

# Introduction to Parent Hope Project

*A program to restore a parent's confidence in their capacity to assist their struggling child or adolescent.*

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An introductory and then six-session, individualised coaching program for parents who have a young person struggling with mental health and/or social/behavioural symptoms.

The meetings are designed to provide parents with guidelines to optimize the way they support their young person's wellbeing.

Parents are helped to cope with their feelings and reactions towards their symptomatic child/adolescent and to consider their role in encouraging their child's/young person's potential for healthy development.

## **It aims to:**

- Optimize the way you support your child/young person's wellbeing
- Shift focus to yourself rather than trying to change the young person
- Promote more autonomy and responsibility in your child/young person through how you manage yourself
- Help you get back on track as a loving and firm leader
- Establish a longer-term project of parent leadership. This is not a quick fix, but with changes to old patterns of interaction, the child is helped to gradually improve the way they manage their own life challenges.

## **Key message**

Parents are not to blame for their young person's difficulties since many complex factors contribute to symptom development – including genetics and the child's broader family and social environment. However, parents can play an important part towards symptom reduction by adjusting how they interact with their young person.

## **Hope building: From child project to parent project**

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It's natural to want to fix and change a child/adolescent who is struggling to manage life. Hence it may be a surprise to hear that this program is designed to focus on the parent rather than to try to change the young person. A repeated idea in this program is that when parents shift their energies away from trying to fix or change their child and invest in what is in their control as parents, new hopeful pathways open up. Changing another is outside of anyone's control, whereas changing self is always achievable. When a parent discovers ways they can promote more autonomy and responsibility in their child/adolescent, through how they manage themselves, it can recover a

parent's confidence. It doesn't promise a quick fix for the young person but it does enable the parent to get back on track as a loving and firm leader. Usually after some initial protests from the young person as they experience changes to old patterns of interaction, the parent begins to observe their child/adolescent beginning to manage their own life challenges more successfully. Even gradual changes can make a huge difference to a young person's path towards adulthood. Information pages are available to assist with the parent's change efforts.

## Program structure

### INTRODUCTION

An opportunity to ask questions and help your coach to understand your particular family story.

#### STAGE 1: SESSIONS 1-3

##### **Stepping back: Observation and awareness**

Learning to observe the parent-child interactions when stress is high

Parents are assisted to:

- Find the most effective ways to lower the high stress of caring for a symptomatic young person
- Understand the child/adolescent's developmental stage and how this shapes parenting, to grant appropriate independence and to foster connection with the young person
- Consider any patterns that might be fuelling tension in the parent/carer partnership
- To identify any patterns that may be triggering increased dependency or reactivity in the child/adolescent
- Distinguish between what is within a parent's control and what is not.

#### STAGE 2: SESSIONS 4-6

##### **Stepping up: Adjusting self**

Learning to adjust parent interactions to promote the young person's growth in responsibility and wellbeing

Parents are assisted to:

- Experiment with acting only on what is in a parent's control
- Reduce unhelpful tensions with the other parent
- Experiment with ways to connect without intensity
- To be able to hold one's own limits with the child/adolescent without creating a power struggle
- Be able to say what I am willing to do as a supportive parent and what I'm not willing to allow as a loving parent
- Set a realistic action plan for maintaining progress.

This program can be equally useful for one or both parents to attend. It can be very helpful for just one parent to work on changing the way they manage interactions. As one person changes, others in the family make adjustments that can lead to a healthier family.

At the end of the program, parents are offered a review session and are then encouraged to take some time to observe and experiment with changes they have made. They will then be given the opportunity to continue in parent coaching to consolidate the ideas of the Parent Hope Project. In Part 2 of the Parent Hope Project, parents will have the opportunity to explore more deeply their understanding of their child's vulnerabilities and how they can continue to assist in their child's improved wellbeing.