

HOW I WANT TO BE SUPPORTED: TIPS FOR WORKERS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE A PARENT WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS / DUAL DIAGNOSIS

The Project Partnership developed this factsheet from consultations with young people who have a parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis. Young people aged between 16 and 21 were consulted between March and June 2006. They talked about their own personal experiences, what they had learnt, and what messages they would like to share with workers.

SUPPORT ME AND MY FAMILY

Young people wanted support to be available for every member of the family, not just focus on one member. They stated that each person would need different types of support and have a different perspective on what is happening.

"Have a family and an individual focus."

"The other parent doesn't understand what the other is going through."

WE FEEL ALONE SOMETIMES

Young people said that each member of their family can feel, and be, isolated and therefore it is important to help connect each member of the family with appropriate support and to the community.

"I don't have any friends, I can't talk to counsellors, I can't talk to my mum. I got nobody."

"The worst thing you can do to someone with a mental illness or drug problem is to make them feel different and left out."

"The people with a mental illness need to get out of the house too. Why does everyone else in the house get a break but not them?"

MY PARENT'S ILLNESS AFFECTS ME

Young people talked about how their parent's mental illness / dual diagnosis affected them and the other members of the family. It can affect all aspects of life.

"My [school] marks you can tell where my mum wasn't well. You can map it."

"It crushes your social life, school, home, friends, family, everything. That's why I like the young carers camps."

BUILD SKILLS AND SUPPORTS IN THE FAMILY

Young people saw family as their greatest asset. They called on workers to support building skills and support systems with, and within, the family. They felt it was important to help family members and the system to understand what the rest of the family may be experiencing.

"Help parents understand what is going on and what the kids are going through."

"Support the parents to support their kids."

HELP ME FIND OUT WHAT'S OUT THERE

Young people wanted support to find out what programs, services and supports are available in the community for them and their family. These included access to a key worker, support groups, camps, recreation activities and support within schools. It is important for workers to keep up to date with an ever-changing service system.

"There needs to be a larger awareness of what services are out there."

"So many kids living with a parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis don't know about the camps."

IF I'M WARY OF YOU IT MAY BE BECAUSE I'VE HAD MY TRUST BROKEN BEFORE

All young people reported having their trust broken by adults in a range of circumstances. These experiences had a profound and long-term impact on their willingness to seek support and information.

"This worker said, "Yeah, you can trust me", and then I found out that they had told other people, and then it went around that everyone knew that I had a schizo mum. Then I was called schizo cause my mum was schizophrenic. They convinced me I could trust them. It screwed up everything for me. Every worker I'd see after that I'd just tell them to **** off."

IT'S HARD SEEING MY PARENT LIKE THAT

Young people talked about how difficult it was to see their parent unwell. They talked about how frightening these experiences could be and how important it was for them to be informed and supported.

"It's pretty scary when you see your mum connected to machines, I was 14. You see that in movies and that is when people die. I didn't know what was happening. I was shocked and all sad."

BE FLEXIBLE

Young people said they were more likely to engage and seek support if workers flexible in the way they work and and environments were youth friendly.

"They'll arrange a meeting with you and if you're not comfortable they will go somewhere else."

STIGMA HURTS

Young people told of the negative impact of stigma on themselves, their parent and their family. They thought it was important for workers to challenge stereotypes and stigma.

"You get excluded because [the parents] have something wrong with them."

"[People should] raise awareness everywhere."

TAKE TIME TO HELP ME FIND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Young people called on workers to work with them to identify practical and realistic solutions that took into consideration their individual circumstances.

"I'd rather talk to someone face to face that can give me advice about my mum. You know, next time she does this, do that..."

IT TAKES TIME

Most of the young people couldn't remember a time when their parents weren't unwell. It's important to recognise that parental mental illness / dual diagnosis is a long-term issue potentially requiring long-term support. Practical solutions are important, however band-aid solutions won't work. There will be highs and lows, and families need to be prepared and supported through these all these periods.

"It took 6 years for my mum to be diagnosed with bipolar, 9 trips to the hospital and many pills later..."

HELP ME UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING

Young people called on workers to support them to understand what was happening to their parent, to their family and to them.

"The worst is when you don't know what's going on or why a worker is doing something."

"[The worker] asked me if I was alright. I said yeah, but I guess he didn't believe me. He said it's not as bad as it looks, everything is going to be all right. He just comforted me and stuff. Then we went for a walk around the hospital. If I'd just left then I would have been way worse. When I said everything was fine he could have just walked away but he didn't."