CYPSP
Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership

Participation Network
Supporting the Public Sector to engage children & young people

SO YOUR MUM OR DAD HAS A MENTAL ILLNESS...



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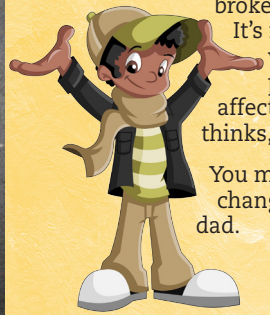
Mental illness isn't talked about much but it is quite common. One in six people in Northern Ireland has a mental illness at any one time. Around the world one in four families has a family member with a mental illness. It can affect anyone, at any age, from any walk of life.

WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?

It is usually fairly easy to tell if someone has a health problem - a bad cold, a broken leg or toothache. It's much harder to tell with a mental health problem. Basically it affects the way a person thinks, feels or acts.



You may have noticed a change in your mum or dad.



- They may have lost interest in things they used to enjoy and seem to be sad a lot of the time.
- Or they may seem to be very anxious and worried about small things.
- Or they may be afraid to leave the house or their room.
- Or they may drink a lot of alcohol and take drugs that don't come from the doctor
- Or they may do the same things over and over again, much more than is normal.
- Or they may have noticeable mood swings - on top of the world for a while, then sinking into feeling sad.
- Or they may get angry more easily.
- Or they may have problems knowing what is real - seeing things that aren't there or believing that they are magical or that people are out to harm them.

Your parent's behaviour may seem weird and may be scary at times - it's important to know that their illness is making them act that way - and the illness can be treated.

WHAT CAUSES MENTAL ILLNESS?

No one knows for certain, it can happen for lots of reasons, but it is likely to be a mixture of different things.

- Sometimes it can be because the chemicals in the brain that control our emotions have got out of balance.
- It can be a result of serious worry and stress.
- It may be that something bad has happened - someone close dies, the person loses his or her job.
- It can happen because the person has been using dangerous drugs or drinking large amounts of alcohol.

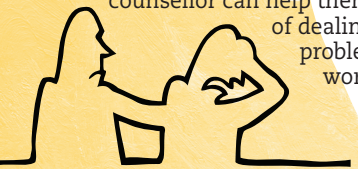
The main thing to know is that you cannot cause another person's mental illness and you can't "catch" it.



WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY MUM OR DAD?

Most people recover from mental illness or find new ways to cope with the periods when they feel unwell. Sometimes it takes the people who help a while to come up with the exact treatment that can help your mum and dad.

- It may be that medication can help. This can be in the form of tablets or injections. Your mum or dad may be on the medication for a few weeks or months - sometimes they have to take medication for a long time.
- Your mum or dad may go to see a counsellor - this is someone who they can talk to about their problems. The counsellor can help them find ways of dealing with problems and worries.



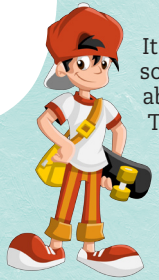
- If your mum or dad just isn't able to cope any more or gets very upset by hearing or seeing things that aren't there - they may have to go to hospital for a while. The specialist people there can look after your mum and dad round the clock, learn more about their illness and find a treatment that will help them feel better.

WHAT CAN I DO?

It can be worrying to learn that your parent has a mental illness - even 'though it may be a relief to know that there is an explanation for what has been happening to your mum or dad.

Sometimes children and young people feel mixed up, angry, guilty, embarrassed and scared about what is going on.





It can really help to find someone you trust to talk to about how you are feeling. That might be:

- Your mum or dad
- Your grandparent, aunt or uncle
- Your friends
- Your school counsellor
- Your teacher
- Your youth worker
- The people who are looking after your mum and dad



ChildLine 0800 1111

You can ring ChildLine anytime you feel like talking to someone **0800 1111**

Lifeline 0808 808 8000

Or you can contact LifeLine to talk about what is happening **0808 808 8000**

To find out about local organisations that can support you check out this website: **http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/**

A big THANK YOU to the children, young people and staff at Action for Children who helped design this leaflet.

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