

**Action for Carers Surrey –
Surrey Young Carers
INFORMATION PACK:
*Mental Illness***

June 2020



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1. Introduction

Mental illness in your family

If someone in your family is diagnosed with mental illness, it can appear a bit scary. Not only are you worried about them and what will happen but you also have to cope with the changes in their behaviour and how they impact you.

In this pack, you will find information on what a mental illness is, how the condition may affect you, tips on looking after your own mental health and who you can turn to for help and support.

2. What is mental illness?

Anyone can have a mental illness

Just like our bodies, our minds can become ill and require treatment. This is very common and mental illness can happen to anyone at any age. It could happen to your mum, brother, friend or teacher.

The difference between normal emotions and mental health

Everyone has days when they feel particularly sad, anxious or lonely but sometimes these feelings can be so strong that they overwhelm us and make us think and act in ways that are different to our normal behaviour. That's when we have a mental illness.

Mental illness can be mild or severe and may last a short or long period of time. However, it is important to remember that, like physical illness, with the right support, mental illness can be treated and managed.

3. Types of mental illness

Whilst each individual experiences mental illness differently, they will often be given a general name or label to help professionals refer them to the right support and treatment.

Information on some of the most common mental illnesses can be found below:

Depression

Is a mood disorder when someone feels 'down' all the time. People suffering from depression may:

- Have lasting feelings of unhappiness or hopelessness
- Lose interest in things they used to enjoy
- Feel tired all the time and lack the energy to do basic tasks
- Find it difficult to concentrate
- No longer take care of their personal appearance

Anxiety Disorders

When someone changes their behaviour because they feel overwhelmed by fear and worry. These include:

- **Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD):** when someone carries out repeated rituals because they believe something terrible will happen if they don't.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** when someone has experienced a traumatic event and continues to re-live it through flashbacks and distressing thoughts.

Bipolar Disorder

When someone has extreme moods; sometimes very sad (low) and at other times full of energy and excitement (high). When in a high mood they may act erratically and impulsively.

Psychosis and Schizophrenia

When someone loses touch with reality and the ability to think clearly. They may see or hear things that others can't (hallucinations) or have irrational and unusual thoughts that are not shared by others (delusions).

4. How does it affect you?

It can be very difficult when someone in your family has a mental illness and it may impact you in many different ways.

If it's a parent, they may:

- Not be able to give you as much time and attention
- Have extreme emotions and appear angry with or withdrawn from you or rely on you for emotional support
- Struggle with routines like mealtimes, bedtimes and taking you to school or clubs and activities
- Need extra help with household chores, buying food and paying bills

If it's a sibling (your brother or sister), they may:

- Not want to socialise with you
- Have extreme emotions and appear angry with or withdrawn from you or rely on you for emotional support
- Take up a lot of your parents time and attention

This might make you feel:

- Like you are missing out
- Ashamed, embarrassed or confused
- Worried about them - and whether you will suffer from the same illness

It is very important to remember that these feelings are completely normal. You should never blame yourself or feel guilty for having them.

Whilst we don't always know what causes mental illness, we do know it is NOT your fault!

5. Looking after me



However busy you are, it is important for your own mental health that you take time out for yourself to relax and recharge the batteries!

Connect

Friends play such an important role in helping us cope with stress and worries. Take time out to stay in touch. We have so many entertaining ways of connecting these days, from text and What's App to gaming and social media, just be mindful of your safety if you are using these platforms.

Get outside, get moving

Exercise is a fabulous stress buster as it gets our natural feel good hormones pumping around our bodies and up to our brains. You do not need to be a 'sports person' to get physical. Going for a walk or a bike ride, shooting hoops or kicking a ball is just as beneficial for your mental wellbeing as a run or a workout.

Breathe and be mindful

If you are feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed taking some deep breaths is an instant way of finding a calm again and can prevent you from reacting negatively to the stress in that moment. Practising 'Mindfulness' is an effective way of relaxing; either through breathing activities, (you can find a simple one on page 4 to try), visualisation and meditation or simply colouring or sitting quietly in the open air.



Take time out for you

Whatever it is you like to do, take time to do it! Cook, exercise, and revisit your hobby or just chill!

All of the above are about you looking after yourself. If you want to be active do so, but if watching a film or having a snooze is your thing then this is just as effective when it comes to relaxing and recharging your batteries.

Just One Breath

BREATHING ACTIVITY



Find a relaxing place, sit comfortably, and set a timer for one minute.

Breathe deeply in and out while paying attention to any sensations you notice or sounds you hear.



Take another slow deep breath, imagine the air moving down into the lungs and back up.

Take one more deep breath and hold for a moment, then release it.



6. Who can help?

There are many organisations out there that can help you if you are worried or are struggling to cope with mental illness in your family.



Sometimes it may be difficult to talk about how we feel and even more difficult to let people know when things aren't great.

It is important that you know where to seek help if you need it. Think about who you could turn to if you need to talk.

- A family member
- A teacher or trusted adult in school or college
- Your Social Worker or Family Support Worker
- Your Youth Support Worker
- Your Surrey Young Carers Coordinator

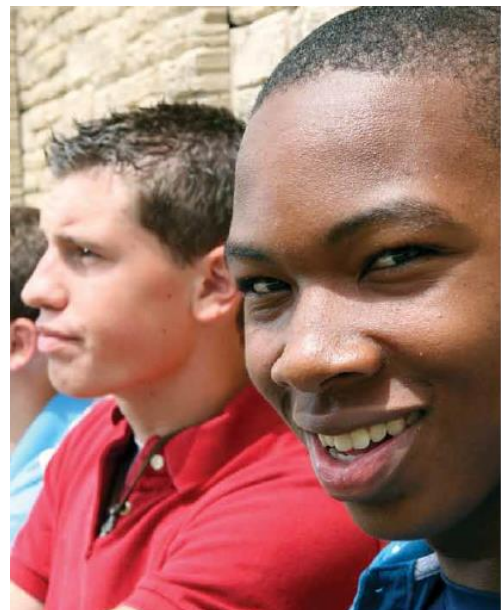
Please do not forget... Surrey Young Carers are still here for you! Get in touch with us by phone on 01483 568269 or email at syc@actionforcarers.org.uk 😊

Useful websites

- www.Actionforcarers.org.uk
- www.Childline.org.uk / 0800 11 11 11
- www.Themix.org.uk / 0800 808 4994
- www.Youngminds.org.uk/family-mental-illness
- www.Youthaccess.org.uk
- www.CarersUK.org
- www.Kooth.com

Useful apps:

- Headspace
- Calm
- Think Genie




Use the sheet on the next page to gather your contacts in one place and keep it somewhere easy to find, this way you can easily access your support network, should you need it.

My contacts

Write in the numbers of some contacts you may need below.


GP




Young carers project




School/college




Work



Family member



Friend



Other support



Other support



Surrey Young Carers, part of Action for Carers Surrey

Call on **01483 568269** or email syc@actionforcarers.org.uk

www.actionforcarers.org.uk



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