

Mental Illness

About mental illness in the family

One in four people is estimated to experience a mental health problem in the course of a year; they belong to families – they are parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives. Many children will grow up with a main carer or close family member who has some kind of mental health difficulty.

Common problems

Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems in the UK but there are a lot of different mental health problems including bipolar disorder, personality disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), psychosis or schizophrenia. Someone in a family may have an eating disorder (anorexia or bulimia), they may be self-harming or have an addiction to alcohol or drugs. People with a mental health problem may be upset or down, they may be confused sometimes and struggle to do everyday things.

We don't always know why people develop a mental health problem, illness or disorder. Sometimes it can be a chemical imbalance in the brain or sometimes something stressful can trigger a mental health problem. Sometimes people with a mental health problem are ill for a short period of time, maybe a matter of weeks whereas for other people they may have a long-term mental health problem that needs ongoing medication or treatment.

Children who have a parent with a mental health problem

If a child or young person has a parent or carer with a mental health problem, it can be tough. The adult's behaviour may be worrying or frightening for their child; they may say things to the child that they don't mean but are upsetting; they may not want their friends to come round to the house. Children may be separated from parents if they need treatment in hospital and they are likely to feel worried and concerned about what is happening.

Young Carers

Children and young people who have a parent with a mental health problem are often young carers. They are more likely to cope with this situation if their parent is given good help, and they have support from their family and other adults but even with extra support, a lot of young people in this situation do a lot of jobs around the house, cook the meals, attend to their parent's personal needs, make sure they take medication, look after younger siblings and even manage the family finances. Their education can suffer.

Sisters and brothers

If a young person has a brother or sister with a mental health problem, this brings a different set of challenges with it. They may be embarrassed because their sibling's behaviour is not like their friends' sisters and brothers, and not want friends to come round; they may feel resentful because their sibling needs more of a parent's time and attention for frequent hospital or doctor's appointments; they may be scared of their behaviour or they may be involved in their care.

Effects on children and young people

Many parents with mental health problems, illnesses or disorders spend a lot of energy trying to protect their children from the effects. It is important to know that often young people who grow up with a parent with a mental health problem, illness or disorder can develop into particularly positive, caring and understanding adults.

Others, however, may struggle with a range of difficulties around their parents' (or siblings') mental health problems or drug and alcohol use, including the following:

- Not understanding what is happening
- Worrying that the mental health problem is their fault
- Having to help a parent with medication or personal care
- Not being regularly looked after or cared for
- Having to look after or care for siblings
- Trying to predict what mood their parent or sibling is going to be in
- Being shouted at if their family member is very angry or upset
- Being scared their parent or sibling will self-harm or commit suicide
- Seeing their parent or sibling self-harming, taking drugs or drinking
- Money problems if their parent is not able to work
- Missing school if they need to look after their parent
- Being separated if their parent is in hospital or not able to look after them

What can help? What to do next

These are some things that can make a difference:

1. Talk to your medical team and social worker if you have one and explain what your concerns are in full.
2. If social services get involved, that does not mean they will take the child away from you – their role is to assess the situation and offer help and support to the family. Your child would only be taken into care if there were no other way to keep them safe.
3. Encourage your child to talk about how they feel, what their worries are, how the mental illness in the family is affecting them. It is common for children in this situation to become withdrawn and unhappy.
4. If you are not able to be part of a discussion with your child, try to find another trusted adult who can help them open up.
5. Give your child clear information about what the parent or sibling is experiencing; this can help them to understand what is going on and that it is not their fault.
6. Try to help the young person have at least some parts of life and routines that are normal for their age group. Their education, their friendships, their sense of identity, their confidence and their ‘fun times’ can suffer very badly when they have a family member with a mental health problem, especially if they have become the main carer for a parent.
7. Contact your child’s school teacher or young person’s college tutor to let them know what is going on and to see what support the school/college can offer.
8. Contact your local young carers’ group and online support groups if your child has taken on a carer role in the family.
9. If you think a child or young person whose parent or sibling is mentally ill is having emotional, behavioural or mental health problems themselves, contact your GP for help.

Finding support

All resources listed on this sheet are for information only.

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, YoungMinds cannot accept responsibility for changes to details made by other organisations.

Mind www.mind.org.uk Online information and support on mental health and legal rights. Their two helplines, Infoline and Legal line, are also available from Monday to Friday 9am-6pm. The Infoline provides information on mental health problems, where to get help near you, treatment options and advocacy. Phone: 0300 123 3393 Text: 86463 Email: info@mind.org.uk The Legal line provides information and advice on mental health law, including being detained, mental capacity, community care and discrimination and equality. Phone: 0300 466 6463 Email: legal@mind.org.uk	Sane www.sane.org.uk Support for people affected by mental illness, and their families and carers. Helpline open every day from 4.30-10.30pm. SANElne: 0300 304 7000 Text care service: www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare Peer support: www.sane.org.uk/supportforum
BipolarUK www.bipolaruk.org Information and a peer support service for people affected by bipolar, including friends and family. You can find local support groups at www.bipolaruk.org/find-a-support-group	Rethink www.rethink.org Mental health advice, information and support, as well as a local service finder. Helpline open Monday-Friday from 9.30am-4pm. Phone: 0300 5000 927 Email: advice@rethink.org
CarersUK www.carersuk.org Information, advice and support for carers. You can find services in your local area at www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support/local-support	Our Time www.ourtime.org.uk Information, advice and support for children with a parent who has a mental illness - including family workshops in some areas of the UK.
Scottish Association for Mental Health www.samh.org.uk Scotland's leading mental health charity, providing information and a range of local support services. Call 0141 530 1000 for service details (open Monday-Friday 9am-5pm).	Carers Trust www.carers.org Information, advice and support for carers. You can find services in your local area at www.carers.org/search/network-partners
Al-Anon Family Groups www.al-anonuk.org.uk Support for anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking. Local Al-Anon Meetings provide a space for people to share their experiences and get support. You can search for Meetings near you at www.al-anonuk.org.uk/find-a-meeting Helpline (open daily from 10am-10pm): 0800 0086 811 Email: helpline@al-anonuk.org.uk	Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide www.uksobs.org Support for people over 18 who have been bereaved by suicide. Helpline open Monday-Friday 9am-9pm. Phone: 0300 111 506 Email: email.support@uksobs.org
	Nacoa (National Association for Children of Alcoholics) www.nacoa.org.uk Information, advice and support for anyone affected by a parent's drinking. Helpline: 0800 358 3456 Email: helpline@Nacoa.org.uk

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The Mix

www.themix.org.uk

If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix about anything that's troubling you over the phone, email or webchat. You can also use their phone or online counselling service.

Helpline open daily 4-11pm: 0808 808 4994

Email: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us

Webchat open daily 4-11pm: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team

Counselling service: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service

Kooth

www.kooth.com

Provides free, anonymous online counselling support for young people. You can also get support from the Kooth community and read personal stories from other young people.

Online counselling available 12-10pm Monday-Friday, and 6-10pm on Saturdays and Sundays. Sign up on the website to access support.

YoungMinds

Parents Lounge

www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-lounge

Our Parents Helpline experts answer questions on having difficult conversations with your child.

#Take20

www.youngminds.org.uk/take20

Ideas and suggestions to help parents find 20 minutes to do something together with their child to support confidence, self-esteem and resilience.



MinedEd

e-learning to support young healthy minds

www.minded.org.uk/families/index.html

MinedEd for families is a website where you can hear about other parents' experiences and find clear, helpful guidance on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small.

24/7 helpline: 0800 1111

Chat 1:1 with an online counsellor: www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat

Email: Sign up on the website, so you can send your message without needing to use your name or email address, at www.childline.org.uk/registration

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

www.thecalmzone.net

Provides support to anyone who is feeling down and needs to talk or find information.

Open daily 5pm-midnight.

National helpline: 0800 58 58 58

London helpline: 0808 802 58 58

Webchat: www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat

Finding a private counsellor or therapist

If your child needs emotional support and this is an affordable option for you, you can find accredited private child and adolescent therapists and counsellors living locally to you by searching the following directories.

Counselling directory: www.counselling-directory.org.uk

BACP: www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists

UKCP: www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist

YoungMinds Crisis Messenger

Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Text YM to 85258

Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.