

Social Workers in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

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Introduction

Social Workers in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) aim to work in partnership with service users, colleagues on multi-disciplinary teams and professionals in other services to identify needs, to facilitate emotional support and effective interventions for children and young people from infancy to 18 years of age, and their families. The guiding principle is one of empowerment in the promotion and maintenance of the clients' positive mental health. The ability to work in and with the whole context or situation is an important distinguishing characteristic of Social Work practice. An essential part of the work includes a collaborative assessment and diagnostic process with the client, the family and other relevant members of the child's network such as teachers and community support personnel. Follow up work is primarily focussed on providing therapy and counselling services. Another core element of Social Work within CAMHS is in facilitating therapeutic and psycho-educational groups for children, adolescents and parents. We also respond to requests from schools, residential childcare units and child protection social workers for support and consultation around management of mental health issues.

What types of issues do Social Workers deal with?

Social Workers in CAMHS assist with difficulties such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), emotional and behavioural problems, anxiety related disorders,

depression, OCD, eating disorders, oppositional disorders, Psychosis, self-harm, attempted suicide and suicidal thinking, Autism, Aspergers Syndrome, learning difficulties and any other mental health difficulties that significantly impact on the lives of children and families.

Framework and Values of Social Work Practice:

- Collaborative model of practice involving the parent/carer, the child, the practitioner, colleagues on the multi-disciplinary team and other professionals.
- Client centred approach to assessment, diagnosis and intervention.
- Respect for the client's right to self-determination, privacy/confidentiality.
- Anti-discriminatory practice.
- Empowerment of the client and advocacy for the client's rights.

The Social Work assessment process involves:

- Exploring an individual and family history.
- Identifying significant stresses for the individual and family.
- Assessing the relationships, supports, resources, strengths, and social networks.
- Analysis of needs.
- Focusing on repeated patterns of behaviours and relationship.
- Assessing attachment related difficulties.
- Evaluating past and current strategies being used to resolve the presenting problems.
- Formulating an agreed understanding of the issues with the client

Following the assessment phase:

A CAMHS social worker becomes involved in the following tasks:

- Discussing any relevant diagnosis issues
- Collaborating on an intervention plan
- Agreeing goals for the proposed intervention.
- Advocating on behalf of clients by assisting in accessing useful resources

Intervention often focuses on problem solving and change management, building on strengths and fostering the child/young person's and the parents/carers competencies, self-development potential and on promoting positive relationships.

Evidence Based Practice

Social work assessment and intervention is based on a systematic body of knowledge and practice methods. The commitment to evidence based practice and the need for researching and understanding their intervention choices is central to the Social Work service.

Similar to other disciplines Social Work interventions rely on a variety of evidence based therapeutic approaches and models. Many of the Social Workers working within CAMHS teams are qualified therapists with dual training in one or more models of practice, some of which are listed below. This list gives an insight into the variety of approaches that inform Social Work practice.

- Systemic Psychotherapy (Family Therapy)
- Counselling
- Solution Focused Therapy (SFT).
- Psychoanalytic psychotherapy
- Play psychotherapy
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

- Therapeutic or Psycho-educational Group work (for example, Parents Plus Programmes and the Working Things Out Adolescent Programme)
- Behavioural models including behaviour management techniques such as “Time Out” and “Star Charts”.
- Marte Meo approaches to parent/child relationships and behaviour problems
- Therapeutic technology (use of therapeutic computer programmes in interventions).

CAMHS and the legal framework.

The work of all practitioners (Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Social Work, Psychiatry etc) within CAMHS in Ireland takes place in the legal context of the Child Care Act (1991), the Children First Guidelines (1999), the Mental Health Act (2001) and the Vision for Change policy document (2006). Within the multi-disciplinary team, the Social Worker can provide support to colleagues in managing child protection issues and family law practice and concerns. Where there are concerns about abuse or neglect, the mental health professional is required to share information with the child protection social work services, whether or not the client is in agreement with this action. Such concerns are shared with the client and the practitioner informs them about the action they plan to take in advance of contacting the HSE Social Work department. The referral to the HSE is usually made by the professional to whom the concerns present or to whom the information is disclosed by the child, parent/carer, family member or other.

Social workers in CAMHS are part of a highly skilled and qualified profession promoting empowerment, equality and social justice for individuals, families and communities to enhance well-being.