

Strengthening Family Relationships – Making a Difference

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Overview

- **Broadly: challenges and strategies associated with encouraging individuals to engage in prevention and early intervention strategies:**
 - ◆ **What is family and couple wellbeing?**
 - ◆ **What limits willingness to proactively seek help?**
 - ◆ **Practice issues and examples that address these.**



Couple & family wellbeing

- **Couple – stable relationship is one where both are satisfied & both want it to continue (Halford, 1999)**
- **Family wellbeing – difficult to define because**
 - ◆ **Contemporary families are complex**
 - ◆ **Children, adolescents & adults view them differently**
 - ◆ **Many statistics but no national picture of wellbeing**



Possible framework

- **Need for a framework for family wellbeing, to inform family research, policy & practice**
- **Families Australia - aspects of family life strengthened by service provision:**
 - ◆ **Physical safety, physical & mental health**
 - ◆ **Supportive intra-family rshps**
 - ◆ **Social connections outside family, in community**
 - ◆ **Economic security & independence**

(Source: Babbington, 2006)



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Families' views on strengths

- **Qualities of “Strong families”:**
 - ◆ **Communication**
 - ◆ **Support**
 - ◆ **Togetherness**
 - ◆ **Acceptance**
 - ◆ **Sharing activities**
 - ◆ **Commitment**
 - ◆ **Affection**
 - ◆ **Resilience**
- **May differ for different family types**

(Source: Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle)



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Summary

- **A number of frameworks exist to consider couple and family wellbeing**
- **Importance of gaining family views**
- **Difficulty in finding single framework - problem for policy/practice**
- **Question remains - prevention/early intervention - how engage people without problems?**



Help-seeking

- **Barriers:**
 - ◆ **Stigma**
 - ◆ **Gender**
 - ◆ **Indigenous Australians**
 - ◆ **Other issues & challenges**
- **Need multi-faceted approach -- individual, family, service, policy, etc.**



Responses - individual/family/service

- **Address stigma**
 - Universal programs, e.g. Mindmatters
 - More complex for adults (not captive), e.g. beyondblue
 - Increase profile of programs in FRSP as “good sense”
 - Intersectoral collaboration - with marketing, IT
- **Hard-to-reach groups - examples**
- **Challenges for services**



Responses - government

- ◆ Question - what is “Family Policy”?
- ◆ Key family policy issues: intervene early; quality and content of interventions; preventing conflict & stability
- ◆ Understanding of “family”
- ◆ Broader policy environment - e.g. employment, taxation, education, child care.
- ◆ Individualism vs. optimal conditions for families



Summary

- **Very complex area - not covered cultural, work-family, etc.**
- **Stigma surrounding help-seeking a key issue**
- **Multifaceted approach - ideally based on family wellbeing framework.**
- **Use of alternative strategies, such as Internet-based information**
- **Collaborations with marketing, IT, others.**

