

What is formulation?

Information for parents and carers

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – Under 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 your child in a non-blaming manner.
- Never static and constantly evolving, it describes what we think is going on for your child at this point in their life.
- Based on viewing what is going on for your child 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 your child.

A formulation 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 your child 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 child's life?



Presenting Problems

What are the problems your child is currently experiencing?



Perpetuating Factors

What may be keeping your child's current problems going?



Protective Factors

What strengths, supports, and good things has your child got going for them?



How we gather information

As you know your child best, your views are really important and are a big part of our formulation.

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

When we feel we have enough information about your child, we will organise a multidisciplinary professionals meeting. This is called a **formulation meeting**.

At this meeting, a range of professionals will attend including those who know your child well and those who do not know your family. There may also be students present. This is a space where professionals working with your child can explore their thoughts and ideas about what may be going on for your child. We do this on our own in the first instance so we can gain a shared understanding as a team.

We then meet with you as a parent(s)/carer(s) 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 other adults 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 child's 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



Information from YoungMinds about CAMHS

www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/parents-guide-to-camhs/



Resources for families

www.annafreud.org/resources/family-wellbeing/



NHS Lothian Patient Experience Team

www.nhslothian.scot/yourrights/patient-experience-team-tell-us-about-your-experience/

