

Case study: Depression and parenting [resident version]

PHN RESIDENCY FOR NEW GRADUATES

Objectives

1. List key assessments performed for a client with a new baby, a history of poor parenting, and minimal support resources.
2. Discuss challenges in providing care to clients with differing values and beliefs.
3. Discuss communication strategies to elicit trust and build relationships with clients.
4. List crisis resources and other resources for young parents in your community.
5. Describe the key elements of a safety plan.

Case study

A Public Health Nurse (PHN) receives a referral for a new baby visit. The referral includes the following information. Julie, a 22-year-old, has four children; her two oldest children live with their father and she is parenting the newborn and a two-year-old on her own. Julie is new to this community and is unemployed.

At the initial visit, she tells the PHN that she “can’t be a good mother” to her two oldest children. She is excited about the opportunity to be a better mom with her new son.

- 1. What assessments might the PHN complete for this mother/family?**
- 2. Reflect on your own values about “good” parenting and how they might be the same or different from Julie’s values. How could the PHN provide nonjudgmental care to Julie?**

After the PHN explores Julie’s strengths and needs, it is apparent that Julie could benefit from some parenting information and anticipatory guidance for the two-year-old and newborn. Julie and the PHN plan to meet regularly.

During subsequent visits, the PHN provides parenting support, safety materials, and information about children’s developmental milestones. The PHN also works with Julie to access community resources.

After visiting for a couple of months, the PHN starts to notice a change in Julie’s behavior. Julie appears disheveled and her home is messier than usual. She says that she is not happy and is finding it difficult to get out of bed. Julie is beginning to miss appointments with the PHN. The PHN addresses their concerns with Julie.

- 3. What can the PHN say to Julie? How can the PHN start the conversation to minimize defensiveness and convey their concerns?**

The next month, Julie comes into the office asking for the PHN; the PHN is immediately concerned. Julie’s appearance has changed; she mentions she hasn’t showered in a while and that she doesn’t really feel like doing her hair and makeup even though it’s something she says she used to really enjoy. She does not have her children with her. The PHN takes Julie into their office to explore her outward changes and the reason she is at the office. Julie breaks down in tears, saying she has no energy, is not sleeping, and hints she is cutting herself. Julie states she feels her depression medication is not working anymore and has stopped taking it.

- 4. What might you want to know about Julie's medications?**

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During the same visit, the PHN asks how Julie is caring for her children. Julie says that the children are currently with her mom, but her mom can only watch them for a few hours at a time. She has no one else to help her and does not think she can get through another week. The PHN asks Julie if she has considered suicide or has a plan to harm herself. She states she has contemplated suicide but does not have a plan at this time.

The PHN and Julie discuss possible interventions and then call the crisis team together. Julie and the mental health nurse initiate a safety plan. They also schedule an appointment with a mental health specialist within a few days. These actions seem to give Julie hope and energy.

- 5. List the crisis resources in your community.**
- 6. List the elements of a safety plan and complete a sample safety plan (this plan can be found in the additional resources).**

Julie begins to receive mental health services and her symptoms begin to improve. The PHN knows the risk for suicide can increase during this time and continues to visit the family.

- 7. List additional resources the PHN would use to ensure Julie and her children's safety as Julie continues to address her depression.**

Concepts covered

Caring for clients with mental health concerns, communication, nonjudgmental care, safety planning, referral resources

Additional resources

1. Mental Health of America. (2020). *Take a Mental Health Test*. Online: <https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/>.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: MentalHealth.gov. (2020). *Let's Talk About It*. Online: <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/friends-family-members/>.
3. Stanley, B., & Brown, K. (2008). *Patient Safety Plan Template*. Online: https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Brown_StanleySafetyPlanTemplate.pdf.
4. Inflexion, Inc. (2008). *Screener and Opioid Assessment for Patients with Pain (SOAPP)[®] Version 1.0-SF*. Online: <https://www.mcstap.com/docs/SOAPP-5.pdf>.
5. National Coalition for Mental Wellbeing. View several examples of mental health screening tools by entering keywords online: <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/integrated-health-coe/resources/>.

Minnesota Department of Health
Center for Public Health Practice
651-201-3880
health.ophp@state.mn.us
www.health.state.mn.us/phnresidency

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