

7 minute briefing: SPOTLIGHT on MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT

For all those working with adults, children and families



Strategic Partnership Boards
SAFETY SAFEGUARDING WELLBEING

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PRIYA'S STORY

Priya, mother of two, lives in Chingford and works full-time in the City. She has a strong support network. Every evening after work she has a glass of wine, another with dinner, and often a third when the kids are in bed, adding up to 40-60 units over a week, far exceeding the recommended maximum limit of 14 units a week.

Priya knows about the health effects of alcohol, but doesn't see her use of alcohol as an issue. It's easy for Priya to avoid acknowledging her drinking as she is able to carry out her day to day activities with little impact. She doesn't drink during the day. It doesn't affect her work / family and it's considered 'normal' to have a drink or two in the evening. However, recently, she's felt lower in mood and has less energy.

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MECC IN ACTION

Priya is picking up a repeat prescription from her GP surgery. While there, she gets chatting to Sheila, the receptionist, who sees that Priya looks stressed and asks how she's feeling. Priya says she is a little hungover and is always tired recently. Sheila says 'Do you mind if I ask you a question about that?' and Priya tells her about her usual evening drinks. Sheila's been trained in MECC and she suggests some quick tips for cutting down, including swapping for a smaller size of drink, and seeing if Priya's partner would be willing to slowly cut down with her, starting with just maybe one glass with dinner. Sheila has recently tried a non-alcoholic mocktail, which she recommends to Priya.

Sheila also uses the opportunity to emphasise some of the health benefits that she notices are the most relevant to Priya, including improved sleep, more energy and feeling fresher in the morning. She gives Priya a leaflet for the [Drinkcoach app](#) to help her set goals and track her progress.

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WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

It can be difficult to measure the impact of MECC because it relies on an opportunity in day to day conversations rather than formal programmes.

In Priya's case, the receptionist didn't have an opportunity to follow up and find out if Priya followed the steps they had talked about. But Priya went away and discussed it with her partner for support. She started monitoring her alcohol units more closely and gradually reduced her drinking. She is now having three completely drink-free days every week and has found that she feels better and is less stressed.

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WHY IS MECC IMPORTANT?

Many long-term diseases are closely linked to known behavioural risk factors. Making changes such as stopping smoking, increasing physical activity, losing weight and reducing alcohol consumption can significantly reduce the risk of poor health.

MECC can be applied to a range of behaviours / lifestyle choices to promote physical and mental health – including smoking, diet and exercise, alcohol/drug use, mental health issues, and sexual health. Brief interventions can be effective in producing small but important changes.

Public Health England evidence suggests that for every 8 people drinking at high-risk levels who receive a 1-2 minute interaction with brief advice, one will significantly reduce their alcohol consumption.

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HAVING A CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATION

It can feel daunting to start a conversation with someone about their lifestyles and behaviours. Use cues from the individual or their environment to start a conversation – for example, they might say they are struggling to leave the house, that they are craving a cigarette, or if you are in their home and see lots of empty bottles or junk food packaging.

It only takes a minute. You don't have to be an expert – you just need to be able to give one tip or suggestion for the individual to consider and be able to signpost them to a relevant service, for example the local stop smoking service, online mental health support, alcohol and drugs services, or it could even just be directing them to book an appointment with their GP.

Anyone can do the brief ['Making Every Contact Count' E-learning course](#) to get a better understanding of how to open a difficult conversation.

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WHAT IS 'MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT'?

Making Every Contact Count (MECC) is about using those every day conversations / interactions to make a difference to people's lives by instigating them to make positive changes to their health and wellbeing.

A MECC interaction takes a matter of minutes and is intended to fit into existing conversations and workloads rather than add extra tasks.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Keep having conversations!**
The more interactions we have like this, the wider the impact and the more we can encourage positive change to people's habits .
- **Access training and resources**
[MECCLink](#) is a directory of LBWF and national support services and also gives staff prompts using the **Ask-Assist-Act** model of brief interventions. These can be used in all interactions.
- **Share resources / discuss with your teams**
[Introduction to MECC](#) / [MECC resources](#) / ['Making Every Contact Count' E-learning course](#)
E.g. in a team meeting, consider MECC examples relevant to your work (e.g. directing to housing/financial/domestic abuse services, etc)
If you are interested in being part of our LBWF MECC working group, contact laura.davidson01@walthamforest.gov.uk