

How to find support for parents of a child with mental illness

Mental health issues are extremely common and people are far more aware of them than they used to be, so while it's natural to want to keep things quiet, you may be surprised how many people in your social group have had similar experiences and want to help.

What sources of help are available?

First of all, ask yourself if there's anyone among your family and friends who might be able to offer you some help in some way, whether it's taking the child out for a while or helping with a few chores or errands so you can relax and unwind.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) may become an important resource for you if your child is referred to them, but, depending on the area you live, there will also be a number of charities and support groups who can give you the help and support you need, as well as advice and assistance with adapting to the child's needs. A great place to start is by talking to your GP or local medical centre.

There will also be lots of support online on sites like Mumsnet or local and national Facebook groups dedicated to particular mental health issues, where parents and children feel safe to share their experiences and ask for advice from people going through the same thing.

Could communication be better?

It may be that you need help with communicating or learning new communication habits within the family. If communication is hostile, critical, or overly emotional there's often a risk of making matters worse, so it's important to find ways of breaking the chain of attack and counter-attack, and a family therapist may be the best person to help you do this, but perhaps there's someone you know who's liked and respected by the whole family and can act as a mediator or help to bring you together to start a conversation.

Tips for reducing the impact of your emotions

- When you feel strong emotions, try to pause and take a deep breath before reacting.
- Remember that your feelings are towards the situation and not the child.
- Try to focus on being supportive rather than apportioning blame.

Healthy dialogue is one of the most important aspects of good mental health, and leaving things unsaid and unresolved often makes things worse, but relationships within families can be fractious, so don't take it personally if they find it easier to talk to someone who they're not emotionally attached to.

People who your child can talk to about their mental health

- Friends or family members whom they trust.
- Mental health professionals or volunteers from specialist support groups. The child's GP will be able to connect you with available resources in your area.
- Remember that everyone has the right to privacy and may not want their problems to become common knowledge, so only confide in those who need to know and who you know you can trust to be discreet.

Some resources that may help.

- NHS advice for supporting the mental wellbeing of others. Better Health: Every Mind matters <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>
- For information on how to access NHS Mental health services visit <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/>