

# What is formulation?

## Information for young people and their families

### Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – Over 12s Day Programme

#### A formulation is:

- A bit like doing a jigsaw – we work together to find the different pieces of the puzzle and put it together in the way we think it fits.
- A structured method for bringing together a shared understanding of what is going on for you
- Never static and constantly evolving, it describes what we think is going on for you at this point in your life
- Based on viewing what is going on for you in the context of psychological theory
- Often used to inform treatment, care plans and supports.
- Continually shaped by new information as we learn more about you.

#### A formation is not:

- A diagnosis
- An assessment tool or treatment plan
- Set in stone or a finished document
- Only created by professionals
- One-size-fits-all (different people may get different kinds of formulations).

### Typical Formulation - The 5 P's framework

#### Predisposing Factors

What may have played a role in making you more likely to develop mental health problems in the first place? This can include biological factors and life experiences.



#### Precipitating Factors (Triggers)

What has happened that may have led to mental health problems developing at this time in your life?



#### Presenting Problems

What are the problems you are currently experiencing?



#### Perpetuating Factors

What may be keeping your current problems going?



#### Protective Factors

What strengths, supports, and good things have you got going for you?



## How we gather information

Your views are a big part of our formulation.

Clinicians may also speak to your family or other adults in their life (like from your school, CAMHS or other activities or places that are important to you). Clinicians may review notes in your health file or other reports that have been shared (such as school reports).

When we feel we have enough information about you, we will organise a meeting and a range of professionals will attend.. This is called a **formulation meeting**. There may also be students present.

This is a space where professionals working with you can explore their thoughts and ideas about what may be going on for you. We do this on our own in the first instance, as we may be using confusing medical jargon and want to arrive at a shared understanding as a team before we meet with you.

We then meet with you or your family to share our professional understanding and see how this aligns with your thoughts and experiences to develop our understanding together.

## What happens next?

After any changes are made, a written version of the shared formulation will be provided.

1. You can choose to share this formulation with others as appropriate.
2. If needed, an adapted version can be created to share with the wider system (for example, if you do not want school to have all the information).
3. We use your formulation to inform treatment planning.
4. As part of ongoing input, the formulation will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

## More information and resources

### CAMHS NHS Lothian

<https://services.nhslothian.scot/camhs/>



### BPS information about formulation

<https://changingmindsuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Understanding-formulation.pdf>



### Information about formulation from NHS

[www.cntw.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/5ps-and-formulation-CNTW.pdf](http://www.cntw.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/5ps-and-formulation-CNTW.pdf)



### Information from YoungMinds about CAMHS

[www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/parents-guide-to-camhs/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/parents-guide-to-camhs/)



### Resources for families

[www.annafreud.org/resources/family-wellbeing/](http://www.annafreud.org/resources/family-wellbeing/)



### NHS Lothian Patient Experience Team

[www.nhslothian.scot/yourrights/patient-experience-team-tell-us-about-your-experience/](http://www.nhslothian.scot/yourrights/patient-experience-team-tell-us-about-your-experience/)

