



It's About You Too!

A guide for children who have a parent with a mental illness

You've been given this book because your Mum or Dad has a mental illness

This book tells you about mental illness.

It also suggests who you can speak to if you need more information.

This publication may be particularly helpful for children aged 8 – 10.



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Why Do People Get Mental Illness?

Anyone can become ill – like getting chickenpox or breaking an arm.

Mental illness is when the mind gets ill – like someone not knowing what they are doing or saying any more.

When someone has a mental illness, they don't feel good. Sometimes they feel confused. Sometimes they feel tired and sad and can't cope anymore. Sometimes they get angry for no reason.

Mental illness can be caused by too much or too little of a chemical in the brain. It can also be caused by people having too much stress or upset for so long that they feel they can't cope.

It's not always clear why some people get ill, but one thing is certain – it's not your fault. After all it's not your fault if your mum or dad gets a cold!

Just like with any illness, sometimes people get better faster in hospital than at home.





What Helps?

When something is bothering you, it usually helps to talk about it. It can be hard, but you feel better when you do.

If your mum or dad has a mental illness, they will talk to a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist (pronounced sigh-ky-atrist) is a trained doctor that specialises in mental ill health and is usually based in a psychiatric hospital.

It's hard living with a parent with a mental illness, so you also need the chance to talk about how you feel.

It's OK to Talk

You don't hear many people talking about mental illness.

But lots of people have mental illness and it's nothing to be ashamed about.

There are lots of young people who have a parent with the same problems as yours. Probably far more than you think.



Who To Talk To

It's best to talk to someone you like and who you can trust.

The people looking after your mum or dad should also be able to answer any questions.

Here are a few ideas of people you can talk to:

- Mum or dad
- Brother or sister
- Teacher
- Best friend
- Neighbour
- Friend's mother
- Grandma or grandpa
- Uncle or aunt

Can you think of anyone else? _____



What if.....



They've got to stay in hospital?

If your mum or dad has a mental illness they may have to stay in hospital. This will be a Psychiatric Hospital or a psychiatric section of a local hospital. Doctors, called Psychiatrists, are specially trained to help people with mental illness.

The doctors and nurses will spend time with your mum or dad and talk to them about what is happening and how they are feeling.

Your mum or dad might also be given medicine. This might just be just for a short while, maybe to help them sleep. This medicine is only to be taken by the person it is given to. Sometimes people have to take medicine for longer so that they feel better.

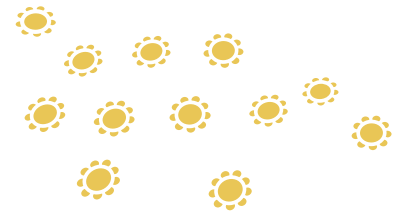
In the hospital, some people will rest and sleep a lot. Others will be active – talking, painting, exercising or working.

You can probably visit your mum or dad in a psychiatric hospital. They probably won't be in bed. Most people in the hospital are up and about in their normal clothes. Some of them might behave differently to what you'd expect or say strange things. They are not doing this because you are there. They do it when you're not there too.

Can they stay at home?

Not everyone with mental illness has to stay in hospital. Some people stay at home and attend a special clinic on regular days.

Psychiatrists, nurses and other helpers work in clinics. They will spend time talking with your mum or dad to find out how they are feeling and to help them discuss any problems. They may also give your mum or dad medicine to take at home.



The Words

Here are some of the words you might hear about mental illness.

Psychiatrist

A doctor who knows a lot about people who are mentally ill.

Other people you might come across are social workers and psychiatric nurses.

Psychologist

A psychologist (pronounced sigh-kol-ogist) is trained to understand the way people think and feel and behave. A psychologist cannot prescribe medicine.

Depression

Someone who has depression feels tired and sad. They may not want to eat and might find it hard to sleep. Everyone feels down sometimes, but depressed people feel like this often and for a long time.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

PHOBIA

DEPRESSION

Phobia

A person has a phobia if they are terribly afraid of something, like birds or spiders. Or they might be afraid to leave their house. Sometimes the fear is so strong that there are lots of things they can't do any more.

Psychosis or Schizophrenia

People who are very confused, who can no longer think clearly, and behave strangely may have a psychosis or schizophrenia. They might think they are someone famous like a king or a president. They might think they are being watched and followed even though they're not. They might see, hear, taste and even touch things that aren't there. They might be tired and avoid other people, just like being depressed.

Neurosis

Some people panic about everyday things, like the telephone ringing. Or they get worked up and angry for no reason. People who behave like this may have a neurosis.

PSYCHIATRIST
NEUROTIC
PSYCHOSIS



Two-Minute Quiz

Here are six questions to get you thinking. Draw an O round your answer.

(Answers on pages 12 and 13)

- 1 If your Mum or Dad has problems and can't cope any more, should you help out around the house more than usual?

Yes **No**

- 2 If your Mum or Dad is suddenly taken into hospital, is it your fault?

Yes **No**

- 3 If things are difficult for you at home is it OK to talk to someone about it?

Yes **No**

4 If your Mum or Dad says something strange or silly to a neighbour, is it OK to be embarrassed?

Yes **No**

5 If your Mum or Dad has a mental illness, can you still do fun things?

Yes **No**

6 If a parent says things that just cannot be true should you laugh?

Yes **No**



The Answers



1 No!

Even if a parent has problems and can't cope, it doesn't mean that you have to take care of everything. Helping out is good, but you're still a child.



2 No Way!

If a parent has to go into a psychiatric hospital it's never your fault! Even if you've done something wrong or didn't do what you were told, it's nothing to do with your Mum or Dad being ill.



3 Yes! Too Right!

If something is bothering you or you don't understand what's happening, it's very important to talk to somebody about it. It's best to talk to someone you trust, like your brother or sister, a friend, a friend's mum or your teacher.

4 Yes!

If your Mum or Dad does something strange or silly you may feel embarrassed. But all parents embarrass their children sometimes. Like telling cheesy jokes or telling the neighbours something about you when you're right there! It's not nice, but what the neighbours think is their own business.



5 Yes! Absolutely!

Even if a parent has a mental illness, you can still do fun things! Play football, go dancing, anything - whatever makes you happy.



6 Yes – Maybe

If your Mum or Dad says strange or untrue things it might be something you can all have a laugh about - or not - it will depend on the situation.



Sometimes there's no right or wrong answer. What do you think?

What Would You Do?

A Letter to Jenny

Dear Jenny

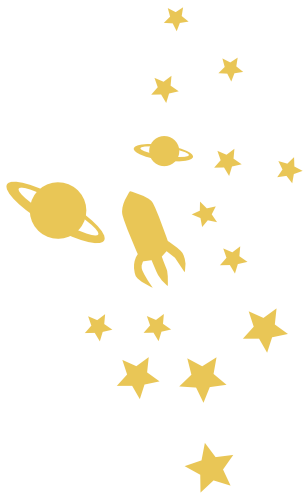
I really enjoyed being able to stay over at your house last week. And I promised to write you a letter.

I didn't want to go home again on Sunday. Your house is so cosy. My Dad is hardly ever at home and my Mum lies on the couch all the time. We have to talk really quietly because she can't cope with noise. A little while ago we had to play in the dark because the light was annoying her. It was exciting - we played ghosts. But my sister was very scared so we went outside to play. My Dad didn't come home until late. The neighbour asked why we were playing out in the rain. I didn't dare tell her that it was because we couldn't put on the light because it disturbed my Mum. Would you have told her?

Please write back!

Jack

What would you say to Jack?



JENNY



DEAR JENNY

I REALLY ENJOYED BEING ABLE TO STAY OVER AT YOUR HOUSE LAST WEEK AND I PROMISED TO WRITE YOU A LETTER.

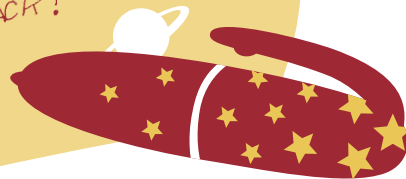
I DIDN'T WANT TO GO HOME AGAIN ON SUNDAY. YOUR HOUSE IS SO COSY. MY DAD IS HARDLY EVER AT HOME AND MY MUM LIES ON THE COUCH ALL THE TIME. WE HAVE TO TALK REALLY QUIETLY BECAUSE SHE CAN'T COPE WITH NOISE.

A LITTLE WHILE AGO WE HAD TO PLAY IN THE DARK BECAUSE THE LIGHT WAS ANNOYING HER. IT WAS EXCITING - WE PLAYED GHOSTS. BUT MY SISTER WAS VERY SCARED SO WE WENT OUTSIDE TO PLAY. MY DAD DIDN'T COME HOME UNTIL LATE. THE NEIGHBOUR ASKED WHY WE WERE PLAYING OUT IN THE RAIN. I DIDN'T DARE TELL HER THAT IT WAS BECAUSE WE COULDN'T PUT

ON THE LIGHT BECAUSE IT DISTURBED MY MUM. WOULD YOU HAVE TOLD HER?

PLEASE WRITE BACK!

JACK



Give Me Five

If a parent has a mental illness, life at home is probably not as nice as it was. But this doesn't mean you can't have fun anymore.

It won't help your mum or dad if you feel bad.

Think of at least five things you would like to do on your own, with others, at home or out and about.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Which one would you like to do most? _____

Which one could you do today? _____

Go For It!



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 NSF (Scotland).

Other booklets in this series are:

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

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