



Parenting during pandemic

Day 33: Evidence based practice – what is it and why is it important?

As we all sit at home waiting for news about the end of lockdown, we are hearing a lot about waiting for the evidence that it's safe to start to move out of lockdown. Evidence based practice is always used in healthcare but what does it mean and why is it important?

Evidence based practice at a basic level is what it says on the tin – using the best evidence we have from research on which to base our clinical practice. For example, when you visit your doctor, you expect them to give you medicine or treatment that has been tested and proven to work. The same is true if you see a Clinical Psychologist. They will offer therapy that has been tested and shown to work for people.

There are, however, different levels of evidence that something works. For example, if you were accessing therapy for yourself or your child, would you want it to be therapy that has been shown to work in case studies of one or two people or in large trials with lots of people? Research about anything usually starts out as case studies with one or two people or small groups and then develops into wider trials with more people in more places and with different characteristics.

When there are enough large trials, the evidence base moves on further and people start to look at all of the published research studies and write critical reviews, where all of the evidence is discussed; or analyse the statistics across studies, this is called meta-analysis. Other reviews look at the quality of the research papers on a particular topic and consider the balance of evidence from the best studies, this is called systematic review.

Healthcare professionals like Doctors and Clinical Psychologists are trained to create the evidence base by conducting scientific research and publishing the results. We are also trained to understand the evidence base and to look at it critically. This means analysing what was done in the research, the quality of this and how it applies to our patients. A lot of the research on which we base our clinical practice is carried out in Universities, laboratories and other academic and research institutes.

When there are enough small trials, then large trials, then reviews of all these trials; the evidence can make it's way into professional guidelines such as those produced but the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network. These guidelines advise professionals on the best ways to treat different conditions. This means they take the evidence and use it to create guidelines about clinical practice.

So, why is all of this important? Well, as parents we want the best for our children so it's helpful to know how the people we see decide on the best treatment or therapy options for our children. It also helps with understanding the reasons for the continued lockdown at present as we wait for evidence that it's as safe as possible for us to return to the things we were doing before the pandemic. It may also be helpful in thinking about where we get our information in general. If we look to qualified sources for healthcare information, then we know that it's evidence based. Clinical Psychologists have to use evidence based practice as part of our professional standards of practice and we have to be trained to create, understand and review research evidence for clinical practice. We then consider how the evidence fits with the people we see in clinic and therefore give people the best therapy for them.

We hope these tips are helpful. Well done on managing another day off school and we hope you will join us again tomorrow.

Please contact us with questions, comments or topics you'd like to see covered. We'd love to hear your feedback.

Wishing you a safe and healthy path through this pandemic.