



## Facts for 9 - 12 Year Olds

Welcome to Facts for 9-12 yr olds. This is an info sheet for children who have a parent with a Mental illness. Mental illness can make people think, feel, and act differently from other people. This may mean that your mum or dad may seem different than what you are used to. If there is anything you don't understand ask an older person to help.

Here are some important facts:

- Mental illness can happen to anyone.
- Mental illness can happen to any person of any age, living in any country in the world. This might be a parent, a brother or sister, a grandparent, an uncle or aunt or cousin.
- Mental illness makes a person think act and feel differently.
- In Australia one person out of every five has a mental illness at some time in their life.
- You can not cause another person's mental illness.
- Mental illness happens for lots of reasons.
- You cannot "catch" Mental Illness
- Mental illness is nobody's fault

Different parts of our body have a job to do such as our skin, and our bones. The brain is very complex & controls the way our body works. It also has important chemicals that give us messages about laughing, crying, running, and many other things.

Sometimes the chemical balance of these changes and the person feels and acts 'weird'. They may not know why they are acting this way and are not able to change it on their own.

Sometimes people have lots of problems at once, such as worrying about exams, or things at work. They can become very stressed. This does not mean they have a mental illness.



### Types of Mental Illness: Three different sorts of mental illness:

There are lots of different types of mental illness and they all affect people in different ways. The three you probably hear the most about are:

**Schizophrenia** (Skitsa-free-nee-ya) is a mental illness that makes it hard to know what is real and what is not real. If someone has schizophrenia they may hear things that are not really there, may see things that are not really there, and think things that are not real. When a person has had these unreal thoughts, or sights, or sounds for several months, then it is called schizophrenia. It can also affect all your senses, so that the person's sight and smell may be affected. Schizophrenia can effect a person's energy level and wanting to do things they normally do. *See info sheet on schizophrenia for more info*

**Depression** (Dee-presh-en) is a mental illness which means a person feels very sad for several weeks or months, has no energy to do things, they might cry a lot, they do not enjoy anything any more, they might have trouble getting to sleep, or they might sleep all day. These unhappy feelings go on for a long time. A person with depression may be grumpier than usual and get more angry about what you think are small things. They cannot just 'make' themselves cheer up. We all feel sad sometimes - if we lose something that is important like a skateboard, or bike, or have a fight with a friend, or someone dies who is close us. This is a normal feeling, and you should talk to someone about it. *See info sheet on depression for more info.*

**Bipolar disorder** (Bi-pole-ar Dis-or-der) is a mental illness in which the person can go from being depressed to being very, very happy in a short space of time. This mental illness used to be called Manic Depression. When they are really happy, or manic, they might race around doing lots of things at once, not going to bed, talking very fast, jumping from one topic to another very quickly, buying lots of new things at the shops. They might think that they have super powers and that nothing can harm them, which is not true. *See info sheet on bipolar disorder for more info.*

## How do children feel when their parent has a mental illness?

- Children are not alone in feeling worried, and mixed up if someone in their family has a mental illness. All children, at times have different sorts of feelings about what is happening in their life.
- You might feel angry and wonder why it has to happen in your family.
- You might get embarrassed, and not want anyone to know that a member of your family is "crazy"
- You might feel guilty, and think that you did something to make the other person mentally ill.
- You might feel guilty if you get angry with the other person.
- You might feel scared when the parent talks about weird things, or talks about wanting to die.
- You might get confused about what is happening to your parent, and may not feel it is OK to talk about what is going on.
- Children often may feel responsible for looking after their parent or making sure they are cared for, as well as looking after other things in the family.



## What can be done to help people get better?

Doctors & other health workers are always trying to understand better the causes of mental illness and how to treat people. Because different people react differently to the treatment they might be given, it can take time for a person to feel better.

The doctor can give medicine - sometimes this will be pills, sometimes it will be an injection. The medicine might have to be taken for a few weeks or months. Sometimes people have to take medicine for a long time.

Sometimes people take medicine, and also talk to a counsellor (cown-sell-or). By talking to a counsellor they get help to work out problems they cannot work out by themselves. Sometimes medicine needs to be taken for weeks months 'or sometimes longer'

When a person with mental illness is very upset by hearing voices, or seeing things, they might go to hospital where doctors and nurses can look after them all day. They can walk around, watch television, or just have a rest in their room. They don't have to wear pyjamas all day, so sometimes it is hard to tell who works there and who are the sick people as everyone is dressed in normal clothes. People might stay in hospital for a few days, or it might be much longer. Often they can go home for the weekend. Sometimes on the ward they do different kinds of activities or go on outings so they do not get too bored. You can visit your mum or dad in hospital if they are feeling well enough and seeing them regularly can help you understand better how they are. Nurses on the ward can help by answering questions for you.

## How to Be Prepared

Everyone feels better if they know what to do if there is a crisis. It is a good idea to work out what needs to happen if your Mum or Dad has to go to hospital if they get sick. Your Mum or Dad's case manager or worker can help with this & everyone can have a copy.



Read and fill in the Crisis Action Plan (CAP) to help you be prepared and plan ahead . Get your CAP on!