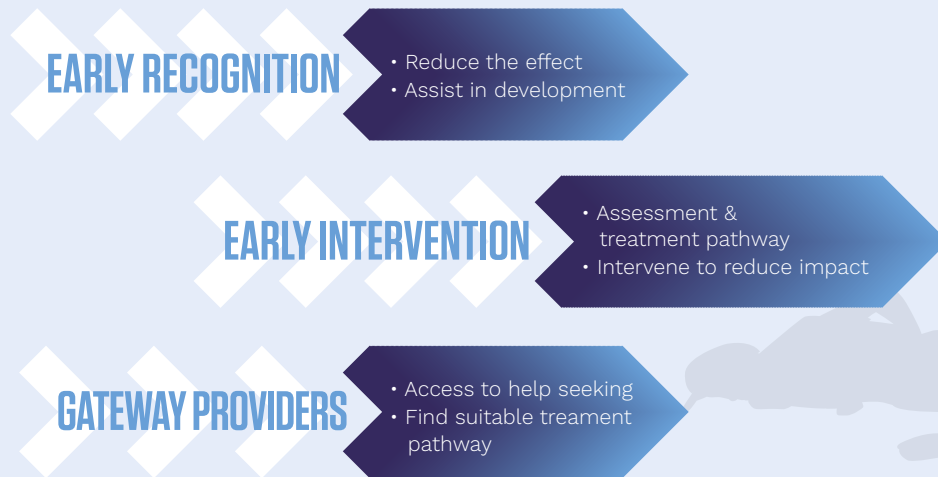


EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS

Caregivers are **'gateway providers'** for children's access to services. As 'gateway providers' caregivers help-seeking behaviours can influence whether a child obtains help or not. Therefore, it is crucial that these people have mental health knowledge to recognise persistent and concerning behaviours as a sign a child may be experiencing mental health difficulties and seek suitable professional support.

The term **'Mental Health difficulties'** covers a broad range of emotional and behavioural difficulties that cause concern or distress, and frequently affect children's learning as well as their behaviour in different settings. One way to understand mental health in early childhood is through a risk and protective factors framework.



RISK FACTORS

- Difficult temperament
- Low self-esteem
- Negative thinking style

CHILD

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Easy temperament
- Good social and emotional skills
- Optimistic coping style

- Family disharmony, instability or break up
- Harsh or inconsistent discipline style
- Parent/s with mental illness or substance abuse

FAMILY

- Family harmony and stability
- Supportive parenting
- Strong family values

- Peer rejection
- School failure
- Poor connection at school

SCHOOL

- Positive school climate that enhances belonging and connectedness

- Difficult school transition
- Death of a family member
- Emotional trauma

LIFE EVENTS

- Involvement with caring adult
- Support available at critical times

- Discrimination
- Isolation
- Socioeconomic disadvantage
- Lack of access to support services

SOCIAL

- Participation in community networks
- Access to support services
- Economic security
- Strong cultural identity and pride



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EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS

It is important to understand that while some behaviours are linked to the developmental stage of children, others are signs that are present in a child who may be experiencing mental health difficulties.

THE SIGNS

Not a checklist but things to keep an eye on



- Difficulty adjusting to new situations
- Inability to form relationships
- Excessive violence towards other children
- Significant & age inappropriate separation anxiety
- Very withdrawn behaviour
- Drastic changes in behaviour or personality
- Severe mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Persistent nightmares
- Loss of interest in favourite activities
- Consistent physical pain (headaches or stomach aches)
- Loss of appetite for extended period

Young children rely on caregivers to identify their problems and carry out the help seeking process when experiencing difficulties – we call this role being a ‘gateway provider’.

It is a critical role as you can significantly impact whether your child receives the necessary support (or not) to address their mental health difficulties.

Important to understand that no one situation will be the same and it’s critical that you adjust your approach and alter the language and behaviours you use as to be an effective gateway provider.

Remember that sometimes as a caregivers you can’t fix the problem, when this occurs your role is to help your child find the support/help they need.

Educating the community about mental health issues can help overcome many barriers to help seeking – hence the importance of this program.

The most important factor related to parents seeking help is those recognising the signs of mental health difficulties.

If there are any concerns please contact me at support@lovemeloveyou.org.au

