



MENTAL ILLNESS AND FAMILY FACTSHEET

This factsheet will provide you with information, advice and links to helpful websites about what to do if a member of your family is experiencing a mental illness.

Mental illness and family

Being around someone who has a mental illness can feel upsetting and frightening – especially if they are your parent, sibling, grandparent, or other close relative.

You or others may be frightened or worried when you hear the term mental illness. This is usually due to a lack of understanding. You may have a number of questions such as “Why is my parent like this?” or “Will I end up the same way?”

What is mental illness?

Mental illness is diagnosed by doctors or mental health professionals. There are different types of mental illness just as there are different types of physical illnesses. 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their life, ranging from common problems like depression and anxiety, to illnesses that may require more intense treatment. Most people cope well on a day to day basis and may have some ups and downs but generally manage to get on with life. It is at times when we are unable to manage with the stresses of life that we may become mentally unwell.

Why is my parent like this?

We don't really know why some people become mentally ill. Mental illness doesn't affect certain groups of people - it can affect anyone regardless of their age, ethnicity or religion.

Will my family still be able to look after me?

Sometimes, your family may not be able to give you the love and care that you need. They may struggle with practical aspects of care like cooking, cleaning or helping you with school work. You may also find yourself in the position of caring for your family instead of them caring for you.

“I get up and make my parent their breakfast every morning. I wish they would make mine for just one day!”

I feel angry towards my family – is that normal?

It is normal to have a lot of feelings about what is happening - some will be negative and you may find yourself feeling guilty for thinking this way. You may feel angry because you are expected to look after your family rather than them taking care of you. This might stop you going out with your friends, and it can make you feel resentful.

“I wish I could just be like my friends, going out to play football or go to the cinema”

Will I become mentally ill too?

Some mental illnesses are more common in some families. However, this doesn't mean that you will suffer from a mental illness. It will help to look after your emotional wellbeing.

You can do this by:

- talking about your feelings
- keeping active/exercising
- eating well
- spending time with friends
- reducing stress levels
- taking part in activities
- accepting who you are
- asking for help if you need it

What can I do if I need further help?

- Talk to someone. If you want more information about mental illness, how it is affecting you and how to look after your own mental health, talk to someone you trust. This might be a member of your family or teacher. They will listen to you and help you get further support if you need it.
- Support groups. Look in your local area to see if there is a young carers group that you could join so you can meet young people who may have experienced living with someone with mental illness.

VISIT THESE USEFUL WEBSITES

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/young-people/when-a-parent-has-a-mental-illness

Webpage from Royal College of Psychiatrists with information about parental mental illness

www.rethink.org/carers-family-friends

Information from mental health charity for everyone affected by mental illness, carers, families and friends

www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/young-carers/

Advice from charity Youngminds for young carers

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/mental-health/someone-family-mental-health-problem/

Information from Childline for children supporting a family member with a mental health issue

www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/childrenandfamilies/youngcarerscontacts.asp

Contact details for all young carer organisations in Cumbria

www.kooth.com

Free online counselling and support