

Supporting staff to work with children and families with complex needs: Checklist for organisations

This checklist can be used in any way that helps organisations to support their staff to work with children and families with complex needs (e.g. to stimulate new ideas, guide an audit of organisational processes, structure conversations in planning meetings). It is likely that individual organisations will find some of the suggested actions more relevant than others.

	Relevant	Not relevant	Actions
Organisational culture			
Conduct a review of organisational culture in regard to working with families with complex needs, ensuring that all staff are involved in evaluating current organisational strengths and challenges.			
Develop a lived experience panel, comprising children and families who access services, which can contribute to understanding and changing organisational culture.			
If significant changes in organisational culture are required, develop a change management plan that incorporates space for staff at all levels to discuss challenges, frustrations and successes.			
Ensure that all managers, practice leaders, and other decision-makers (including those planning services and negotiating contracts) are aware of, and informed by, the evidence base and theory on best practice when working with families with complex needs.			
Encourage a core group of staff to explore the evidence and theory on designing services and supports for families with complex needs. These staff may form an expert group on the topic within the organisation.			
Ensure that managers, practice leaders and other decision-makers acknowledge and discuss the challenges of understanding and addressing how best to work with families with complex needs (e.g. by raising it as a topic at all-staff meetings or on planning days).			
Ensure that publicly available information on the organisation (e.g. on a website) acknowledges and accurately reflects the support being provided to families living and parenting in adversity.			
Policies and procedures			
Conduct an audit of existing policies and procedures related to working with families with complex needs, including those on: models of care; management lines and position responsibilities; service eligibility criteria; referral protocols; recruitment; training; supervision; interagency collaboration; staff wellbeing; and data management.			

Introduce or modify policies and procedures as necessary, ensuring staff at all levels of the organisation are included in the process, and are able to provide ongoing feedback.			
Ensure that policy and procedure documents are clear, concise, relevant, and easily accessible to all staff.			
Given the complex changes that regularly occur in policy and practice, schedule periodic review and revision of all organisational policies and procedures.			

Recruitment, retention and training

Articulate the organisation's desired qualifications, professional experience, and personal qualities required for positions involving working with families with complex needs. Ensure that staff who will be hiring and negotiating contracts (e.g. Human Resources staff) understand the nature of staff that are being sought.			
Provide realistic position descriptions, which clearly identify that staff will be working with families with complex needs, and which outline the roles and tasks associated with such work.			
During interviews for new staff, ask interviewees about their experiences of, and ideas about, working with families with complex needs.			
During the induction phase for new staff, outline how the organisational culture and policies and procedures acknowledge and reinforce the idea that a focus on addressing complex needs is central to the organisation.			
As part of the recruitment and selection process, identify new staff members' training needs, particularly in relation to working with families with complex needs. During the induction phase for new staff, identify how the organisation and new staff member will build the requisite skill set.			
Conduct (and regularly review) an organisational staff training needs analysis, designed to identify the ongoing training needs of all existing staff.			
Based on the staff needs analysis, develop (or modify) a staff training schedule. This schedule will likely include focus on the effects of family problems (e.g. mental health difficulties, substance use, domestic and family violence) on children, family relationships, and parenting practices.			

Supervision

Conduct interviews with frontline staff and their supervisors to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current supervision practices in the organisation, as well as opportunities for improvement.			
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Provide training for all supervisors, with a focus on developing the skill sets and practice frameworks required to supervise staff who work with families with complex needs.			
Develop a formalised organisational infrastructure to support the supervision process, including regularly updated policies and procedures, supervision guidelines or manuals, practice development opportunities for senior and supervising staff, and ongoing administrative support.			
Develop an array of supervision and support options to be offered to all staff, including supervision with supervisors external to the organisation, peer supervision, and debriefing.			
Provide meta-supervision (i.e. supervision of supervision), which normally involves highly experienced external consultants.			
Collaboration			
Ensure that staff in the organisation have opportunities, and are supported, to share their knowledge and expertise, both within and across teams.			
Assist staff to develop a working knowledge of the other health and welfare services in the local area (e.g. by building this into an induction program).			
Establish clear referral procedures, and maintain an up-to-date list of referral organisations. Actively build relationships with these referral organisations, for example by providing clear information about the services offered and how to access them.			
Provide members of a lived experience panel with opportunities to share with management and staff what has worked and not worked for them in terms of collaboration with service providers.			
Facilitate and participate in informal relationship-building activities with other organisations (e.g. breakfast meetings).			
Develop formal interagency collaborations. Ensure that all parties are clear about the specific responsibilities of their organisations, and that there are mechanisms for regular communication and information sharing between organisations.			
In organisations that are geographically isolated, consider using teleconferencing or web-based services to facilitate collaboration with other organisations.			

Staff wellbeing			
Assist all managers, practice leaders and other decision-makers to understand that supporting staff wellbeing involves both social/emotional support and instrumental support, and that maintaining their own wellbeing is central to their capacity to support staff wellbeing.			
Provide managers, practice leaders, supervisors and all staff with training on providing social/emotional support (e.g. providing recognition, encouragement, care and respect) and identifying staff stress, burnout and vicarious trauma.			
Establish an organisation-wide initiative to promote staff wellbeing and self-care. Such an initiative would involve both internal and external (e.g. an Employee Assistance Program [EAP]) supports. It may include activities such as lunchtime yoga or mindfulness.			
Promote an organisational culture that recognises and rewards good work.			
Develop policies and procedures relating to work/life balance, staff turnover, stress, burnout, and vicarious trauma.			
Data, evaluation and innovation			
Conduct an organisation-wide audit of data collection and management processes (e.g. what data is collected, for what purposes, how is it used, how could data systems be improved).			
Integrate data collected in other health and welfare sectors (e.g. child protection, criminal justice, housing, education) to provide a more complete picture of clients' needs.			
Monitor and evaluate all organisational initiatives (e.g. staff training, wellbeing programs, interagency collaborations) and programs (i.e. services offered to families with complex needs) to assess the impact they have had on staff, service provision, and client outcomes.			
Develop processes or platforms for sharing information (e.g. shared care plans) between collaborating organisations (while paying attention to issues of consent and confidentiality).			
Ensure the results of data collection and analysis are fed back to staff to support reflective practice and service innovation.			
Encourage a culture of innovation within the organisation (e.g. by rewarding initiative, offering seed funding for new programs).			

This checklist was created as part of Emerging Minds' practice paper, 'Supporting staff to work with children and families with complex needs: A checklist for organisations'.
 Read and download the full paper at emergingminds.com.au/resources