



Need to Know

A guide for young people who have a parent with mental illness

You've been given this booklet because your mum or dad is being treated for a mental illness.

When a parent has mental illness it can affect your life too.

This booklet gives some information about mental illness and what it's like to live with someone who's got it. There's also a list of other organisations that can help.

This publication may be particularly helpful for young people aged 11 – 14.

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What is Mental Illness?
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If someone has a mental illness it means that their mind is ill. There are different kinds of mental illness such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia. Mental illness is sometimes described as having mental health problems or psychiatric problems.

There are many different types of mental illness. Often these involve feelings of depression, anxiety and confusion – all of which most people get at some time or other, particularly after distressing events in life. But with mental illness these feelings are so strong or last for so long that they make it very difficult for a person to cope with everyday life.



Why do People get a Mental Illness?

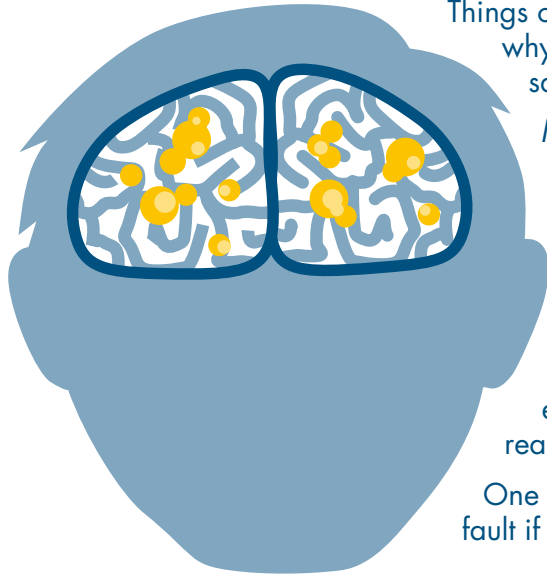
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Things can go wrong with our bodies and we don't always know why, or why some people get sick and others don't. It's the same with mental illness.

Mental illness can be caused by too much or too little of a chemical in the brain. It can also be caused by bad experiences and problems. However, everyone reacts differently.

While one person may be able to deal with a bad experience, another may find it more difficult.

Your mum or dad might have gone through a bad experience, but it might be that you can't think of any reason for their mental illness.

One thing is certain – it's not your fault. After all it's not your fault if your mum or dad gets a cold!

How Long Will It Last?

Sometimes mental illness can be a one-off condition that gets better and never returns.

Sometimes it's something that keeps happening, but people aren't ill all the time and they cope with it either by themselves or with the help of others. Some people never recover fully and they have to learn to live with their illness, usually with the help of medication.

Medication can help but sometimes it has unpleasant side effects. The person might feel tired or slow, or they might put on weight.

Is It Catching?

If a parent has a mental illness you might worry that you'll end up with the same thing. However, the fact is that most people do not develop the mental illness because their parents were unwell.

But, it's also true that anyone can suffer from mental illness.

The important thing is that you talk to someone about what's going on with your mum or dad and how you are feeling. You can speak to the person who is treating your parent, your GP (family doctor), a teacher, counsellor or youth worker. **Or you can contact Support in Mind Scotland on 0131 662 4359.**



Types of Mental Illness

There are many different kinds of mental illness. Here are some:

Depression

People suffering from depression feel very down and unhappy for a long period of time. They don't want to do the things they used to enjoy. They may also feel tired, find it difficult to sleep, or lose their appetite.

Manic depression (sometimes called bipolar disorder)

People with manic depression can sometimes feel very happy and active, and at other times very depressed. They may often be irritable, and might become angry and aggressive for no reason. They may sleep very little and continually start new projects or have grand ideas that are often impossible to carry out.

Phobia

This is a very strong fear of everyday things like dogs or spiders or open spaces or small spaces. The fear can be so strong that people try to avoid whatever it is that frightens them, such as never going out of the house in case they see a dog. This means they don't do the things that they used to do such as going to work or going out with their children.

Psychosis

People who suffer from psychosis (or are psychotic) can't think clearly. They may hear or see things that don't exist (hallucinations). They may have strange thoughts or beliefs (delusions). They may feel they are being watched, threatened or badly treated by everyone around them (paranoid).

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a type of psychosis. People with schizophrenia may have a different understanding of the world around them. They may have delusions and hallucinations. They can feel very confused and laugh at something sad or cry at something funny. They may hear voices in their head. Sometimes the person withdraws, avoids contact with others and doesn't want to do any of the things they used to do. Many people do cope well with treatment helping to control their problems.

If you need further info, the people who treat your parent should be able to help. **You can also contact Support in Mind Scotland on 0131 662 4359**



Getting Medical Help

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People with mental illness need different kinds of medical help:

At Home (as an out-patient)

The person sees a family doctor (General Practitioner or GP), or a psychologist or a psychiatrist, usually in a hospital out patient department. This means they have a regular appointment for treatment or medicine but they don't have to stay in hospital and can continue to live at home.

In Hospital (as an in-patient)

The person stays in hospital (a psychiatric hospital or a psychiatric section of a local hospital) where they may get different kinds of help.

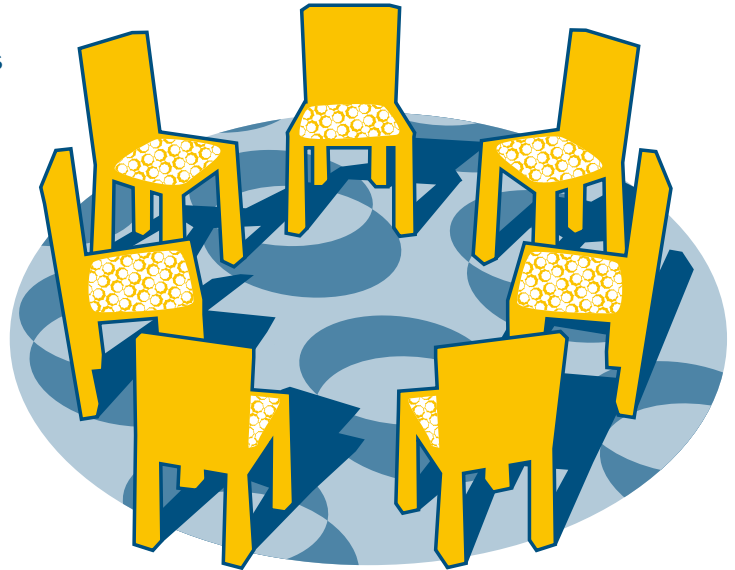
Some things that can help:

- Talking about their problems to medical staff either on their own or in a group. Sometimes, when someone gets the chance to talk about problems, they can see what's causing the problems and the changes that might help.

- Exercise, relaxation, painting, music and group discussions.
- Medication. This can be for a short time to help someone relax or sleep. Sometimes people have to take medication for a long time if it's the only way they can improve, or to stop an illness coming back.

A **psychiatrist** (*pronounced sigh-ky-atrist*) is a trained doctor who specialises in mental ill health and is usually based in a psychiatric hospital or clinic.

A **psychologist** (*pronounced sigh-kol-ogist*) is trained to understand the way people think and feel and behave. A psychologist is not a doctor and cannot prescribe drugs.



You're In It Too
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You're In It Too

When a parent has a mental illness, it affects the whole family. Attention is often focused on the person who is ill. Life at home may not run quite so smoothly. Your mum or dad might find it hard to do the usual things like cooking and shopping and looking after the house and family. The atmosphere might be tense and you may feel uncomfortable and unhappy.

If your parents have a lot on their minds you might get less attention and you might be expected to help out more around the house.

It's good if you can help now and then. But you can't take on all the things your mum or dad used to do.

Try to keep doing the things you normally do like hobbies and sports and seeing your friends. It doesn't mean that you are abandoning your mum or dad. It just means that you are taking care of yourself.

Other People
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Other People

Other People

There's a lot of prejudice about mental illness. This is usually the result of fear and ignorance.

People don't talk about mental illness much and so tend not to know much about it or how to react to someone with a mental illness.

Mental illness is actually very common. One in four of us will experience a mental health problem at some time in our lives.

You might find your mum or dad's behaviour quite difficult to handle sometimes. They might say or do something odd in front of your friends. This can be very embarrassing but it's important to remember that you aren't responsible for your parent's behaviour. Try to explain to your friends about your parent's illness. It's not easy, but it often helps.



Talking Helps



Some young people prefer not to talk to others and try to deal with things on their own. That's OK, but talking will probably help you deal with things better.

It's a good idea to talk to someone you really trust and to think about what you will tell them.

Get a Life

It's difficult for young people when a parent has a mental illness. However, there are things you can do to help you cope with what's going on. Like:

Talk it out

If you're in any way worried or unhappy with what's happening at home talk to someone about it.

Lots of young people feel they don't get enough love and attention when a parent is ill. They may feel sad or angry or guilty. These feelings are perfectly normal. When you feel like this, try to talk to your mum or dad about it. If that doesn't work, then find someone else you can confide in.

It's your life

You may have to spend more time helping at home than you used to, but make sure you leave enough time to relax. Keep in touch with your friends and do the things you usually do. After all, if your mum or dad had broken a bone, no one would expect you to sit around at home all the time.

Get help if you need it

If things have been difficult for a while and your mum or dad isn't getting any better, you might feel it's all getting too much for you. You can cope with a lot, but not everything. Talk to someone you trust, such as a relative, your GP or a teacher and tell them that things cannot go on as they are. Don't be ashamed of asking for help. Often, there's all sorts of help around – but you need to ask before you get it!



Help File

If you need advice or help try to find someone close to you who is a good listener and whom you can trust. This could be:

- Your mum or dad, your best friend, brother, sister, grandparents or a neighbour.
- Someone at school like your guidance teacher or student support services if you're at college.
- Your GP. What you say to your GP will be treated in confidence. This means anything you say will not be passed on without your consent.
- A trusted adult like a social worker, youth worker, minister, counsellor.

You can get free, confidential advice from:

Support in Mind Scotland on 0131 662 4359

Childline on 0800 1111

You can also check out www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk

Young Minds at www.youngminds.org.uk

RETHINK at www.rethink.org

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The idea for this booklet began in Holland. The text was put together by various centres working with the children of mentally ill parents. It was then translated to German and adapted by a child psychiatrist and child psychologist in Switzerland and Germany. It has been adapted for Scotland and Ireland by members and supporters of Support in Mind Scotland.

Other booklets in this series are:

A guide for children who have a parent with mental illness

Advice for parents with mental illness

Support in Mind Scotland would like to thank the young people, adults and organisations who helped in developing these booklets.

support
in mind
scotland



action for people affected by mental illness

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