

YOUNG MiNDS

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing an orange knit sweater, is shown in profile, looking towards the left. In the background, a man is blurred, looking down. The scene is set in a brightly lit, modern interior with blue and white tones.

**Mental illness
in your family**

“Sometimes when my brother gets ill he can be a bit scary. Once he stopped taking his tablets. He said he just wanted to be like everyone else and didn’t want to depend on anything or anyone.

“I came home from school one day and he was talking right in my face about stuff that didn’t even make sense. He has all these ideas about how he was going to lead the army into sorting out psychiatrists. He was never violent or anything but I was worried if I didn’t say the right thing, he might be.”

Coping with a family member with a mental illness

If someone in your family is diagnosed with a mental illness, it can be hard to deal with.

First, you're probably worried about them and what will happen. Then there's your own feelings and trying to cope with the changes in how they behave towards you.

In this booklet, you'll find information on what a mental illness is, how their illness can affect you and where to go for help and support.



What is a mental illness?

Just like our bodies get ill, our minds can get ill too.

Everyone has days where they feel lonely, disappointed, frightened or anxious.

But sometimes, these feelings can get on top of us and they can impact everything from going to work or school and how we behave towards others.

That's when we have a mental health problem. When someone is at the extreme end of these feelings and they find it difficult to manage, we consider it to be a mental illness.

It can be mild or severe and can last a short period of time or continue for years and require a lot of help to get better.

What causes mental illness?

It's rare for a mental illness to occur out of the blue, it usually builds up over time and comes to a point where people need professional help. The causes are wide ranging and include:

- A stressful or traumatic event that triggers certain feeling and emotions
- A chemical imbalance in the brain
- Changes in the body which can affect how someone feels or reacts
- There can be no identifiable cause
- Remember you are never the cause of their illness

Mental illnesses can be treated. Sometimes, medication is used while other therapies such as talking therapy and counselling can help people deal with the traumatic event that may have triggered their illness, the symptoms they show as well as how to stay well and healthy.

Anxiety Disorders: What are they?

When someone is overwhelmed by fear, it can lead to an anxiety disorder such as:

- **Phobias** – when someone has severe or unreasonable fears of everyday things such as going to work, being outside, certain places, animals or items.
- **Obsessive compulsive disorder** – when someone carries out repeated rituals or habits to handle distressing thoughts, for example constantly washing their hands.
- **Post traumatic stress disorder** – when someone is overwhelmed by a distressing event and continues to have dreams, flashbacks or upsetting thoughts about it.
- **Eating disorders** - when someone's eating habits become unhealthy such as eating too much or eating too little. These include bulimia and anorexia.



Depression: What is it?

Depression is one of the most common types of mental illness. It's a mood disorder where someone feels 'down' all the time. It's like taking the bad days we all have, but having them for weeks or months and it can cause a wide variety of symptoms including lasting feelings of unhappiness and hopelessness, to losing interest in the things you used to enjoy and feeling very tearful.

Sometimes it can happen as a reaction to something sudden and traumatic. Sometimes the reasons can build over time.

More than one person can experience depression in a family, too. Sometimes, mothers can experience it after the birth of a baby – this is known as Post-Natal Depression.

People with depression can feel tired all the time, find it hard to concentrate and they often don't want to do everyday things like getting dressed or making something to eat.

1 in 5

people are affected by clinical depression at some point in their lives



Psychosis: What is it?

In a psychotic episode, a person loses touch with reality as other people see it. They might hear voices, see or feel things that aren't there, feel paranoid or believe things that don't rationally make sense.

The most common types of psychosis are:

- **Schizophrenia** – someone sees, hears or believes things that for other people are not true. They can also feel muddled, low or withdrawn.
- **Bi-polar** – where someone's mood swings from very 'high' to very 'low'. It's also known as manic depression. People with bipolar disorder don't always show psychotic symptoms.

1 in 100

people in the UK are affected by
bi-polar disorder



How does mental illness affect you?

It can be hard when someone close to you has a mental illness.

If it's a parent, sometimes they might not be able to give you the love and attention you need. And they might find things like cooking or helping you with your homework difficult.

If it's a brother or sister, there might be times they don't want to play or socialise with you. Your parents may spend a lot of time looking after them and it may make you feel left out.

You might have some feelings that make you feel guilty or ashamed too. For example, you might feel;

- You're missing out because you're looking after someone and doing jobs around the house most people your age don't do



- Ashamed and not want to bring friends home
- Worried that you will suffer from the same illness

These feelings are absolutely normal. Don't feel guilty or blame yourself for having them.

If you're finding it hard to cope, it helps to talk to someone. Talking to someone in your family can help because they're probably going through the same thing.

If you can't talk to someone in your family, think of someone else you trust like a teacher, youth worker, counsellor or your doctor.

“Everyone’s always picking on other people at school. If I told about my dad and got it out, they might start picking on me. I wouldn’t be able to tell anyone at home because they’ve got enough to worry about. I’m really scared about someone finding out. I make up excuses so no-one comes round.”



How are mental health problems treated?

There is help and treatment available for people with mental health problems. Usually, they'll see their GP first, who'll arrange for them to see a specialist like a psychiatrist, counsellor or psychotherapist. They'll decide together on the best treatment for them. This can include:

- > **Talking treatment** – where they talk through the problems with trained professionals to help them get better
- > **Medication** – these can help to address chemical imbalances and make someone feel more 'normal'

Sometimes, if someone is very ill they may need to go to hospital. This is rare and is usually only the case if they are at risk of hurting themselves, other people or because they are not getting better with the treatment they are having at home.

My parent is ill - who looks after me?

If your parent or carer is ill, you don't have to cope on your own. Another family member or friend may be able to help out and arrangements about you being looked after will always be discussed with you and your parent or carer.

Social services may be able to get involved to arrange some extra help at home or work with a relative or family friend to make sure they can give you the support you need.

On some very rare occasions, they may need to arrange a temporary foster carer until a parent or carer is better and well enough to look after their children.

This is a really important decision that will be discussed with you and your parent or carer.

You should never feel the burden of a parent's mental illness – remember, if it's getting too much, talk to someone about it.



Who can help?

There are plenty of organisations out there who can help if you're worried or struggling to cope with mental illness in your family.

childline.org.uk

The UK's free helpline for children and young people – it's a confidential service and provides telephone counselling for any child with a problem.

Helpline: 0800 1111

Textphone: 0800 400 222

Mon-Fri 9:30am-9:30pm | Sat and Sun: 11am-8pm

themix.org.uk

Offers free support and advice for under 25s through a confidential helpline, online chat and discussion boards.

Helpline: 0808 808 4994

7 days a week 2pm – 11pm



youthaccess.org.uk

Information and advice on counselling services for people aged 12–25. Visit the website and click 'Find a service'.

carersUK.org

Information and advice for carers of all ages. They also have a directory of local carers groups

Tel: 0808 808 7777

Mon-Fri 10am-4pm

babble.carers.org

An online community of young carers where you can talk to others like you, share stories and find support.



YoungMinds
Suite 11 Baden Place
Crosby Row
London SE1 1YW
Telephone 020 7089 5050

yomenquiries@youngminds.org.uk

youngminds.org.uk



LOTTERY FUNDED

Registered charity number: 1016968

Company limited by guarantee number: 02780643

Thank you to Dr Andrea Gnanadurai and her colleagues at the Child and Family Public Engagement Board, Royal College of Psychiatry for fact checking this booklet.