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What Works?

- 5.10 Ample evidence exists that early intervention programmes are a powerful prevention strategy. The most successful programmes addressing risk and protective factors early in life are targeted at child populations at risk, especially from families with low income and education levels (Brown and Sturgeon, 2005). They include home-based interventions during pregnancy and infancy, efforts to reduce smoking during pregnancy, parent management training and pre-school programmes.
- **Promoting Parenting Skills**- group based parenting training programmes improve the mental health of both parents and children (Barbour et al 2001) and may be more acceptable to parents than clinic based programmes for individuals/parents.
 - **Home-Based Interventions** - evidence from home visiting interventions during pregnancy and early infancy, addressing factors such as maternal smoking, poor social support, parental skills and early child-parent interactions, has shown health, social and economic outcomes of great public health significance (Brown and Sturgeon, 2005). These include improvement of mental health both in the mothers and the newborns, less use of health services and long-term reductions in problem behaviours after 15 years. Evidence also shows that such interventions can be cost effective, especially when long-term outcomes are taken into account.
 - **Improving the Mental Health of Mothers** - early support during pregnancy for mothers in difficult social and economic circumstances has been shown to have a positive impact on birth weight and family relationships. Professional emotional support for women caring for their existing children can decrease the rate of post natal depression (Hodnett 2000: Scott et al 1999).

Northern Ireland Example

Lifestart Foundation

- 5.11 Lifestart (www.lifestartfoundation.org) which has offices in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, is a home based educational programme for parents of children aged from birth to 5 years. Its aim is to enable parents to make informed, relevant decisions about the upbringing of their children.

Key Issues to be Addressed

- 5.12
- Factors which promote resilience in children under five help those children to do well despite adversity, therefore early intervention is vital. Evidence shows, for example, that Promoting Parenting Skills Programmes improve the mental health of both parents and children. This is an area which should be further encouraged.
 - Action 18 of the Strategy and Action Plan 03-08 relates to parenting skills and links with the ongoing work being undertaken to implement the teenage pregnancy and parenthood strategy and action plan.
 - According to the Implementation Group's (Strategy and Action Plan 03-08) Draft Annual Report, all HSS Boards are undertaking some action, for example the delivery of skills training to Surestart staff on building self esteem and handling child behaviour.

To access and view the entire Bamford Review go to: <http://www.rmhdni.gov.uk/mentalhealth-promotion-report.pdf>