

## Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents : What are Complex Problems?

Some young people have problems that are complicated and it is difficult to find the right help for them. Hopefully some of the information in this sheet might help.

### What are complex problems?

- Your child may have problems that you have trouble working out.
- They might behave in ways that worry you but you don't know exactly what is wrong with them.
- You might have tried to get help from doctors or school teachers but no-one seemed to be able to help.

There are other parents out there like you. Many parents try hard for years to deal with their child's problems on their own or are unable to find answers to their questions.

This help sheet might provide some useful information.

### Who are Young People with Complex Needs?

Young people with complex needs:

- Have many different problems.
- Need help but are usually not getting the right type of help.
- Behave in ways that put themselves and others at risk.
- Require support from a range of services for a long time.

### What are Complex Needs?

Young people with complex needs often have at least two or more of the following problems:

- Mental health problems
- Personality Disorders
- Drug or alcohol addiction
- Intellectual disability
- Brain injury
- Criminal history
- History of trauma or abuse
- Trouble controlling anger
- Physical disability

### Mental health problems

If you notice changes in the way your child is behaving, for example:

- they seem to be suspicious of people
- or they are depressed all the time
- or they are talking to themselves
- or anxious all the time,

then they may be suffering from a mental illness. It is important to have your child seen by a doctor to check if their problems are serious. Don't delay.

To find out about mental health services near you, ask your local doctor or council.

### Drug Use and Mental Illness

Some young people use drugs to cope with the symptoms of mental illness, or they may develop mental health problems after heavy drug use.

When a young person has both a mental illness and a drug or alcohol problem, it is called a *dual diagnosis*.

There are now dual diagnosis counsellors and outreach workers available to assess and support young people who have both these problems.

If your child needs help for these problems, contact your local community health centre or mental health clinic for advice about where to find a dual diagnosis worker in your area.

### Personality Disorders (PD)

Personality disorders are a type of mental illness. People who have a personality disorder often have trouble coping with life. They can be very sensitive and become stressed easily. They sometimes use drugs to deal with their disorder.

There are a number of different types of personality disorders including: anti-social personality disorder, borderline personality disorder and dependent personality disorder.

For more information about personality disorders, see Multicultural Mental Health Australia's website: [www.mmha.org.au](http://www.mmha.org.au)

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If you are concerned that someone in your family may have a personality disorder, speak to your doctor and ask for a referral for them to a psychiatrist.

Victoria has a Borderline Personality Disorder service called **Spectrum**. Telephone: **03 9871 3900** or go to [www.spectrum-bpd.com](http://www.spectrum-bpd.com) for information.

### Intellectual Disability

Children with an intellectual disability may develop skills more slowly than others or may have significant difficulty learning.

Disability Support Services in your state will be able to assess your child and advise you about what support services are available in your area.

To find a service near you telephone **Disability Services 1800 641 038**.

### Intellectual Disability and Mental Health Problems

Dual Diagnosis is a term used also when someone has both mental health problems and an intellectual disability. Parents can find it very stressful dealing with a child who has both these problems.

Some young people with intellectual disabilities suffer high levels of anxiety. They may need to be treated by a psychiatrist as well as receive support from disability services.

If you suspect that your child has mental health problems as well as an intellectual disability, ask your doctor for a referral to a psychiatrist or a psychologist who has experience working with young people with both these problems.

### Intellectual Disability with significant Behaviour Problems

Disability Services have Behaviour Intervention Strategies Teams (BIST) available to assist parents to cope with young people who have both an intellectual disability and also problems controlling their behaviour.

Some families find they need more intensive support to deal with the very difficult behaviour they are managing.

If your child's behaviour is very difficult to control you might also need to consider arranging for them to live in **supported accommodation** provided by the government.

These are small residential houses where young people with an intellectual disability live with a small number of other people with the same problems. They are cared for by residential care workers.

Unfortunately there are limited places available. However, if you feel your child needs this type of care, contact Disability Services in your area.

### Acquired Brain Injury

Brain injury which occurs during birth or at a later time is called '**acquired brain injury**'. It may happen through heavy or long-term drug use or due to an accident or injury.

The injury may lead to physical, intellectual, personality or behaviour problems.

There are services available in each state that provide support for people with acquired brain injury. (See your white pages telephone book).

**ARBIAS** based in Victoria provides services for people with acquired brain injury. Telephone ARBIAS on **(03) 9417 7071** or [www.arbias.org.au](http://www.arbias.org.au)

### Other behavioural or personality problems

Your young person's behavior may not fit with any of the conditions described above. But they may still have behaviour problems. For example, they may:

- behave in unpredictable ways
- be very impulsive (act without thinking)
- be constantly demanding of you
- be aggressive most of the time.

Families may need to seek support from a range of services until they get the help they need.

Sometimes, families may come to realise that they can't do anymore for the young person at this stage.

They may need to focus on looking after themselves.

At home, clear rules need to be set in place to contain the young person's behaviour.

### If a young person is under 16 years

If your child is under 16 and you believe they are at risk of hurting themselves or others, contact Child Protection Services in your state. Their job is to assist families where children and young people are at risk.

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### → Tips from this Fact Sheet

- Young people with complex needs often require support from a number of different agencies and need long-term care from these services.
- When a family has done all it can to support a young person with complex needs, then it may be time to focus on looking after themselves and setting clear rules for the young person.

### → Related Fact Sheets

- Mental Health: Understanding the problem.
- Drug & Alcohol: What Can Parents Do?
- Getting the Right Help.
- Dealing with Conflict

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