



Supporting young people

who have family members with
mental illness or alcohol and
other drug issues



WORKSHOP FACILITATION GUIDE

This facilitation guide provides a structure and resources for alcohol and other drug professionals to deliver an introduction workshop.





Background

Sometimes young people live in families who experience considerable stress and strain.

While many families have good social support networks and can cope well with short-term stressors or increased strain, over a long period of time, this may be more difficult to manage. Unmanaged mental illness and addiction issues can create an unpredictable environment which often places significant stress and strain on families.

Some families cope with stress and strain by accepting their situation or encouraging unhelpful behaviour. For some families, it may feel like addressing a problem will cause more challenges and tension than it will alleviate. This can close down communication channels, and if the things causing the stress or strain don't go away, this can impact family dynamics and worsen the situation over time.

The approach covered in this workshop aims to increase understanding of how a young person growing up in such environments may perceive how they should act, and explores common coping patterns. These coping patterns have pros and cons, and raising awareness of these with young people can give them a sense of hope, self control, and a direction for growth in situations that are out of their control.

This workshop does not cover how to directly address the stressors that families face, as this requires significant professional training.



Learning objectives

KNOWLEDGE

To understand common coping patterns that young people may use when living in families under stress or strain.

ATTITUDE

To appreciate that:

- Young people will learn different expectations of their own and others' behaviour from different living situations.
- While we may not be able to influence all situations, exploring how we cope with a situation can increase hope, feelings of self-control and give a direction for growth.

SKILL

To feel confident introducing young people to the *Four Outs* model of coping patterns, and supporting them to explore how they cope with their situation.

KEY POINTS

- Strengthening a young person's protective factors and increasing their connection to supportive environments can have large benefits.
- School is a significant protective factor, and offers young people opportunities to be exposed to and engage with different ways of living. This increases their ability to navigate a variety of situations.
- Young people will learn different expectations of their own and others' behaviour from different living situations.
- While some situations may be out of our control, exploring how we cope when that happens can increase hope, feelings of self control and give a direction for growth.
- The *Four Outs* model of coping patterns provides examples that can support a young person to reflect on how they currently cope with their own situation and what they could do differently.



Underpinning principles

This workshop is part of a series that encourages participants to explore how they can support young people and reduce alcohol and other drug-related harm. It focuses on developing an understanding of common coping patterns and approaches to build hope, feelings of self-control and give directions for growth.

The workshop guides participants through various reflection exercises, helping them empathise with a young person living in a family under stress or strain. It includes periodic reflections on how this perspective influences their role at school, turning their understanding into actionable insights within their influence.

This training is based on the principle that concentrating on how people react to situations can be beneficial.

It doesn't include strategies for addressing family stressors, which requires significant professional training.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Matua Raki (2017). **Bridging the Gap: Young people and substance use**
Wellington: Matua Raki.

Supporting Parents Healthy Children website
Supportingparents.nz.org.



Suggested approach

Welcomes and introductions

- 1 Welcome the workshop participants and introduce yourself.

Frame up for the workshop

- 2

Outline that the workshop will cover one approach to support young people who have family members with mental health or alcohol and other drug issues. This approach is based on research into children who had a parent with an addiction, and focuses on understanding common patterns of coping. These patterns have advantages and disadvantages associated with them, and exploring this can help young people feel freer to make changes and have more agency around how they cope. Supporting a family to make changes requires more training than will be covered in this workshop.

You may like to present [the Tūturu introduction video](#). It highlights why thinking about alcohol and other drugs as a part of wellbeing, and working as a school and community to prepare to students to live in a world where alcohol and other drugs exist is an effective way of addressing the topic.

Explain that as we work through the different slides and activities, we may remember situations that have happened to us or people around us in our own lives. We are happy to talk to people afterwards to clarify or provide extra information as needed.



Protective factors

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Give each group member a copy of the **Protective and Risk Factors Worksheet**. Explain the risk factors increase the likelihood of difficulties in life and poor health and wellbeing. However, they are not predictive – just because a person has a risk factor does not mean that they will have negative outcomes. Protective factors enhance life opportunities, promote good health and wellbeing, and buffer the impact of these risk factors on someone’s life. Focusing on strengthening protective factors can have powerful consequences for a student’s life.

Explain that protective factors come in multiple forms and can be beneficial across someone’s lifespan. There are protective factors that are more closely associated with alcohol and other drugs and these might be worth highlighting in this workshop. For individual protective factors, developing an internal locus of control is important. This is the belief that we have an influence on our life, how we feel, and what happens to us. Ideally, young people will develop this sense of control over their lives, however, substance abuse can interfere. Substance use may lead some young people to feel that the substance has more control over them than they do over themselves. You might like to ask the group to identify how their school supports students to develop an internal locus of control as this is something that schools can do well.

Explain that there are also several whānau and peer protective factors that are proven to work. These include: family connectedness (one of the strongest whānau protective factors that is a key feature across successful prevention programmes); social competence; and decision-making skills. Also, feeling connected to just **one** positive adult outside of the family can buffer the impact of several risk factors. Young people commonly name school teachers, form teachers, deans and assistant principals as people who have a supportive influence – and also as the first people who might notice when things are not going right. A quick conversation asking how they are doing can make a significant difference. One study in New Zealand found that young people who were interviewed expressed that having conversations like these could have prevented numerous negative experiences in their lives.¹

1. *Knowing Someone Cares* (CAYAD 2016).



The unspoken code of conduct

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Explain that we all adopt different ways of being in social situations. These can sometimes be called codes of conduct, expectations, rules, norms or other names.

You might like to do this activity in smaller groups or as one large group. If you decide to do the activity in smaller groups, divide them into groups and give each group an A3 sheet of paper.

Ask each group to think of what all the expectations or rules are that apply to students in their work setting, and write each one down (E.g., be at school on time, be well dressed, be honest). Explain that these could be expectations that are spoken about or written down, as well as expectations that are unspoken but generally accepted as an expectation

Hint: *as an alternative, you may like to do this activity looking at the expectations or rules that apply to themselves in the workplace. Different groups may respond differently to reflecting on themselves and their place of work.*

Ask each group to put a tick next to each of the ideas that they have written down as a formal expectation (E.g., written in a code of conduct).

Ask each group to underline each one that is spoken about explicitly on a regular basis.

Ask each group to circle each one that applies to some people in their workplace (or students at school) but not others.

Invite each group to look at what is written on their sheet of paper, and reflect on what it looks like. You might like to prompt them to think about what it would be like for a new person entering that setting and trying to fit in.

Explain that how we grow up in our early years has a huge influence in shaping how we see our place in the world and our way of being.

5 Give each group a new sheet of paper and explain that we are now going to picture a perfect, ideal family. You can assure them that while families may be perfect the way they are, there isn't any real family that is harmonious all the time.

Ask each group to write down what rules or expectations could be in place for a perfect/ideal family. These could be things like: we name problems and work through them; every family member is valued; we communicate in a direct way with each other; our body language matches our verbal communication; it is safe to express your thoughts, perceptions, feelings and desires; it is okay to be different; we follow through with what we say we will do; we all know how our family works and we can be flexible if things need to change; we keep a fun, spontaneous and exciting atmosphere; we see mistakes as opportunities to learn; and we respect personal values.

You might like to invite each group to share what they have written.

Invite each group to compare their two pieces of paper, and have a short discussion on how easy or challenging it would be for a child from that family to adapt to the expectations at their school and thrive.

6 Give each group a new blank sheet of paper and explain that we are now going to picture a family that has a large amount of stress and strain on them for a long period of time. Unmanaged mental illness and addiction issues can put a large amount of stress and strain on families. In general, many families have good social support networks and can cope really well with short term stressors or increased strain. Over a long period of time however, this can be more difficult to manage.

Ask each group to write down what rules or expectations could be in place for this family. This could be things like: do as I say, not as I do; it's not okay to discuss or express feelings openly; avoid directly addressing issues; always appear perfect to others; avoid confrontation; avoid tension; don't be selfish; keep what happens at home a secret; and it's not okay to play.

Explain that sometimes families cope with stress and strain by accepting their situation or encouraging unhelpful behaviour. For some families, it may feel like addressing a problem directly will cause more challenges and tension than it will alleviate. This can close down communication channels, and if the things causing the stress or strain don't go away, this can impact family dynamics and the situation can worsen over time. Unmanaged mental illness and alcohol and other drug issues can create an unpredictable environment, which can put stress and strain on a family.

Invite each group to compare their sheets of paper, and have a short discussion on how easy or challenging it would be for a child from that family to adapt to the expectations at their school and thrive.



School as a supportive environment

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Explain that school can be seen by young people as a supportive environment where they know what to expect, where they can rely on other people and where they know how things are responded to.

Point out that we know people learn from progressive exposure to new ideas or skills. Part of the benefit of attending school is being exposed to environments and people that are different from what we may know from our home environment. Engaging with and learning from that difference is how we grow, and how we develop an ability to move confidently between 'worlds'.

Emphasise that these benefits of attending school are even more pronounced for those from a more vulnerable background. Doing what we can to understand these students and keep them engaged at school can make a huge difference to their lives.

The Four Outs

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Explain that we will now explore four common coping patterns that young people living in families under distress could be utilising. This was researched by Sharon Wegsneider-Cruse and Claudia Black, who found these four common roles when speaking with children of parents with addiction.

Ask the group to stand up and gather around you, making sure you leave enough space for you to place four sheets of paper on the floor with people standing around them.

Place a sheet of paper on the floor with the words "ACT OUT" written on it. Explain that this is the first pattern. People using this pattern are often reacting with a fight response, confrontational, visibly angry, feel hurt and are often in trouble. They can detract from the tension in the family by being a scapegoat.

Place another sheet of paper on the floor with the words "GET OUT" written on it. Explain that this is the second pattern you will cover. People using this pattern are often reacting with a flight response, uncomfortable around tension and defuse tension by creating humour, running away or staying away from home, feel anxious and find dealing with stress challenging.

Put another sheet of paper on the floor with the words "HELP OUT" written on it. Explain that this is the third pattern you will cover.

People using this pattern are often high achievers. They tend to deal with situations by doing everything they can to help out, caring for other siblings, studying and putting out an impression that they have everything under control. Underneath that, they tend to feel inadequate, overresponsible, and worry that the consequences of making a mistake will be extremely serious.

Lay down the last sheet of paper on the floor with the words "LEFT OUT" written on it. Explain that this is the last pattern you will cover. People using this pattern are often 'forgotten.' They tend to quietly conform, keep to themselves (perhaps reading), and can be withdrawn. They tend to feel invisible, lonely and unimportant. They also tend to have difficulties making decisions.

You might like to pause for a moment here to let these roles sink in. Group members tend to reflect on people that they know or themselves as you explain these roles. You might like to name that process for them and normalise it as a common process, even if we have not come from families with extreme distress.

These are common patterns, and they are not fixed roles that a person must play. Each way of coping will have advantages and disadvantages and understanding that there is always an alternative way of coping can relieve some of the distress.

Ask the group to name some of the pros and cons of each coping pattern. Some examples are:

ACT OUT

Pros: Don't bottle up their feelings, can do what they want (get their needs/wants met), can develop skills for independence.

Cons: Always in trouble, can be disliked by others, can be overlooked for positive things.

GET OUT

Pros: Can be liked by others as a funny person, can avoid problems.

Cons: Can find it hard to be around conflict, can have high anxiety, can be seen as someone who cannot be serious and can be overlooked.

HELP OUT

Pros: Generally liked and praised by many people, can feel like they are contributing.

Cons: Can feel inadequate, can have many worries that they cannot make mistakes, can feel overly responsible for things that are out of their control.

LEFT OUT

Pros: Can avoid tension, can 'escape' into their own world, can develop a good imagination.

Cons: Can feel unimportant, can find it difficult to get their needs met, can find it hard to feel equal in relationships.

Ask each group member to reflect on which pattern they think they used the most when they were a teenager, and to stand next to that sheet of paper. Explain that they may not have had one pattern that stands out strongly, but encourage them to pick one for the purpose of this activity.

Explain that as we grow, we change. Ask each group member to reflect on what pattern they may have become more skilled in as they grew older, this doesn't necessarily mean swapping patterns but adopting more of another pattern.

Ask everyone to move and stand next to the sheet of paper that reflects the pattern they developed more of as they grew older.

We can look back at the changes that we made as we grew older and acquired new skills (including new coping skills) because we have lived through that change. Teenagers have not yet lived through that change, and tend to feel like these patterns are static roles. Introducing these patterns, and helping a young person reflect on what they use the most, the pros and cons of that, and what they would like to do more of, can help a young person feel a sense of direction, know the skills they would like to practise and feel like they have more control over how they respond to a situation that is outside of their control. Some young people who have done this activity reflected that their awareness helped them a huge amount and relieved some of the tension they were carrying.

Framing this as an activity for a young person

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Seat the group again. Explain that you will run through an approach to frame this up for a young person to explore. They may choose to use a similar approach to what we have just done. This tends to work well with small groups of young people.

Give everyone a copy of the **Four Outs Worksheet**.

Ask everyone to write the names of the patterns they identified using themselves as a teenager and then later as an older person, along with the pros and cons that they feel are applicable to them. They may like to use the ideas that were identified by the group in the previous activity.

Invite everyone to reflect on what they wrote on the paper, and to identify what helped them (or could have helped them) develop new skills or have the opportunity to develop new skills at the bottom of the sheet.

You might like to encourage people to share ideas as they put them down on paper. Common ideas are: joining an activity where I can meet other people and have fun, talking to the counsellor about what I can take responsibility for and what I can't, and choosing one subject to talk with the teacher about wanting to become more serious about learning in that class.

Practise

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Divide everyone into groups of three. Explain you are going to practise introducing the idea to a student. Some people in the group may have a lot of experience doing things like this, and you might like to offer the opportunity for group members to share examples of how they could do this. One structure that you can introduce is as follows:

- 1. Reflect understanding** *"It sounds like a pretty rough time at home at the moment."*
- 2. Affirm strengths** *"And it also sounds like you've got some great ways to deal with that."*
- 3. Evoke curiosity** *"I'm wondering if there are ways that you could deal with the situation that might help you to feel happier."*
- 4. Ask permission to explore** *"I've spoken with a lot of young people about this, and am thinking it could be helpful to explore some of what worked for them. Is that okay with you?"*
- 5. Introduce the Four Outs** *"One way of looking at this situation is how people cope with a rough situation. I'm going to tell you about four common patterns of coping, and then I'll ask you to reflect on which one you might be using a lot of."*

Ask which pattern they might be using the most at the moment, and identify what is working well for them using that pattern, and what isn't.

Ask which pattern they would like to use more often (you can reassure them that they can use more than one pattern), and identify what the pros and cons about using that coping pattern might be for them.

Identify what could help them to practise using that pattern more.

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Play one of the persona videos.

Invite each small group to pick one person to be the young person in the video, one person to take that 'young person' through the activity and one person to watch and give feedback.

Give each group a short amount of time to role play this in their groups. Some variations on this depending on how much time you have:

- Three persona videos, + three rounds of role play, so each group member has a chance to be in each role (supporter, young person, observer).
- One persona video + three rounds of role play (swapping roles each time) covering the introduction of the activity.
- One persona video + three rounds of role play (swapping roles each time) covering different sections of the activity (eg. 1. Introduction, 2. Explaining the model and identifying pros and cons and 3. Identifying next steps.)

Invite the smaller groups to join together as a big group again.

Ask the group to reflect on how they found the activity, where they could use the activity/approach, and how confident they feel to use it now.

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Summarise the key points at the start of this facilitation guide.

You might like to hand out feedback forms. Nice work!

tūturu.