

Webinar: Understanding and supporting **infant and child mental health**

With Emerging Minds and Parenting Research Centre
Thursday 29th January 2026

During the session:

- The session will be recorded
- Your microphones and cameras are off
- Ask questions in the chat
- We will answer questions at the end

After the session you will receive:

- A link to view the webinar recording
- A text document summary of the webinar content
- Q&A summary with answers to any questions we don't get to today



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Agenda

Cath Webb and Anabel Mifsud (*Parenting Research Centre*)

- Introductions
- About Emerging Minds, the Parenting Research Centre, and the project

Specialist Presentation from Julie Ngwabi (*Emerging Minds*)

- Child Mental Health and Disability
- Emerging Minds resources
- Next steps



Presenters

Catherine Webb

Assistant Implementation Specialist
Parenting Research Centre

Anabel Mifsud

Assistant Practice Design Specialist
Parenting Research Centre

Julie Ngwabi

Senior Child Mental Health Advisor - Health
National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health



Emerging Minds

- Leads the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health with key partners
- Assists organisations and workforces with resources and strategies to understand the role they can play to support infant and child mental health
- Funded by Department of Health (under the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program – Workforce Initiative)
- [Emerging Minds - Advancing Australian children's mental health](#)

Parenting Research Centre

- 30 years working across research, evaluation, knowledge synthesis, practice design, parenting support, and implementation
- Drawing on research, practice knowledge, and lived experience to develop evidence-informed approaches to support practitioners working with children and families
- ***We help children thrive by driving new and better ways to support families in their parenting.***
- [Home • Parenting Research Centre](#)



National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention

National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Child and Family Centred

Connection and Collaboration

Culture and Diversity

Outcomes and Evidence

Participation and Everyday Settings

Rights based

Relationships based

Ecologically based

Strengths based

Principles and Practices

Emerging Minds' 10 Guiding Principles of Children's Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Work Topics Archive - Emerging Minds

Cultural and spiritual identity

Trauma informed

Prevention and early intervention

The child and their local ecology

Relationships matter

Strengths and vulnerabilities

Resilience

Developmental perspective

Children's rights

Child, family, and practitioner voice

Introductions

Julie Ngwabi

Senior Child Mental Health
Advisor; Health



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Learning outcomes

1. Discuss the child mental health continuum and explore it in the context of the Whole Child concept.
2. Explore what supports positive child mental health.
3. Explain the parent – child loop.
4. Introduce and explain the PERCS Conversation guide, a psychosocial tool that support strength-based conversations with parents.
5. Highlight other Emerging Minds resources that can support working with children and families.

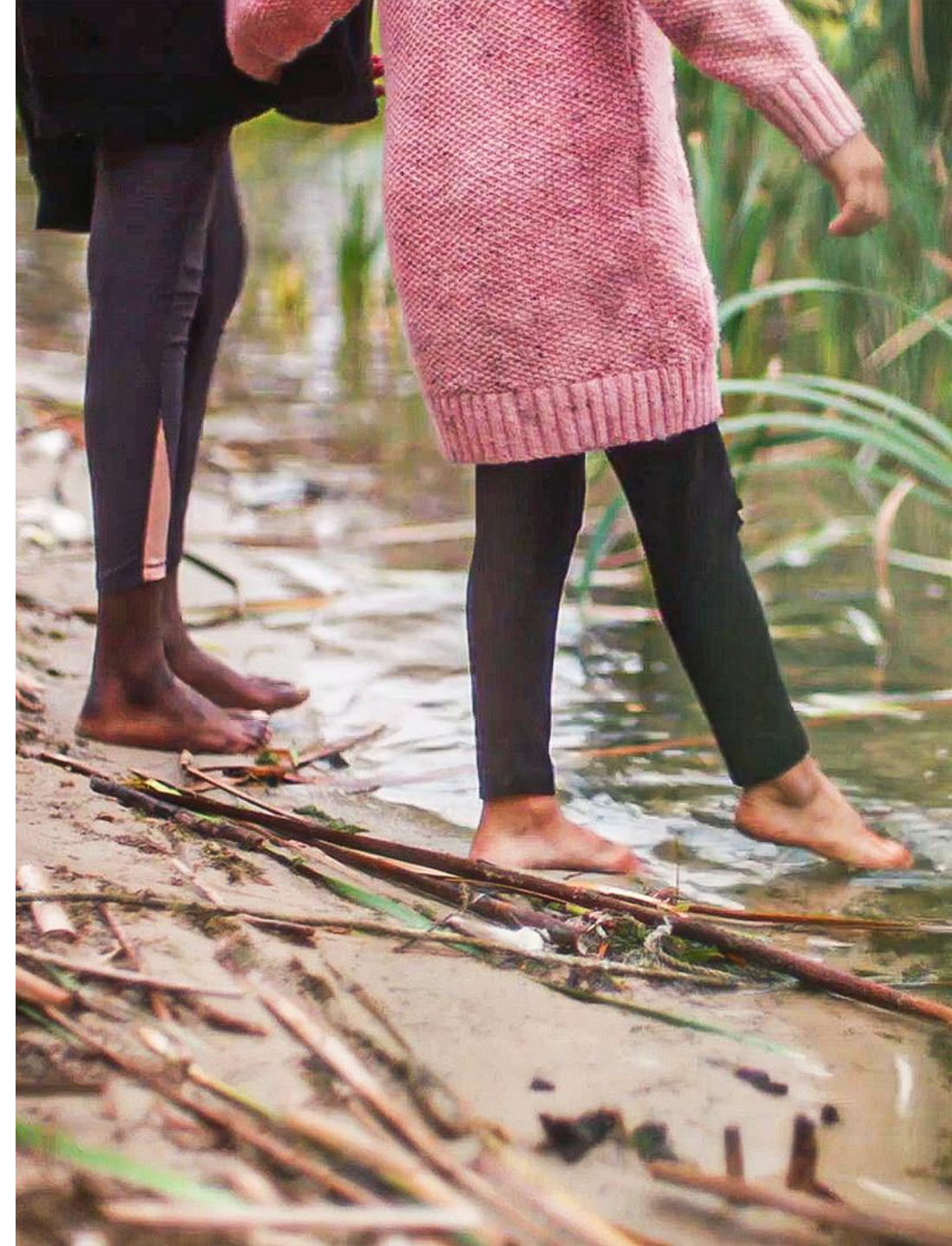


Lived experience recognition

We invite one another to recognise the children, young people and adults within families and diverse communities with many and varied lived experiences who have come before us. We appreciate the experiences of people whose pain, trauma and heartache, including harmful systemic practices, require recognition and compassion. We recognise the strengths and know-how that children and families have drawn on to navigate difficult times. And we respect the skills people have developed to contribute their lived experience. We are committed to deeply listening and responding with integrity to their voices and expertise.

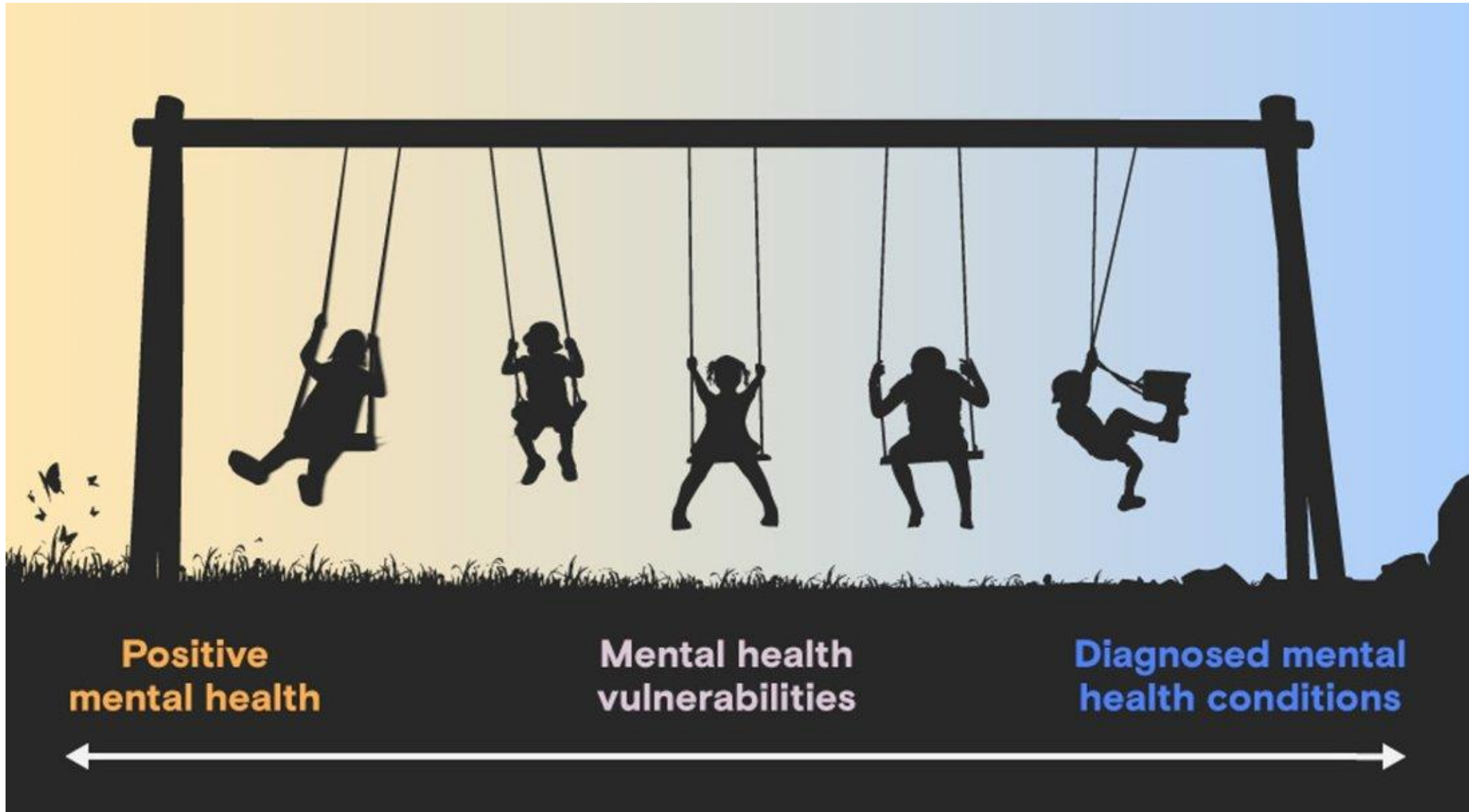
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Defining child mental health

Mental health continuum



How we define and understand child mental health influences:

- who responds
- when we respond
- how we respond
- what we seek to measure.

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The whole child

- How children experience the world around them.
- Shaped and influenced by a range of individual, social and environmental factors → the 'whole child'.
- One area of a child's life can affect others.
- Children should be viewed in the context of their relationships/environments.

Children in Australia today:



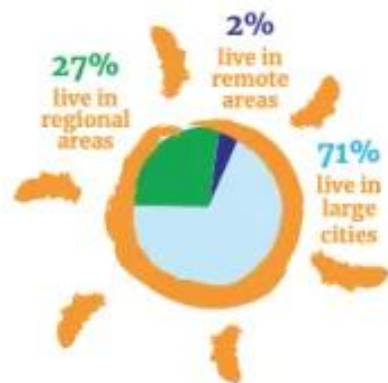
Australian Government
National Mental Health Commission

4,150,138 children
under the age of 12

Just over **16%**
of the Australian
population (March 2023)



7 out of 10
of the most common
presentations to
paediatricians are for
mental health.



One study found that **50%**
of children with mental illness
continue to struggle in adulthood;



...while the other **50%**
no longer warranted
a diagnosis.

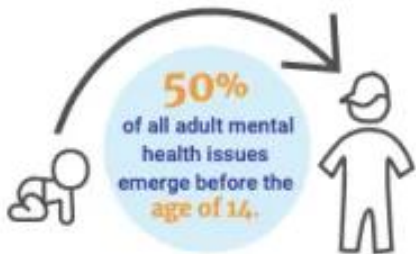


65% of parents in
Australia are not
confident they could
identify the signs of
social or emotional
problems in their children.



Evidence indicates
the first **2000 days**
of life are a critical period,
and interventions during
this time can result in
significant improvement
to children's early life experiences,
health and development.

66% of parents
don't know where
to go for help.

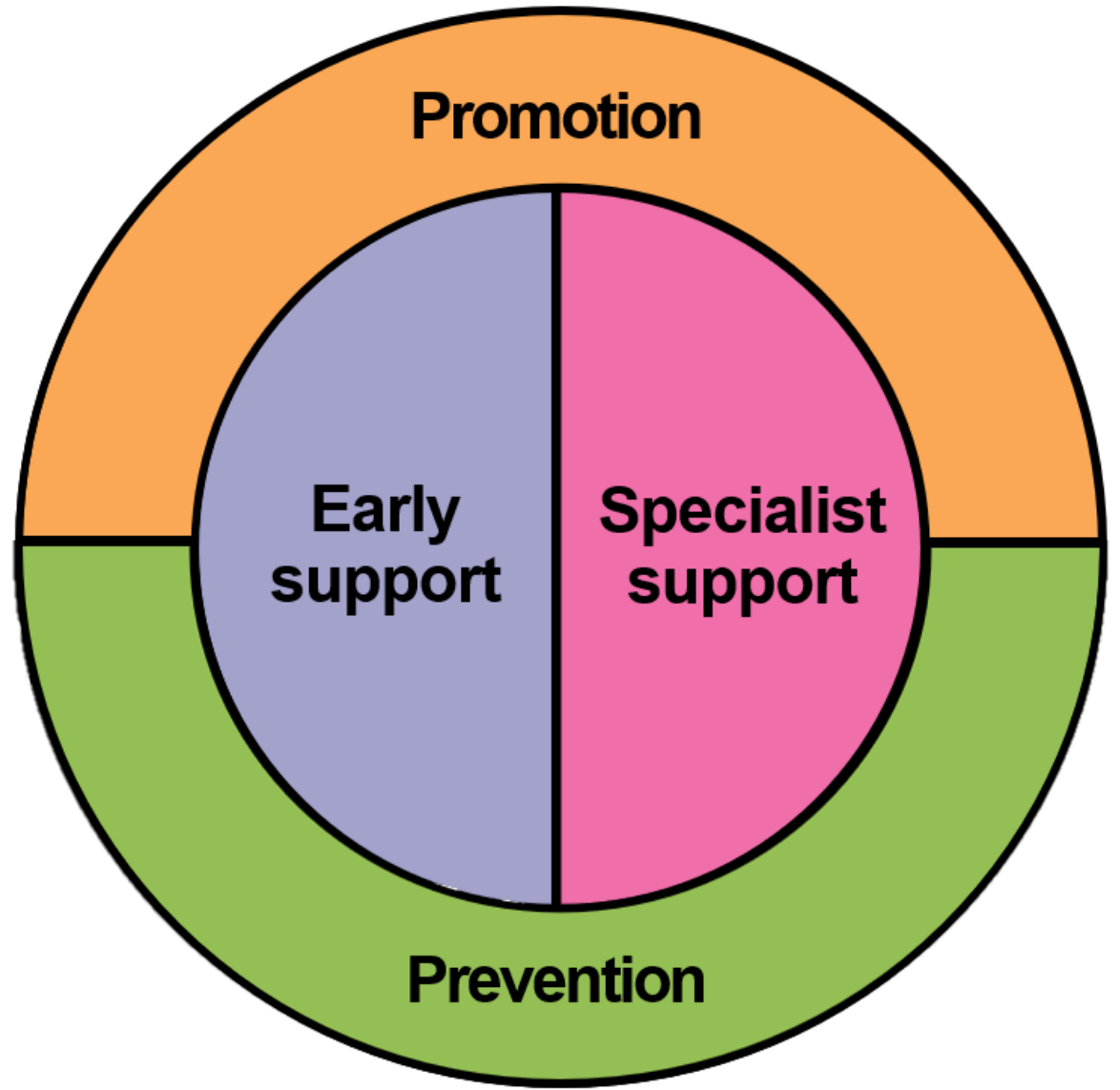


50%
of all adult mental
health issues
emerge before the
age of 14.



More than **50%**
of children with
mental health issues
are not receiving
professional support.

**Infant and child mental health:
a greater focus on prevention
and early intervention**



Function

Promotion

All parents / families have access to universal guidance and information on how to support positive child mental health and wellbeing.

Prevention

Families experiencing adversities have access to resources (information, guidance and support) that can support their child's well-being and family resilience. Families feel confident to know when and where to seek help. The overarching aim is to minimize the impact of adversities on the child and the family and provide families with tools and resources that can help to build their resilience/ family functioning.

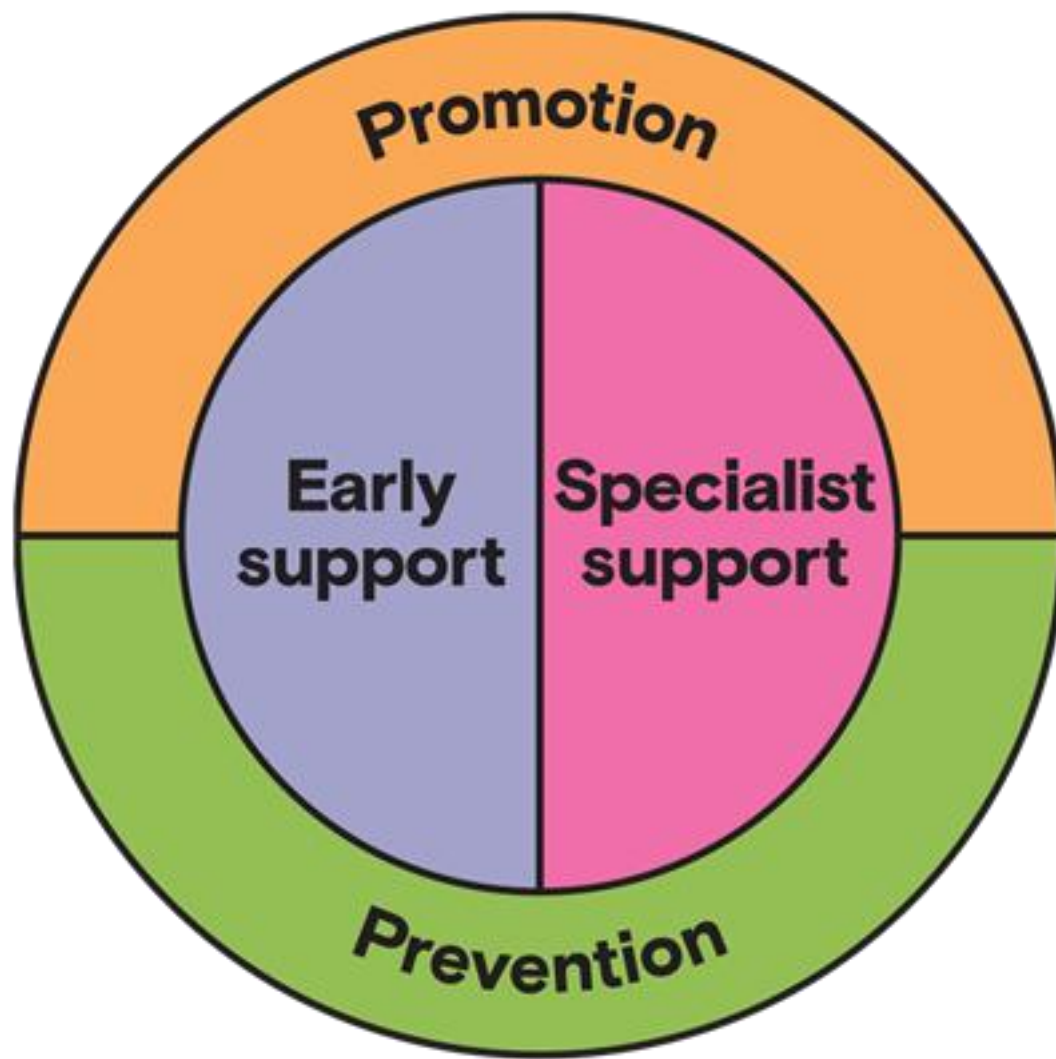
Early support

Families receive timely guidance and adequate support if their child is experiencing early signs of mental health challenges. Early signs of mental health challenges are addressed through child development support, emotional and behavioural strategies, and parenting support.

Specialist support

Children experiencing mental health conditions (and/or complex mental health challenges) and their families receive tailored evidence-informed treatment and support. This support is often multi-disciplinary and able to consider the needs of children and their parents/ families.

A comprehensive child mental health and wellbeing system



Parent - child feedback loop



What supports child mental health



**Relationships are key to infants' and children's social and emotional wellbeing.
Services and practitioners can play an active role in supporting these.**

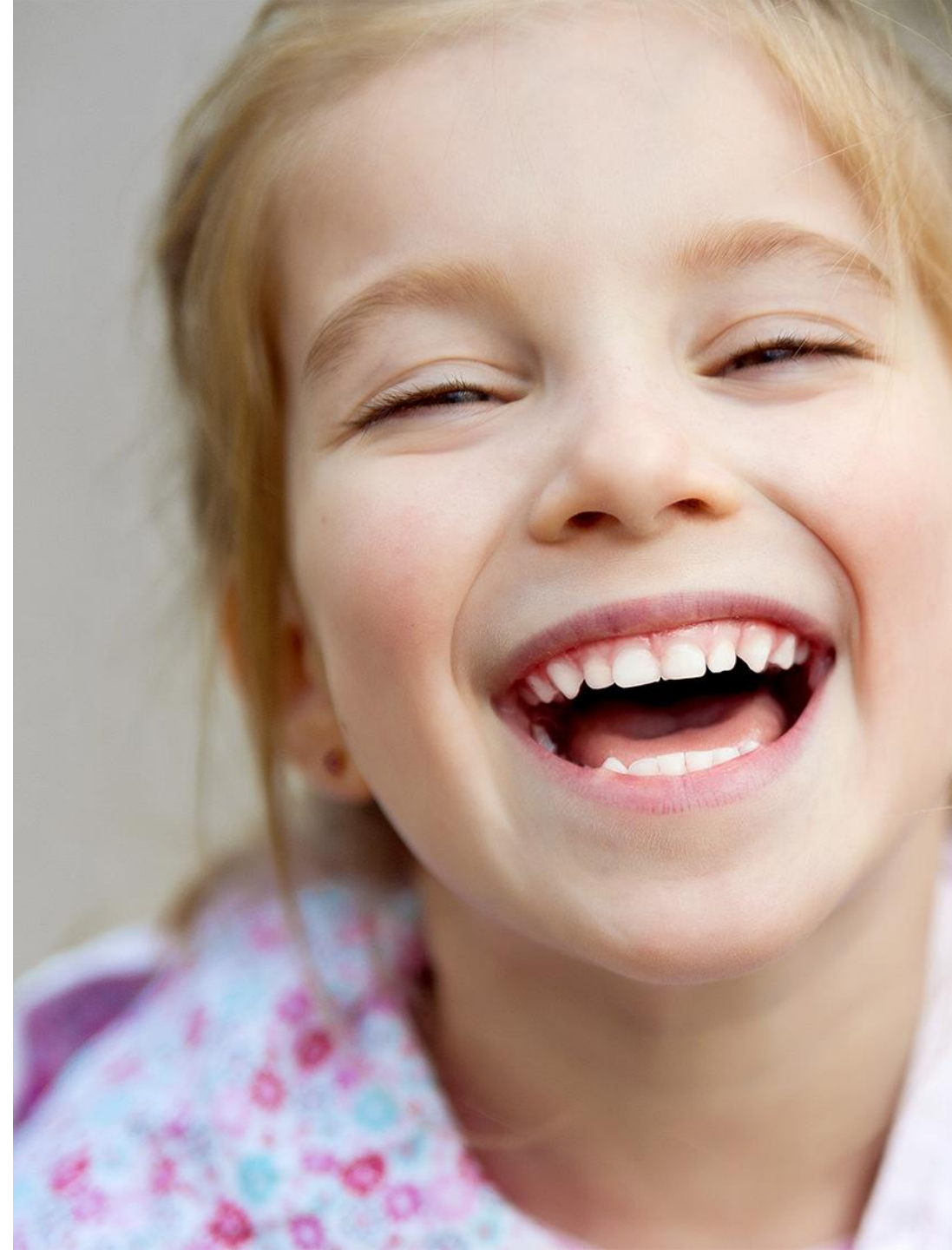
When infants and children have positive mental health, they can:

- cope effectively with the challenges of life,
- express and regulate a range of emotions,
- form close and secure relationships, and
- confidently explore their environment to an extent appropriate to their developmental stage.

They can engage fully with the world and thrive over their life-course.

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**How can we make a
difference?**

**Supporting parenting and
children's mental health**

“To pull out each different part of our family’s needs doesn’t help us... we come as a unit, our needs are holistic.”

- Parent with a mental illness

The National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

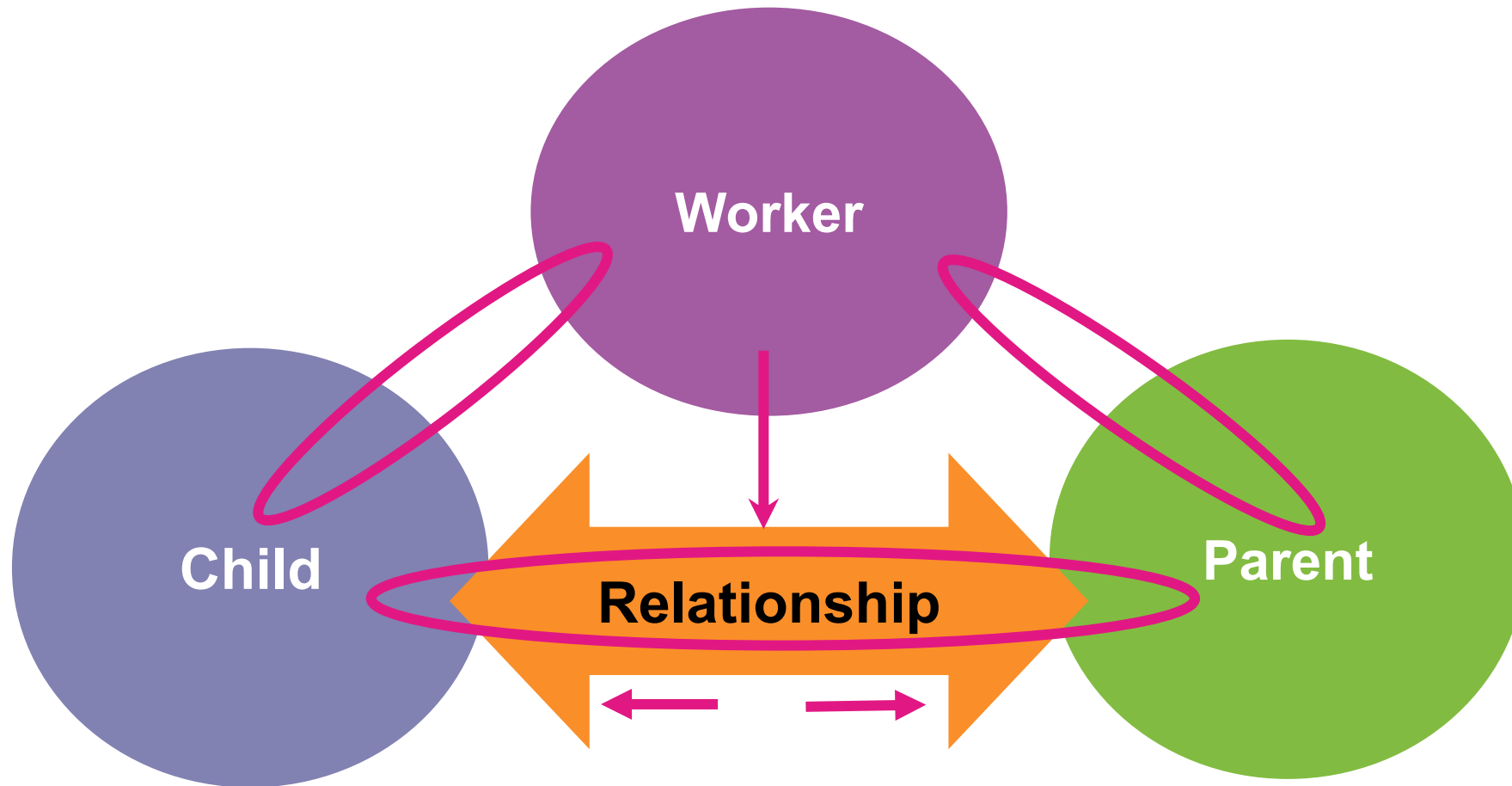
Holding both the parent and child's needs



- Talking to parents about their children/parenting.
- Acknowledging experiences and needs of children.
- Validating relational role/responsibilities of parents.
- Awareness of stigma and fear of judgement.

“To pull out each different part of our family’s needs doesn’t help us... we come as a unit, our needs are holistic.”

Parent with a mental illness,
The National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy



Practitioners are uniquely positioned to provide support to parents and help plan for children's social and emotional development and mental health at the earliest possible stage.




Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention strategies are vital to improving infant and child mental health and helping to prevent the development of mental illness in adolescence and adulthood.

When do we need to respond?

- Early in life
- Early in the life of the problem
- Early in engagement with services



Australian Centre for Child Protection

Dr Mary Salveron

Parent

Sandra

Conversations with Parents: PERCS Conversation Guide

- Support strength-based conversations with parents around adversity, parenting and children's mental health.
- Flexible to work context and family circumstances.
- Multiple versions.



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PERCS Conversation Guide summary

The PERCS Conversation Guide is a psychosocial discussion tool for professionals working with parents. It supports collaborative, respectful conversations around the impact of parental and family adversities, such as mental and physical health issues, substance use issues, and family and domestic violence on children's daily lives. The guide provides example questions to help you explore five important domains in a child's life. It is designed to help you to recognise parents' strengths and hopes for their family, and opportunities to support and improve children's mental and physical health, resilience and wellbeing.

There are four broad stages to the guide:

1 What is the entry point?

Look for opportunities, or 'entry points' to engage the parent in conversations about their child. Potential entry points include:

- The parent presents with an issue or circumstances that might impact on the child.
- The parent expresses concerns about the child's behaviour or circumstances.
- The professional explores the child's mental health and wellbeing through:
 - open enquiry
 - concerns around parental, family, or social adversity.

2 What are you curious about?

Consider the five PERCS domains:

- P** Parent-child relationships
- E** Emotions and behaviours
- R** Routines
- C** Communication and meaning-making
- S** Support networks

This guide contains example questions to assist professionals in their conversations with parents.

3 Conversation with the parent

Conduct a collaborative and respectful conversation with the parent to arrive at shared understandings and decisions, using the six principles of parent engagement:

- Child-aware and parent-sensitive
- Curiosity
- Collaboration
- Strengths and hopes
- Context
- Respect

These principles will support the development of the trusting therapeutic relationship.

4 Provide support

Provide support to parents to lessen the impacts of adversity on their children:






- Use a strengths-based approach to support a positive parent-child relationship and improved social and emotional wellbeing for children.
- Provide resources to parents regarding child development and parenting practices.
- Practice integrated care and make warm referrals to other community supports or specialist services.
- Continue to work with the parent around their initial presenting issue.

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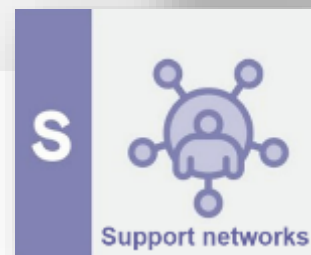
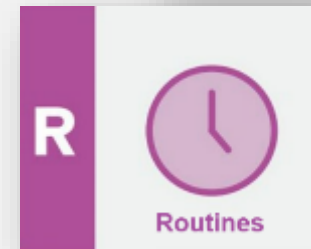
PERCS Domains

This guide provides a pathway and example questions for exploring the five domains of a child's life.

P	 <p>Parent-child relationship</p> <p>A safe, secure, responsive and nurturing relationship between a child and their parent/caregiver is key to building resilience.</p>	<p>Professional's role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify if/how parents feel/stay connected to their child in the face of challenges. - Promote parents' confidence and a positive parent-child relationship (warmth, acceptance, stability). 	<p>ASK Example question</p> <p>What's it like being a parent to (child's name)?</p>
E	 <p>Emotions and behaviours</p> <p>Children need to feel loved, safe and confident that their emotions will be listened to and responded to in a nurturing way.</p>	<p>Professional's role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help parents to understand and be responsive to their child's emotions and behaviours. - Help to develop a shared language around emotions. 	<p>ASK Example question</p> <p>Has your child or family lived through a traumatic event or period of time?</p>
R	 <p>Routines</p> <p>Routines and rituals provide children with a stable base, especially in times of stress.</p>	<p>Professional's role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage parents to create routines and predictability in their children's lives. 	<p>ASK Example question</p> <p>Are you able to make time to read or play games with (child's name)?</p>
C	 <p>Communication and meaning-making</p> <p>Through respectful and effective communication, children can express emotions, make meaning from experiences of adversity, and develop their resilience.</p>	<p>Professional's role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support parents in understanding the impact of adult issues on their child. - Guide parents in helping their children make sense of life events through questions and conversation. 	<p>ASK Example question</p> <p>Is (child's name) able to share their thoughts and feelings with you?</p>
S	 <p>Support networks</p> <p>Safe and supportive networks outside the family can be key to a child's social and emotional wellbeing.</p>	<p>Professional's role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help parents to identify and develop a consistent, positive support network for their child outside of their immediate family. 	<p>ASK Example question</p> <p>Who do you think would notice if (child's name) was struggling?</p>

The PERCS framework

- A set of domains to support parenting and children's mental health
- Safe and nurturing **P**arent-child relationships
- Ability to regulate and express **E**motions
- Predictable and consistent **R**outines
- Ability to **C**ommunicate and make sense of their world
- Wrap-around **S**upport networks



Using the PERCS Conversation Guide: What are we curious about?



Parent-child relationship

Focuses on the quality of connection, safety and responsiveness between a child and their parent



Emotions and behaviour

Explores how children express and manage their feelings and actions, and how parents respond to them



Routines

Looks at the consistency and predictability of daily activities that support a child's sense of stability and wellbeing



Communication and meaning-making

Considers how children and parents talk about and make sense of their experiences



Support net

Examines the availability and role of family, friends and community in support the child and parent

Key messages:

- Children respond to what they see, hear, and feel:
Apply a curious lens to understand.
- **Alongside challenges, parents have strengths** and periods where they are well.
- Children and families require **supports in the context of their needs and relationships.**
- Children and families are embedded in broader systems where **everyone has a role to play.**
- Engage families within a continuum of **promotion, prevention, early intervention and access to specialist** services as needed.
- **An integrated approach:** support before referring, connect with other services, support families to connect with other services.

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How Emerging Minds can support you in your role in supporting children and families

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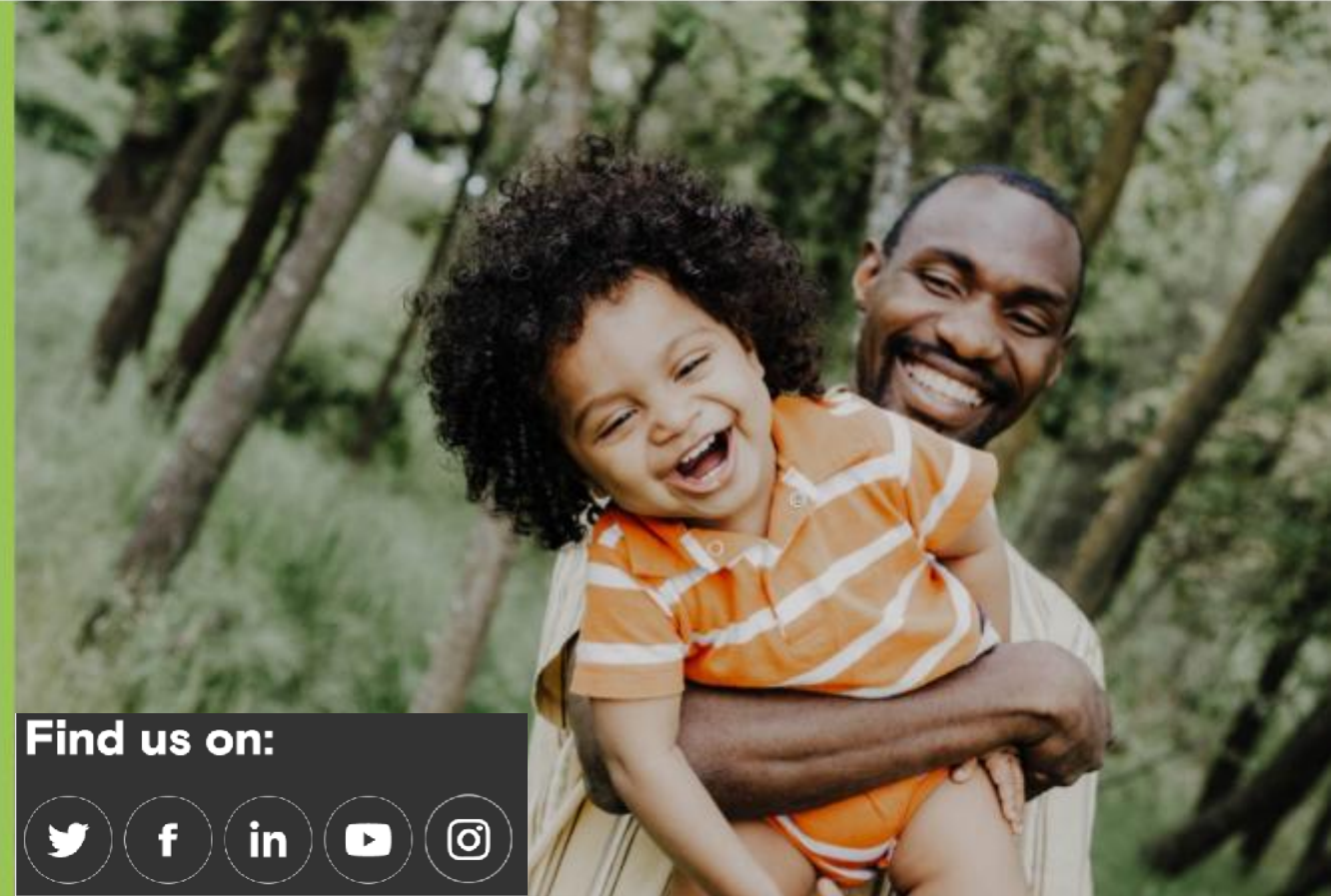
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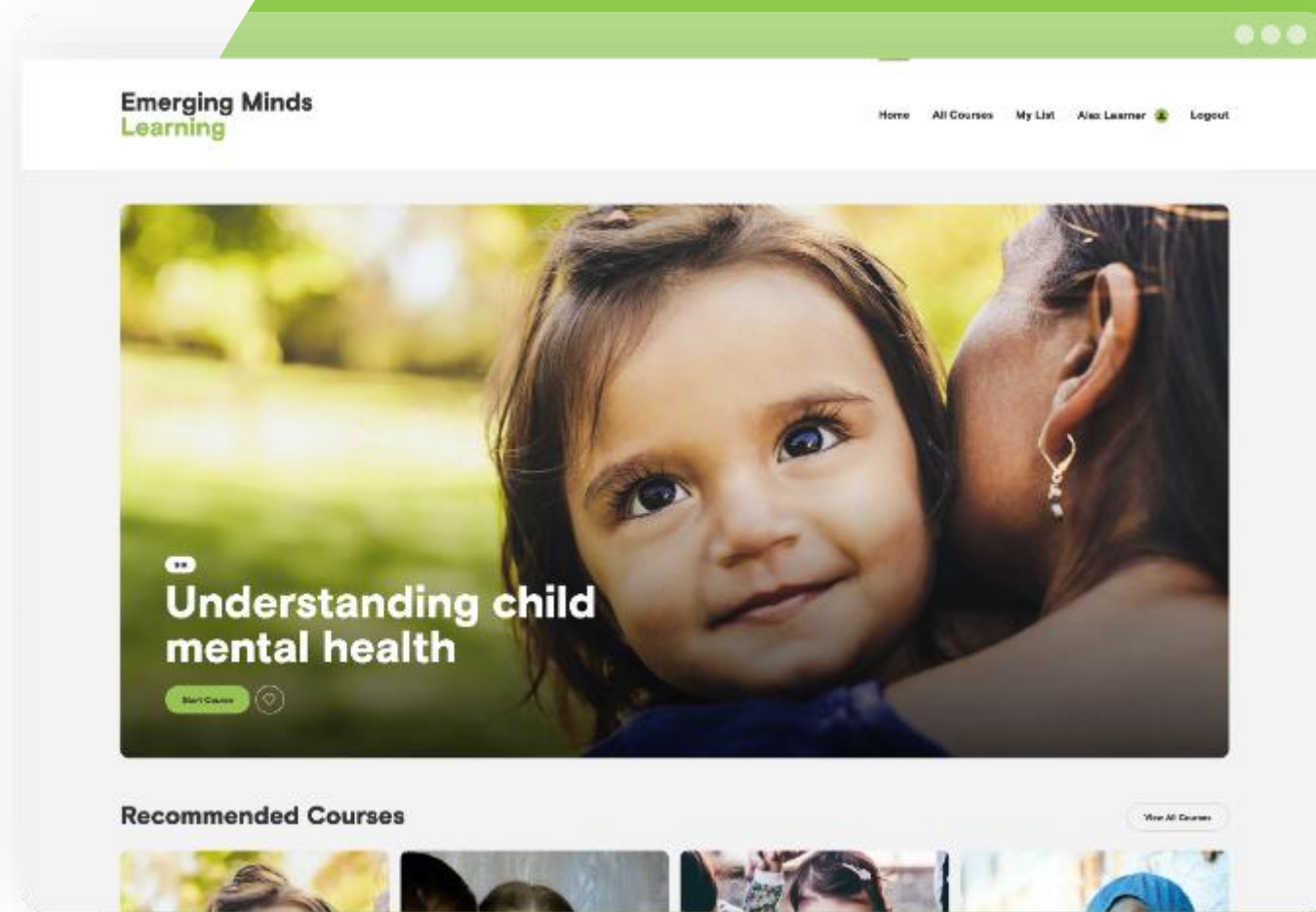
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Free resources to support your family's mental health and wellbeing

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Personal reflection:

Identify one thing you can include into your practice to support child mental health.

Who could you talk to within your organization to expand conversations around child and family mental health.

Thank you.

Please let us know if you have any questions or comments on the presentation.

You can send us an email at info@emergingminds.com.au or ngwabij@emergingminds.com.au

if you would like to get in touch.

We appreciate your feedback.

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