help or lacks understanding of the illness, children may experience instability, emotional strain, or a lack of appropriate care when their parent is unwell.

7. Support Networks

What this might show about the parent:

A strong network—family, friends, or professionals—suggests protective factors that can reduce risk during crises. If no trusted adults are available to help with childcare, the parent and child may be isolated and vulnerable. The quality and involvement of these supports matters as much as their presence.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Supportive networks help to buffer children from the impacts of their parent's mental health. A child with other caring adults in their life is less likely to experience neglect or emotional harm during difficult times.

8. Impact on Other Parent/Carer (if applicable)

What this might show about the parent:

If one parent is overwhelmed or takes on more parenting responsibilities, this can affect their relationship with the child. Insight from the unwell parent into this dynamic suggests awareness and a willingness to support co-parenting. When both parents are stressed or focused solely on managing the illness, the child may receive minimal emotional attention.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children in these households may lack consistent, emotionally available caregiving. They may experience conflict, confusion, or divided loyalties. If discipline and support are unbalanced between carers, it can create strain in the parent-child relationship.

9. Planning and Safety

What this might show about the parent:

Parents who have made plans for times of crisis or hospital admission show strong protective insight. Those who have received help from professionals in planning indicate engagement and readiness to manage future risks. A lack of planning or refusal to consider future needs may put the child at risk during unexpected deterioration.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children need to know they will be safe and cared for if their parent becomes unwell.

Having a clear plan with known, trusted carers reduces anxiety and prevents crisis-driven interventions. Without planning, children may face sudden disruption, confusion, or unsafe situations.

SEE OUR WEBSITES FOR MORE **FREE** RESOURCES

1 WWW.SOCIALWORKERSTOOLBOX.COM



2 WWW.ANXIETYHELPBOX.COM



3 WWW.FEELINGSHELPBOX.COM



©EDITA STIBOROVA (2025) THIS PRINTABLE PDF DOCUMENT CAN BE USED AT NO CHARGE BY INDIVIDUALS AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS FOR THEIR WORK WITH FAMILIES AND/OR TRAINING AS WELL AS UPLOADED TO OTHER WEBSITES PROVIDING THAT NO CHANGES ARE MADE TO ITS CONTENT.