

Psychosocial Support

A Social Work-Led Approach

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- The **background**, role and function of the Psychosocial Team including Lived Experience.
- **Psychosocial challenges** experienced by people affected by cancer.
- The value of **integrated, person-centred** and family-focused care across disciplines.
- How the **Family Model** can support assessment and intervention.
- Recognise when and **how to refer individuals** and families to the service.

The Need for Support in Northern Ireland



Cancer affects thousands of people and families every year

72,650 people diagnosed with cancer in Northern Ireland (2019-2023)

14,530 people diagnosed on average every year

53.5% Male 38,891 diagnoses

1 in 2 Men will develop cancer before age 85

46.5% Female 33,759 diagnoses

1 in 2 Women will develop cancer before age 85

Source: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, All Cancers Report (published August 2026; data 2019-2023).

Role and Function

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- **Social-Work-Led**
- **Multidisciplinary Approach**
- **Family Focused Recovery**
- **Key Themes Northern Ireland Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 & Northern Ireland Cancer Strategy 2021-2031**
- Lived Experience groups highlighted the need for better psychological support in cancer care
- Macmillan established UK's first social work-led psychosocial cancer service in Northern Ireland.

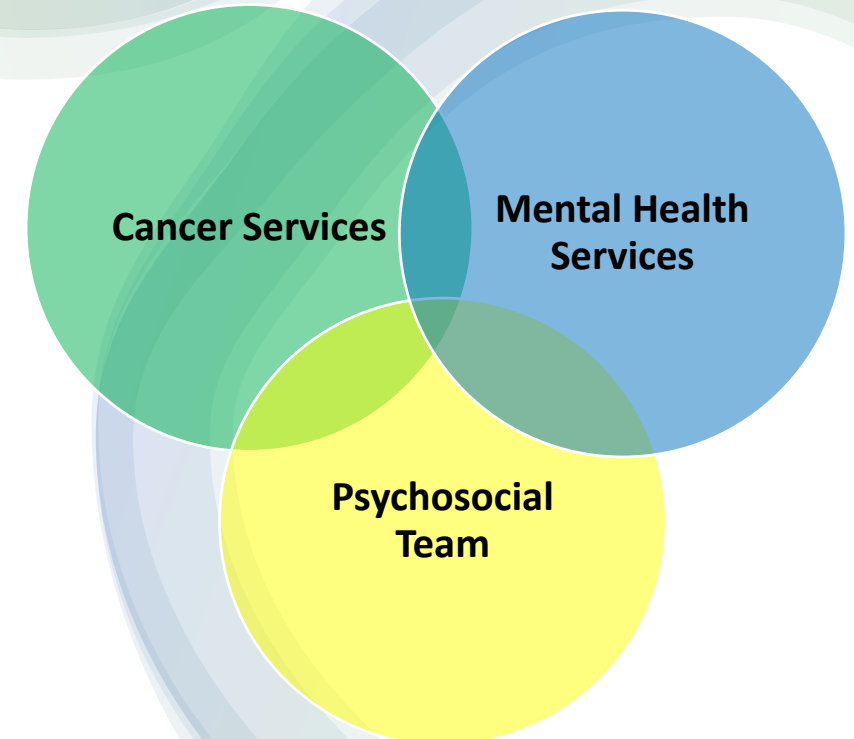


Cancer and Mental

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- **Large numbers** diagnosed each year access to specialist **psychosocial support** is a vital
- Right support at **right time**
- **Early** interventions
- Drawing upon **existing services** and networks
- Learning more developing **new approaches**
- **Family Focused Service** and training
- **Proof of Concept = Sustainability**



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Psychosocial needs in cancer care.

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Cancer impacts much more than physical health.

People frequently described:

- Loss of confidence
- Anxiety about the future
- Reduced self-identity
- Changes in family relationships
- Social withdrawal
- Fear of recurrence or progression.
- **Key Message**

The emotional impact of cancer often continues long after treatment has ended

What Makes us a Social Work Service?

Cancer affects far more than physical health. Social work addresses the psychosocial, family and practical challenges

- ◇ Family relationship difficulties
- ◇ Parenting and family concerns
- ◇ Impact on children and young people
- ◇ Caring and caregiving responsibilities
- ◇ Social isolation and loss of connection
- ◇ Bereavement, grief and anticipatory loss
- ◇ Mental health and emotional wellbeing needs
- ◇ Complex social circumstances
- ◇ Financial, housing and employment issues
- ◇ Multi-agency coordination and advocacy

Integrated Working

Family Support Workers

- ✓ Early emotional support and listening
- ✓ Practical guidance and signposting
- ✓ Supporting children, families and carers
- ✓ Reducing isolation and strengthening support networks
- ✓ Building confidence and resilience

Social Work

- ✓ Psychosocial assessment
- ✓ Family-focused interventions
- ✓ Complex case coordination
- ✓ Risk assessment and safeguarding
- ✓ Advocacy and systems navigation

Wider MDT and Community Partners

- ✓ Oncology and cancer services
- ✓ Primary care and mental health teams
- ✓ Palliative care services
- ✓ Community and voluntary sector organisations
- ✓ Welfare, housing and employment supports

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Impact= Integrated working helps individuals and families access holistic support, reduces fragmentation between services, and ensures that physical, emotional, social and family needs are addressed together

Why Integrated Care Matters

Cancer Does Not Happen in Isolation

*Individuals and families affected by cancer often experience **multiple interconnected challenges** at the same time:*

- ◇ Anxiety and depression
- ◇ Emotional distress and uncertainty
- ◇ Social isolation and loneliness
- ◇ Family and relationship difficulties
- ◇ Parenting and caring responsibilities
- ◇ Bereavement and anticipatory grief
- ◇ Financial and employment pressures
- ◇ Adjustment to diagnosis, treatment and recurrence



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What the Data Shows



- Over 288 client and family records have been created to date.
- Around 15-20% of referrals were self-referrals, while
- Most were referred by healthcare professionals, demonstrating confidence in the service across disciplines.
- A significant proportion of referrals involved family members, carers, partners and children,
- Complex family circumstances, social isolation and emotional distress frequently occurred alongside cancer treatment concerns.



Why Data Matters

The psychosocial service is uniquely positioned to integrate social work, family support, emotional wellbeing, practical assistance and community resources into a truly holistic model of cancer care.

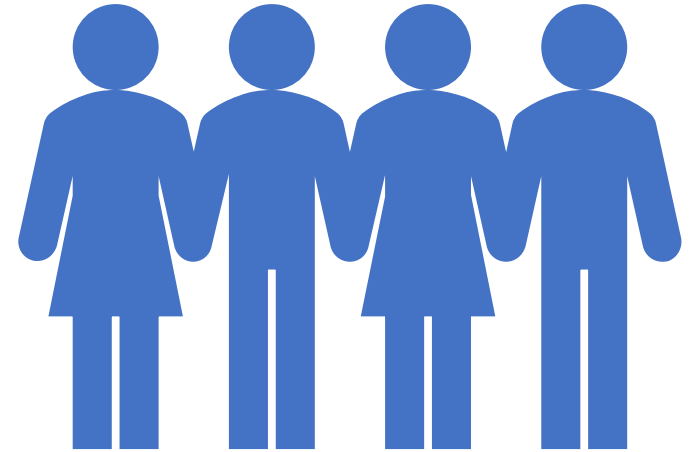
288+ client records = demand for psychosocial support.

Referrals received = confidence in the service across disciplines.

Family members and carers represent = importance of family-focused practice.

Outcomes are influenced not only by treatment, but also by:

- Mental wellbeing
- Family relationships
- Social support
- Community connectedness
- Practical circumstances



What we have Learned



Emotional Wellbeing

- Anxiety and uncertainty often increased following diagnosis
- Many people valued having a safe space to talk

Family Relationships

- Cancer affected communication across the family
- Parents expressed concerns about supporting children

Coping and Resilience

- People developed new coping skills and emotional regulation strategies
- Support helped build confidence and hope

Social Support

- Peer, family and community connections reduced isolation
- Practical support often improved wellbeing

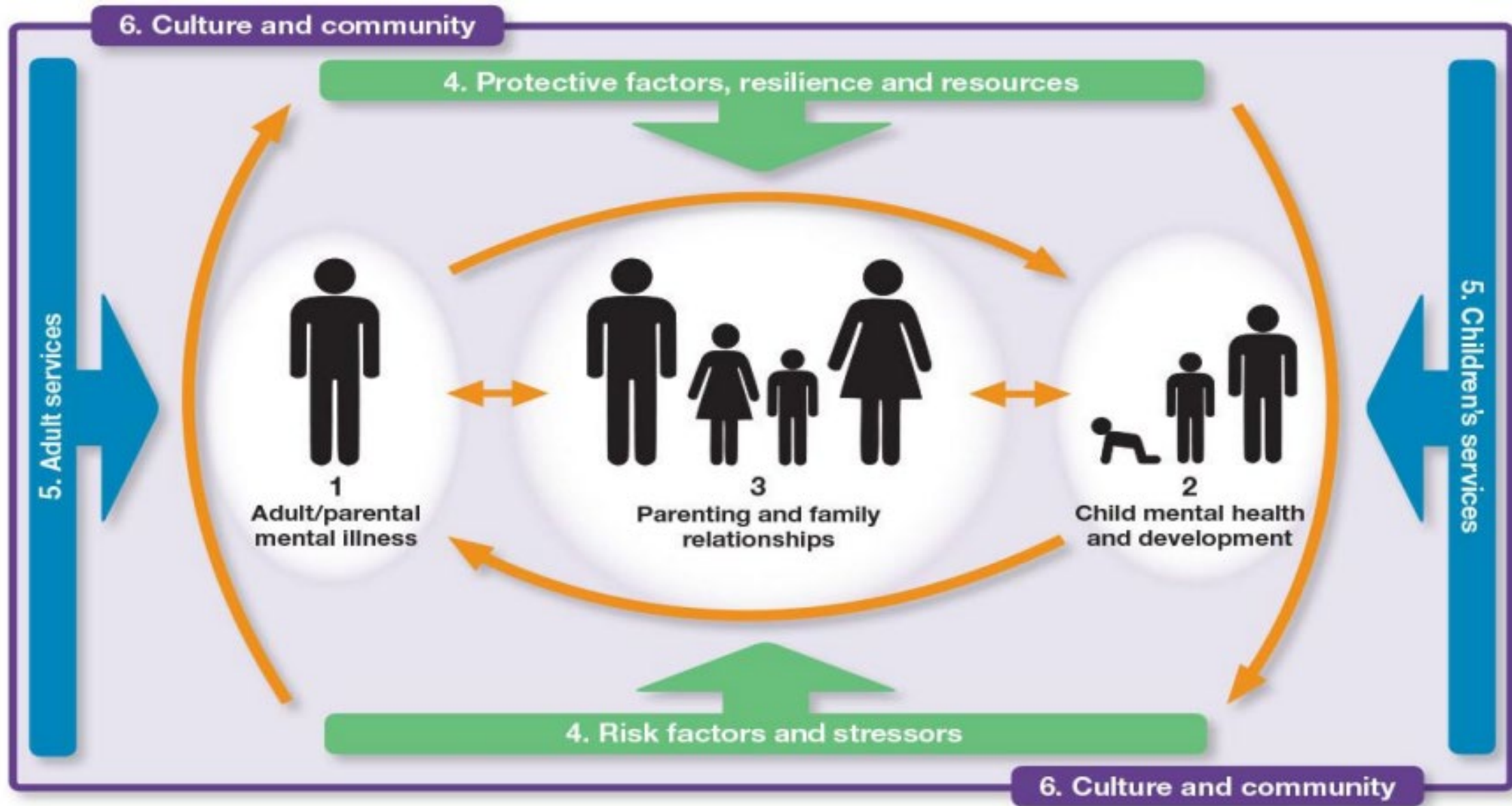
Service Access

- Delays in accessing psychological support were a recurring concern
- Integrated cancer and mental health support was highly valued

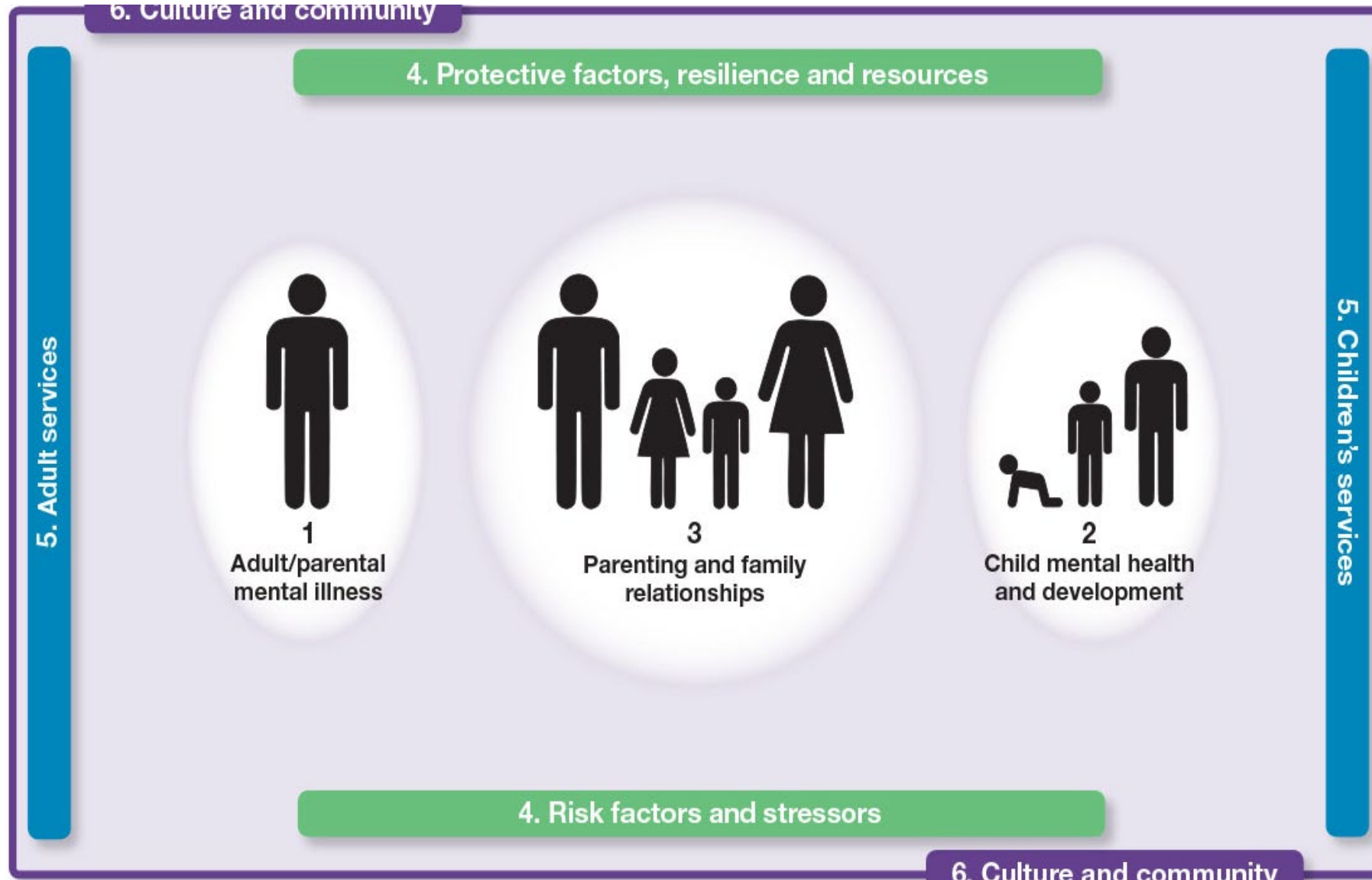
Impact of the Service

- Individuals reported feeling heard, understood and less alone
- Families described improved communication and coping

The Family Model Falkov 2012



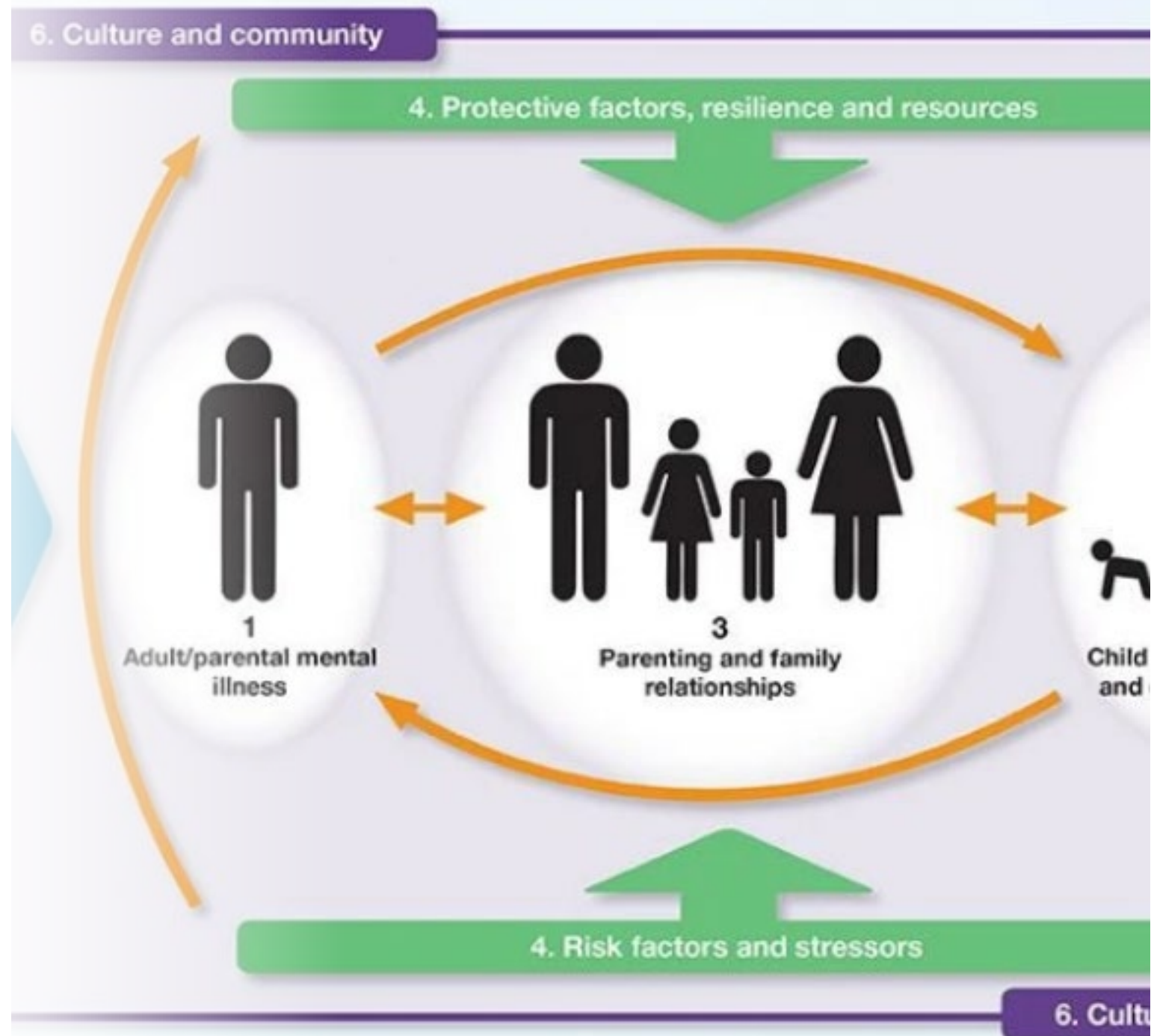
6 Domains



Domains Summary

- 1. Adult/Parental Health and Wellbeing**, mental health, and life circumstances affect both themselves and their family.
- 2. Child Wellbeing and Development** Considers the child's emotional, social, behavioural, educational developmental
- 3. Parenting and Family Relationships** Focuses on communication, attachment, caregiving and family functioning
- 4. Risk and Protective Factors** Identifies challenges that may increase stress or vulnerability, alongside strengths, resources.
- 5. Services and Professional Networks** Examines the role of adult services, children's services.
- 6. Culture and Community** Recognises the influence of culture, beliefs, values and identity

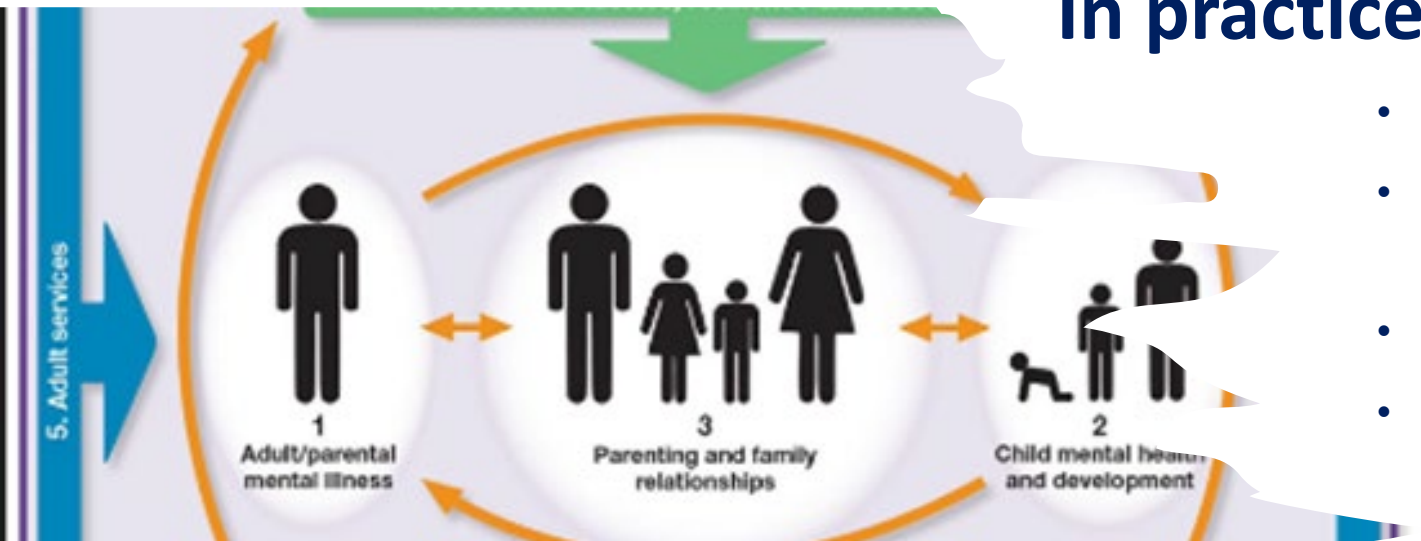
"The Family Model provides a whole-family framework"



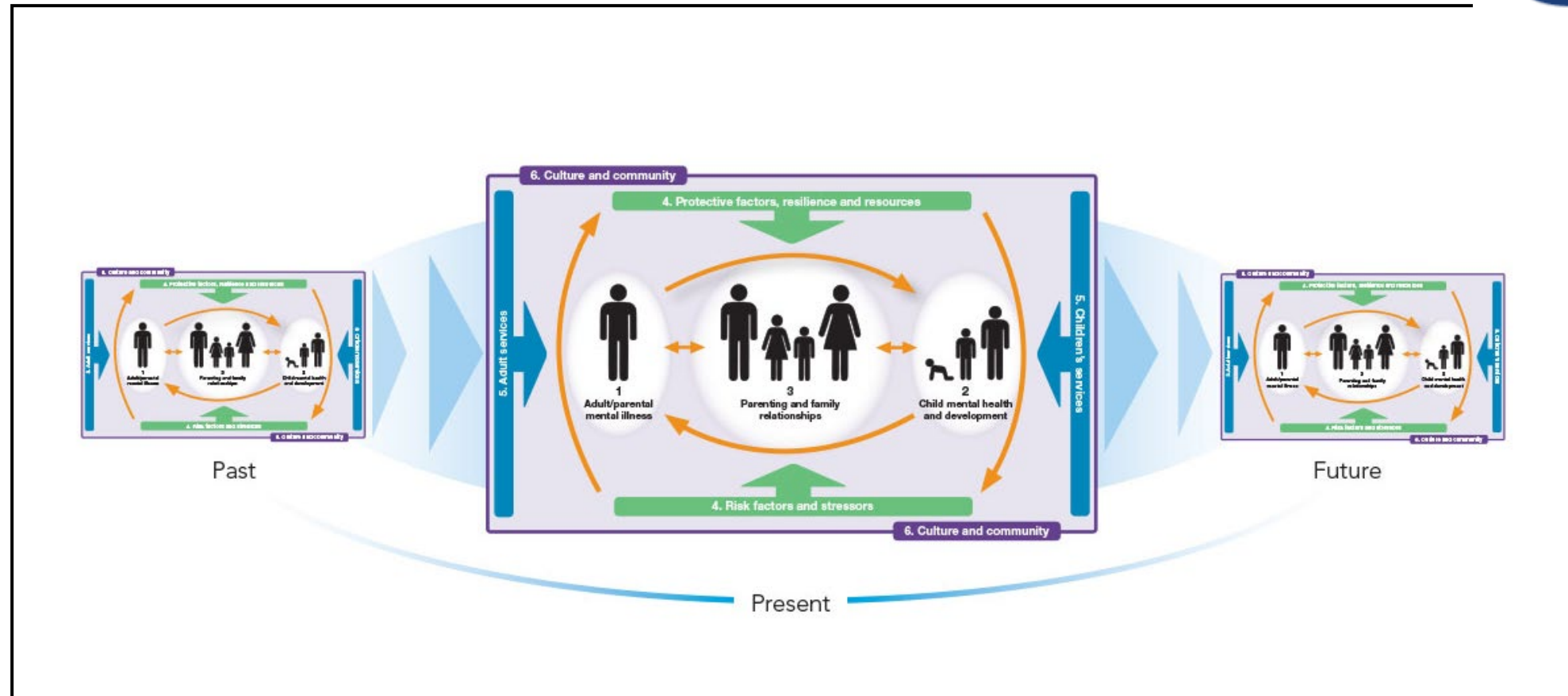


In practice...

- Used as a structured **conversation tool**
- Helps to consider how a parent's mental health, a child's wellbeing and family relationships **influence one another**.
- It can identify **family strengths, areas of concern** and opportunities
- Supports **collaborative discussions** with families,



Past - Present - Future



The Family Model helps families, to understand how past experiences, present challenges and future aspirations are connected, while identifying strengths and resources that can support recovery and resilience

Lived Experience Group





Sharing Experiences



Lived Experience Regional Working Group

Impact

- Facilitated by the Macmillan Psychosocial Team.
 - Action-focused approach,
 - Members contribute to evaluation, service improvement and future planning
- Strengthens co-production and meaningful involvement.
 - Ensures services are shaped by those with direct experience.
 - Promotes awareness of the psychological impact of cancer on individuals and families.
 - Creates opportunities for peer support, connection, advocacy and community engagement.

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Developed and Delivered



**Children
in Northern
Ireland**





BY AWARE NI

LIVING WITH CANCER AND BEYOND

AWARE NI's Mood Matters is a free mental health awareness workshop for adults wanting to learn about mental health and managing mood. This course has been adapted in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to help anyone affected by cancer, either personally or through a loved one.

COURSE CONTENT

- Mental health and cancer
- How cancer can make you feel
- Stress, depression and anxiety
- Looking after your mental health

DETAILS

Thursday 17th September 2026

10am - 12pm

Delivered online



LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL

This CBT-based mental health course is suitable for people aged 18 and over experiencing low mood, stress, and mild to moderate depression. It teaches skills that can be used in everyday life. Delivered by AWARE NI, this course has been adapted in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to help people living with cancer look after their mental health.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This programme can make a big difference to your life. It can help you manage your feelings when you are stressed, worried or depressed and teach you simple, practical skills to help you cope with life's challenges.

DETAILS

Thursday 24th September - 29th October

10am - 12pm

Delivered online

HOW TO APPLY

Scan the QR code to apply:



COURSE CONTENT

Week One: Understanding your feelings

Week Two: Doing things that make you feel better

Week Three: Looking at things differently

Week Four: How to fix almost anything

Week Five: Building inner confidence

Week Six: The things you do that help and the things you do that don't

AWARE NI MACMILLAN

Macmillan Psychosocial Service NI

MindWise has services to support people diagnosed with cancer, their family, friends and colleagues.

Mental Health & Wellbeing Coaching

Mental Health & Wellbeing Coaching takes a goal-orientated approach to tackling a range of Life's challenges. It is a type of support system for people with Mental Health difficulties.

Mental Health Coaches are specially trained professionals who help people develop greater self-awareness, introduce and implement tools which allow the client/ coachee to better manage their life and pursue specific mental health goals.

Mental Health Coaching often uses cognitive techniques (finding understanding through thought, experience and the senses) and behavioural techniques (finding understanding of your behaviour and reactions), but it does not diagnose or treat mental illness.

Individual Mental Health & Wellbeing Coaching

For people diagnosed with cancer and need support with their emotional wellbeing. You will work with an assigned Mental Health Coach for up to 8 sessions for about 50 minutes a week. You will identify your goals and work on a plan towards achieving these.

Peer Group Coaching

For groups of people who have a cancer diagnosis. These will be arranged in conjunction with the Macmillan Lived Experience Development Lead, this is one 2-hour session.

Family Coaching

For family members and support network of the person diagnosed with cancer. Up to 6 people (which can include the person with the cancer diagnosis) will attend 6x 90-minute sessions with a Mental Health Coach. Identifying their goals, and work on plans towards achieving these.



Get in Touch To Find Out More macmillan@mindwisenvi.org



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Scan QR Code for Referral



You can register directly for one of the programmes or contact the Psychosocial team professionals who will either signpost, refer onwards for support or carry out a piece of individual work with individuals and families / significant others.

Scan this QR code for further information

SCAN ME

HEART STRENGTH AMBITION



MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT *MindWise*

Macmillan Psychosocial Service NI

Get In Touch

Contact the Macmillan Psychosocial Team NI

E-Mail: Macmillan@mindwisenv.org

Tel: 02890-402323



Macmillan & MindWise
Macmillan in Partnership with MindWise
Macmillan Psychosocial Service NI

- Professionals Referral for Macmillan Psychosocial Support Services
- Self-Referral for Macmillan Psychosocial Support Services
- MindWise - New Visions for Mental Health
- Professional Referral - MindWise Mental Health & Wellbeing Coaching after a Cancer Diagnosis
- Self Referral - MindWise Mental Health & Wellbeing Coaching after a Cancer Diagnosis
- CINI - The Family Model Awareness Training For Cancer and Mental Health Professionals and Suppo...
- Aware NI - Supporting Your Mental Health Living with Cancer and Beyond

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Future Opportunities- Sustainability

Expand Family-Focused Practice

- Earlier identification
- Family support plans
- Whole-family interventions
- Increased support for carers

• Strengthen Integration

- Closer links with CNS teams
- Primary Care MDTs
- Mental health services
- Hospice services
- Community and voluntary partners

• Prevention and Early Intervention

- Reduce isolation
- Improve coping
- Prevent deterioration in mental wellbeing
- Reduce crisis presentations