

Parenting intervention for adolescents with complex medico-psychosocial presentations

Background

Complex medico-psychosocial symptoms impair adolescent functioning across multiple life domains including schooling, socialising and physical and mental health. While typically intervention focuses on the adolescent themselves, it is important to recognise that adolescents sit within a family system. Intervention should address the whole system to provide more robust and comprehensive treatment.

Approach

The complex adolescent clinic has acknowledged and responded to the need to address adolescents within their family system via two avenues: 1) providing family therapy based on the parent hope project and 2) running online parent groups for waitlist families. Family therapy aims to help parents recognise their role in supporting and influencing the trajectory of functional recovery. Education sessions aim to educate and empower parents to independently begin the functional recovery process. Sessions focus on psychoeducation on the brain-body connection, shifting focus from symptoms to function, and learning about sleep hygiene, pacing, relaxation, nutrition and schooling supports.

Outcome

Having parents engaged in sessions has helped to translate treatment principles to the home environment. Running parenting interventions prior to attending our clinic helps to both ensure that the family are on board with our model of care, but also to fast-track progress by identifying a family's capacity to implement treatment principles and barriers from the outset.

Innovation

Recognising that family systems influence a young person's recovery is not novel in the mental health space. However, implementing family therapy approaches is unique within a medical model. We hope to demonstrate that a family systems approach can be effective for complex medico-psychosocial symptoms as well.

Significance

Adolescents with complex medico-psychosocial symptoms can experience burnout in trying multiple adolescent-focused interventions. Shifting to a family focus helps to alleviate pressure on the young person to "fix" the symptoms and increase their supports via the people that know them best, their family.