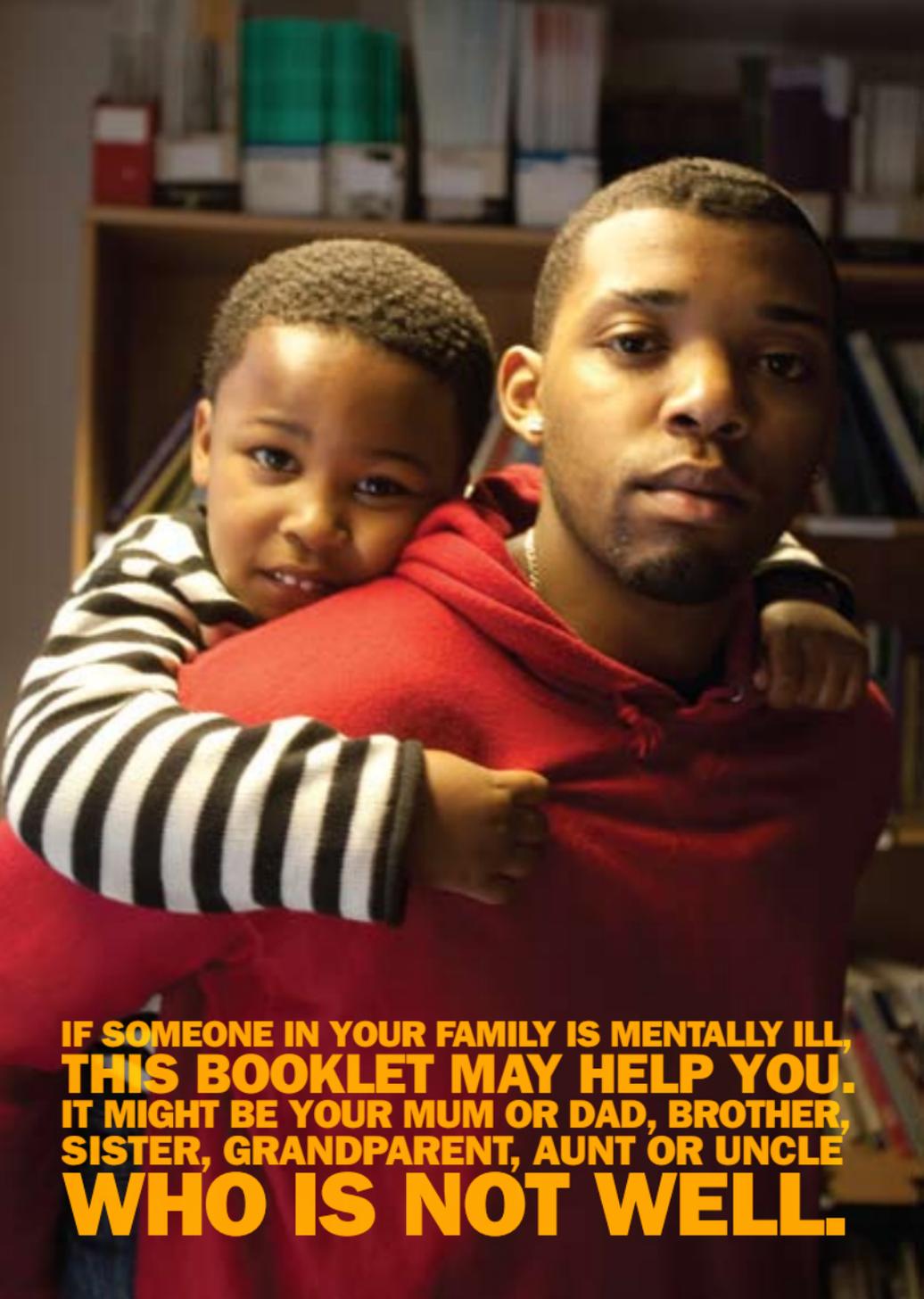


# YOUNG MINDS

The voice for young people's mental health and wellbeing

**MENTAL ILLNESS  
IN YOUR FAMILY**





**IF SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY IS MENTALLY ILL,  
THIS BOOKLET MAY HELP YOU.  
IT MIGHT BE YOUR MUM OR DAD, BROTHER,  
SISTER, GRANDPARENT, AUNT OR UNCLE  
WHO IS NOT WELL.**

## **MENTAL ILLNESS IN YOUR FAMILY**

### **A LOT OF PEOPLE FEEL WORRIED OR FRIGHTENED WHEN THEY HEAR THE WORDS 'MENTAL ILLNESS.'**

But this is probably because they don't understand what it means or they have heard stories which are untrue. Once you know more about mental illness, you should find it's not as frightening as you first thought.

Just as people's bodies can become unwell, people's minds can become unwell too. Mental illness is more common than you might think.

There are different kinds of physical illness and different ways to treat them. There are also different types of mental illness and different types of treatments for them. But mental illness is something most people find hard to talk about. This booklet gives you some information about mental illness, how to cope with your feelings about it and where you can get more information and advice.



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WE FEEL  
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AND LET THINGS  
GET OUT OF  
PROPORTION.**

## **WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?**

It is important to be sure what we mean by mental illness. Most of us cope well enough with our lives on a day to day basis. But there are times when we don't feel so well. We get fed up, lonely, disappointed; we become anxious or frightened. We feel misunderstood and let things get out of proportion.

These kinds of feelings are part and parcel of ordinary living. But sometimes they get on top of us – so much so that we find we can't get on with our lives. We can't concentrate and sometimes we can't get to work or school. We seem to be at odds – with other people and with ourselves. Our behaviour may get 'out of order' and we may become restless, argumentative, even violent. We are not happy. We don't feel well.

When our lives become as difficult as this, we have mental health problems. They can be mild or severe – some get better quickly but sometimes they last a long time and people need a lot of help.

The term 'mental illness' refers to the extreme end of these difficulties when some people, at different times of their lives, become so confused and out of touch with reality that they can barely cope with everyday living.



## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MENTAL ILLNESS?

We can all see if someone has a broken leg, but it's not easy to tell if someone is mentally ill. And because some symptoms might upset or frighten you, it can be hard to feel nice or kind to someone with a mental illness. These are some examples of mental illness:

### PSYCHOSIS

Psychosis is a serious mental illness. It means that people who suffer from it (described as 'psychotic') lose touch with reality and cannot tell the difference between what is real and unreal.

The most common forms of psychotic illness are 'schizophrenia' and 'bi-polar affective disorder.' (sometimes called manic depression)

Someone who has schizophrenia may have any of these symptoms:

- Delusions, which means they believe something is real when it isn't; they may think, for example, they are famous or have special powers. They may think that they are guilty of terrible crimes or that other people are controlling their thoughts or are wanting to hurt them.





- Thought disorder, which means their thoughts become very muddled and hard for anyone else to understand.
- Hallucinations, which means that they see, smell or feel something that isn't really there. A lot of people who have schizophrenia hear voices which no-one else can hear. They might also talk back to these voices.

Having schizophrenia can make people lose interest in everyday living and make it hard for them to talk or show affection or even eat or dress properly.

People who have bi-polar affective disorder suffer from extreme changes of mood. People who have this disorder (also called manic depressive illness or manic depression), can switch from being very manic to being very depressed. When manic or 'high' they feel very happy and powerful, and may take unusual risks. When they are very depressed they have little energy or enthusiasm.

People who are psychotic need help from mental health professionals.

## ANXIETY DISORDERS

Some people become overwhelmed by their fears and thoughts which can lead to the development of anxiety disorders. They may have:

**Phobias:** severe and unreasonable fears; e.g. they are afraid of going outside, going to work or school or of being in small spaces like a lift or crowded bus, or of being in large spaces.

**Obsessive compulsive disorder:** they feel they have to repeat things over and over again, such as washing hands or checking the oven is switched off, or have thoughts they can't get out of their mind.

**Eating disorder:** they feel so worried about the shape of their bodies and frightened of losing control of their lives that they eat too little (anorexia nervosa) or repeatedly binge and vomit (bulimia nervosa) – which badly affects their physical growth and health.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder:** they feel overwhelmed by very frightening events or experiences that have happened to them, such as accidents and assaults. They may suffer flashbacks where they seem to re-live the frightening event. They often become very moody and find it hard to concentrate or sleep at night.

**PHOBIAS**  
**OBSESSIVE**  
**COMPULSIVE**  
**DISORDER**  
**EATING**  
**DISORDER**  
**POST-TRAUMATIC**  
**STRESS DISORDER**

## CLINICAL DEPRESSION

Clinical depression is very different from just feeling low and that things are too much. People who have clinical depression feel very miserable or hopeless, sometimes for weeks or months on end. They may feel they want to kill themselves. They feel tired all the time and find it hard to concentrate. They often don't feel up to doing normal things like getting dressed or making something to eat.

Sometimes mothers get depressed after a baby is born. This is called 'post-natal depression' or if severe, 'puerperal psychosis'. This can make doing ordinary things very hard, for example, looking after the baby or other children.

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DOING NORMAL THINGS LIKE  
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MAKING SOMETHING TO EAT.**

## WHAT CAUSES MENTAL ILLNESS?

No-one really knows all the reasons why people become mentally ill. Some people have a 'chemical imbalance' which affects how their brain works. This makes them have strange thoughts or feelings, or behave oddly. They may need to take medication to help their brain work better. For other people, something might happen in their life which is very stressful, such as the death of someone very close, and this may trigger a mental illness.

Mental illness doesn't normally start out of the blue. It usually develops slowly. But some people do get a mental illness suddenly, such as when someone has a psychotic illness.



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## HOW LONG DOES A MENTAL ILLNESS LAST?

There is not an easy answer to this question, because it varies from one person to another.

Some people may only ever have one bout of mental illness, which lasts for a few weeks or months. Someone else may have a mental illness all their life, but learn how to live with it, with support from friends or through counselling or psychotherapy. Taking medication regularly helps some people to lead a fairly normal life. Some people may have many periods of mental illness during their life, but also long periods when they are well. A few people will have to spend periods in hospital from time to time.



## HOW DOES MENTAL ILLNESS IN YOUR FAMILY AFFECT YOU?

The closer the person is to you, the more likely you will find things difficult. If one of your parents has a mental illness, there might be times when they can't give you the love and care you need. They might also find it hard to do things like cook your meals or do the washing or help you with your homework.

If your brother or sister is ill, there might be times when they don't want to be with you or when they don't behave like a 'normal' brother or sister. Your parents might be very busy looking after them and sometimes you might feel your parents don't have any time for you.

Sometimes people can behave in ways which are hard to cope with and which will upset you. This can be very frightening. You might be worried that you will get hurt if someone is being aggressive. Or you might be worried they will hurt themselves.

“

*Abbie is just like anyone else's sister most of the time. But when she gets really stressed, we all worry that she's going to get ill again. Mum takes her side every time we have an argument. Last time Abbie couldn't sleep and was going on about suicide all the time. Everything has to be planned around how she is feeling. I know it sounds bad, but sometimes I really hate her. It's like mum and dad are so worried about her all the time they haven't got time to help me with my problems, which seems so small in comparison.*

”

“

***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 he was so wound up I was worried if I didn't say the right thing he might be.***

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Living with someone in your family who has a mental illness might lead you to have some uncomfortable feelings. You might also feel things you don't want to feel. It might feel unfair that you are expected to do things that other people your age don't have to do, like looking after the person who is unwell, doing lots of jobs around the house, or looking after your younger brothers or sisters.

You might find you feel ashamed, or that you can't talk openly to your friends about your relative's illness. Or you might feel you don't want to bring your friends home.

“Well, it's not exactly cool is it? Everyone's always picking on other people at school. If I told about dad and it got 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 in case dad tried to kill himself or something.”

You may be worried about whether the illness will ever go away or even that you are to blame in some way.

It's important not to blame yourself for your relative's illness; it's not your fault that they are ill.

You might even be afraid that you will suffer from the same illness at some time in your life. But remember, even though some mental illnesses are more common in some families, it's much more likely that you will NOT develop a mental illness yourself. And also if you do, there will always be people who can help you.

It is normal to have any of these feelings. You are probably feeling this way because you're having to cope with something which is very hard to deal with. You may find it helps if you talk to someone. You might want to try and talk to someone else in your family, because they are having to live with the same problems as you and will know what you're going through.

Or you might want to try and think of someone else who you like and trust. This might be a friend, or a youth worker, teacher, school nurse, counsellor, doctor or mental health professional.

“  
***My granny said if I hadn't got into trouble at school, mum wouldn't have worried about me and wouldn't have got ill. I know other people get into trouble and their parents don't fall apart, but I still wonder if it is all my fault.***  
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## WHAT HELP IS THERE FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS?

People who have a mental illness need help from a specialist mental health service (that includes psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, social worker and nurses who are all highly trained in treating mental illness). Their GP will usually arrange this. They will be offered treatment to help them recover, or at least to help them cope better. Treatment usually starts by assessing the person's problems. Most people who have a mental illness are offered either a 'talking' treatment, such as counselling or psychotherapy, or medication to help them get better. Often, they are offered both.

**SOMETIMES, IF PEOPLE  
ARE VERY UNWELL,  
THEY MIGHT NOT REALISE  
THAT THEY NEED TO  
GO TO HOSPITAL.**



Sometimes, people become so ill that they need to go into hospital. Most people are willing to go because they know they need help. But sometimes, if people are very unwell, they might not realise that they need to go to hospital. Yet they might be at risk of hurting themselves or someone else, or they might need urgent treatment which can only be given in hospital. So the law says people can be taken into hospital even if they don't want to go, but only when it's in their own interest. This doesn't happen very often. The Mental Health Act states how and when this can happen.

If it is your parent or carer who is ill, social services might be able to arrange for some extra help at home. Or they might try to make sure that a close friend or relative can give your family the help it needs. Occasionally, social services will arrange for children to stay with a foster carer until their parent or carer is able to look after them again.



## WHO CAN HELP?

It may help to contact some of these places:

### MDF THE BIPOLAR ORGANISATION

21 St George's Road, London, SE1 6ES

Helpline: .....0808 802 1983  
(Mon-Fri 9.30am-4.30 pm)

Website: .....[www.mdf.org.uk](http://www.mdf.org.uk)

Supports people with manic depression and their families.  
Educates the public and runs local self-help groups. Local  
contact numbers available on request.

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### BEAT

103 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich NR1 1DW

Helpline: .....0845 634 1414  
Mon-Fri 10.30am-8.30pm, Sat 1.00pm-4.30pm,  
Sun-closed & Bank Holidays 11.30am-2.30pm

Email: .....[help@b-eat.co.uk](mailto:help@b-eat.co.uk)

Youthline: .....0845 634 7650  
Mon-Fri 4.30pm-8.30pm, Sat 1.00pm-4.30pm,  
Sun-closed & Bank Holidays 11.30am-2.30pm

Text: .....07786 201 820

Email: .....[fyp@b-eat.co.uk](mailto:fyp@b-eat.co.uk)

Website: .....[www.b-eat.co.uk](http://www.b-eat.co.uk)

Support and information for people with eating disorders and  
their carers through telephone helplines, a network of self-help  
groups and newsletters.

## **CHILDLINE**

Helpline: .....0800 1111

Textphone: .....0800 400 222

Mon-Fri 9.30am-9.30pm & 11am-8pm Weekends

Living away from home: .....0800 88 44 44

Monday-Friday 3.30pm-9.30pm & 11am-8pm Weekends,

Website: .....www.childline.org.uk

ChildLine is the UK's free helpline for children and young people. It provides a confidential telephone counselling service for any child with any problem. It comforts, advises and protects.

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## **YOUTH ACCESS**

1-2 Taylors Yard, 67 Alderbrook Road, London SW12 8AD

Tel: .....020 8772 9900

Fax: .....020 8772 9746

Email: .....admin@youthaccess.org.uk

Website: .....www.youthaccess.org.uk

Provides information advice and counselling services throughout the UK for young people aged 12-25 years. Can give details of appropriate local agencies for young people. Can contact by letter, telephone, fax or email

## GET CONNECTED

Tel: .....0808 808 4994

7 days a week 1-11pm, Web chat 7pm-10pm

Email: .....help@getconnected.org.uk

Website: .....www.getconnected.org.uk

This service provides a unique, free and confidential helpline for young people, acting as a signpost to relevant sources of help.

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## THERE4ME

Website: .....www.achance2talk.com

Email support service for young people between 12-16 years.

There's on-screen advice about all sorts of things e.g. bullying, relationship, exams, drugs, difficulties at home, to name just a few.

Or you can send an e-letter to Sam their agony aunt. If you would prefer a confidential private session you can talk 1-2-1 in 'real time' with an NSPCC adviser or email for a reply within 24 hours.

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## YOUTH2YOUTH

Helpline: .....020 8896 3675

Email & Online chat via website Mon & Thurs 6.30pm-9.30pm

Website: .....www.youth2youth.co.uk

For people under 19 years. Confidential and anonymous email and telephone helpline support run by young volunteers. Offers sympathetic listening and information about practical help.

## **NSPCC**

NSPCC Helpline, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH

Helpline for children

and young people: .....0800 1111

Helpline for adults: .....0808 800 5000

Textphone: .....0800 056 0566

Email: .....help@nspcc.org.uk

Website: .....www.nspcc.org.uk

Has a child protection helpline for any child or adult concerned about a child at risk of abuse. The NSPCC also provides services to help families overcome abuse, and produces publications on general parenting.

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## **SAMARITANS**

Helpline: .....08457 90 90 90 UK & NI

..... 1850 60 90 90 Republic of Ireland

Textphone: .....08457 90 91 92

Email: .....jo@samaritans.org

Website: .....www.samaritans.org.uk

Confidential emotional support for anyone who is in crisis.

## RETHINK

General Enquiries: .....0845 456 0455

Email: .....info@rethink.org.uk

National Advice Line: .....020 7840 3188

Email: .....advice@rethink.org.uk

Website: .....www.rethink.org.uk

Provides mental health information and support for families,  
friends and relatives

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## MIND

MindinfoLine: .....0845 766 0163

Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

Email: .....contact@mind.org.uk

Email: .....info@mind.org.uk

Legal Advice Line: .....0845 255 9393

Email: .....legal@mind.org.uk

Website: .....www.mind.org.uk

Provides mental health support and Information for those  
experiencing mental health problems and their families,  
friends and relatives

## **SANE**

1st Floor, Cityside House, 40 Adler Street London E1 1EE

Helpline (SANEline): .....0845 767 8000

Email: .....sanemail@sane.org.uk

Website: .....www.sane.org.uk

Information and support for sufferers, friends and relatives affected by mental illness. Has a database of local and national services.

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## **CARERS UK**

20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

Carers Advice Line: .....0808 808 7777

Wednesday & Thursday 10am-12pm and 2pm-4pm

Email: .....info@carersuk.org

Website: .....www.carersuk.org

Information and advice to carers of any age, has a directory of local carers groups.

## **FIRST STEPS TO FREEDOM**

Helpline: .....0845 1202 916

Website: .....[www.first-steps.org](http://www.first-steps.org)

Email: .....[first-steps@btconnect.com](mailto:first-steps@btconnect.com)

For people who suffer from eating problems, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety and panic attacks and also helps their carers. Offers advice, self help groups, one-to-one telephone counselling, befriending, a pen-pal scheme and publications.



## **YOUNGMINDS**

48-50 St John Street  
London EC1M 4DG

**Tel:** 020 7336 8445

**Fax:** 020 7336 8446

**Email:** [yomenquiries@youngminds.org.uk](mailto:yomenquiries@youngminds.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

**YoungMinds  
Parents Helpline:**  
0808 802 5544

**YoungMinds  
Parents Forum:**  
[www.shareyourstory.org.uk](http://www.shareyourstory.org.uk)

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