

THE  
COLOURED  
KIT  
FOR  
THE  
WORKER'S  
SECTION

BOOKLET 2

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE OF PARENTS WITH A  
MENTAL ILLNESS / DUAL DIAGNOSIS AND THEIR FAMILIES

How To Support A Young Person To Use **THE COLOURED KIT**: A Step-By-Step Guide

# Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, their families and ancestors. We acknowledge that the effects of the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original peoples of modern day Australia, including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. We celebrate Ngunnawal culture and the invaluable contribution to the community.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to the Worker's Section of *The Coloured Kit!*

### INTRODUCING THE COLOURED KIT

*The Coloured Kit* aims to support and empower young people and families affected by mental illness / dual diagnosis to think about, and plan for, what they want to happen if a parent is suddenly unable to care for their children. Planning is important, regardless of the likelihood of a family being separated. This section supports workers to support young people and families through this process.

The ACT has high population turn over. Many families may not have local social support networks, such as extended family. A **Care Plan** can help families identify social support networks.

A **Care Plan** can reassure families that children will be well cared for by someone trusted and accepted by the family should a parent require hospitalisation or treatment away from home.

The Kit is divided into three booklets:

- *The Young People's Section* (divided into 4 colour-coded sections and includes a **Care Plan**);
- *The Worker's Section* (this booklet); and
- *The Support Services and Other Resources Section*.

### YOUNG PEOPLE MADE THIS KIT

Young people who have a parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis developed the *Young People's Section* and had input into the development of this Kit. Without their generous contribution this Kit would not exist in the form it does. Their willingness to invest much of their own personal time and share their own personal experiences was invaluable. While the Kit is more oriented towards young people aged 12 – 16 years old, it can be used for a variety of age groups and circumstances.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKER'S SECTION

The *Worker's Section* is a Step-By-Step guide on how to support a young person to use *The Coloured Kit*. It has been designed to be used by a variety of professionals who may have contact with families affected by parental mental illness / dual diagnosis. The term "worker" is used generically throughout the Kit. You may be a Case Manager, Youth Worker, Mental Health Worker, Teacher or a General Practitioner. What's important is that you are supporting the young person and their family, and are prepared to stick with them for the long haul.

The *Worker's Section* explains the purpose of the Kit, when to use it, how to use, how to distribute it and how to action the **Care Plan**. It also provides background to some of the issues

for families where there is parental mental illness / dual diagnosis.

### YOUR ROLE IN THE PROCESS – A KEY WORKER

Children of parents with a mental illness / dual diagnosis have historically been forgotten, ignored or excluded from processes, programs, services and supports. Workers may sometimes feel they lack the skills or resources to support a family affected by parental mental illness / dual diagnosis, however simple actions make huge differences.

**Appropriate referrals are important, however it's important to recognise that no matter what your position or role is, you can make a profound and powerful impact in a young person's life with some very simple actions.**

It is important to treat young people as experts in their own lives and the life of their family. Acknowledge and treat their feelings with respect and give them as much information as possible about their parent's illness and treatment. These actions can go a long way to making young people feel supported and acknowledged.

A **key worker** is someone who takes a lead role in supporting the young person and their family. Ideally this worker is identified by the young person, is someone they trust and respect and has the capacity to advocate for them. A key worker will have contact with a number of services and will assist with those services to work together for the benefit of the young person.

Further information and support strategies for workers, young people and families is available through the Children of Parents with a Mental Illness National Resource Centre at [www.copmi.net.au](http://www.copmi.net.au)

### DEFINING TERMS

**COPMI:** Children of parents with a mental illness.

**Dual Diagnosis:** Concurrent mental health and alcohol and / or other drug issues.

**Young Carer:** Young carers are children and young people who care, or help care, within a family affected by the illness, disability, drug or alcohol and / or mental health issue of one or more of their members or friends<sup>1</sup>.

Further definitions can be found in the "Some Mental Health Terms" in the *Young Peoples Section* and in "Some Key Words That Might Help" in the *Young People's Section*.

### WHAT'S NOT IN HERE

We acknowledge the gaps in this Kit. Further information on, for example parents / carers and dual diagnosis, is available in the *Support Services and Resources Section*. See also the Project Evaluation Report, available from [www.youthcoalition.net](http://www.youthcoalition.net)

## THE BASICS

This section provides some basic information about working with children of parents with a mental illness / dual diagnosis and their families including: resilience and risk factors, personal stories, self-care tips, and some key principles.

### RESILIENCE AND RISK FACTORS FOR CHILDREN OF A PARENT WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS / DUAL DIAGNOSIS

#### RESILIENCE FACTORS

There are a number of resilience factors that encourage more positive experiences for young people, including:

- Being acknowledged
- Having an accurate understanding of their parent's mental illness / dual diagnosis
- Having access to information that is useful, age appropriate and accessible
- Knowing they are not alone
- Knowing that other young people have a parent with mental illness / dual diagnosis
- Having a **Care Plan**
- Having a safety plan in case of a potentially dangerous situation
- Having opportunities to communicate their feelings and experiences to people who will listen and support them
- Having a significant other trusted adult (eg grandparent, relative, family friend, neighbour) in their lives that is able to give them some stability and support
- Having access to community support, such as respite care
- Knowing how to look after their own health and well-being
- Being socially connected with their peers and others
- Participating at school

#### RISK FACTORS

Some risk factors for young people who have a parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis, includes:

- Not being acknowledged
- Having more than one person in their lives with a mental illness / dual diagnosis
- Being in an unsafe situation and not knowing where to go or who can help
- Not understanding what's happening
- Blaming themselves
- Being at risk of neglect and abuse

- Being alone, or isolated from peers and social connections
- Having little or no access to trusted adults
- Disrupted schooling
- Taking on caring responsibilities without support
- Being removed from their family and placed into alternative care
- Not being involved in planning
- Lack of coping strategies
- Lack of access to support services
- Poor mental health
- Poverty, inadequate housing, homelessness, or lack of access to resources (e.g. transport)

#### YOUNG PEOPLE CAN BE PLACED AT FURTHER RISK IF:

- Their parent/family is isolated and unsupported
- They are involved in their parent's delusions
- Their parents suffer from dual diagnosis
- They are at a young age when their parent develops a mental illness
- The symptoms of mental illness interfere with their parent's motivation, emotional availability, ability to supervise and respond to their child's needs.

## **SOME EMOTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE MAY EXPERIENCE**

Young people may experience a range of emotions related to their parent's mental illness / dual diagnosis, including:

- Guilt
- Fear
- Confusion
- Embarrassment
- Feeling different
- Depression
- Blame
- Anger
- Ongoing grief
- Frustration
- Powerlessness
- Isolation
- Stress
- Tiredness or exhaustion

Young people need the opportunity to be heard, acknowledged and supported in a way that is comfortable and appropriate for them. Let the young person know that whatever they're feeling is ok and that they are not alone.

### **Craig's story**

A strong 'young carer' time in my life was definitely the last time my Mum tried to commit suicide. It was difficult calling the hospital, asking what to do. Stopping my Mum from leaving, waiting for an ambulance. Talking to the ambo, the ambulance guy, telling him how many she took, when she took them, how strong they were.

In emergency all day, waiting, watching my Mum slip away somewhere else, another world, taken by the pills. Waiting for a relative or someone I knew to pick up the phone. An hour or two goes by, then we need to talk to the guy who says if she's in or out of the psych ward.

Pleading, a 13 year old boy, a 26 year old sister, a 24 year old brother, two workers and the hospital social worker, all pleading to this one guy.

## **SOME TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF TO PASS ON TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Sometimes young people forget to care for themselves. Here are some ideas that you can suggest to young people to support building resilience:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat well
- Get enough sleep
- Talk to friends
- Keep a diary
- Talk to someone you trust - share the load
- Learn the early warning signs that things are getting too much
- Ask for help if things are getting too much
- Get accurate information
- Separate the illness from the person
- Write a list of escapes, such as sport, music, art, friends, hobbies
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques
- Do something fun often
- Treat yourself kindly
- Remember you are not alone and it's ok to ask for help

### **Jake's story**

During my early childhood I was never told about why my mother was different, why she didn't have a job, why she slept eighteen hours a day, why she was only semi-alive at the best. It was believed by my mother and her counsellors that it was best for me not to know about her schizophrenia or her depression and though this was done to protect me, it didn't help at all. I had no excuse as to why we were poor and why I was never at school.

Around Year Six when I wanted to know what was happening and I would not stop pestering until I found out WHY. Once I knew a great weight was lifted. I now know what was wrong with my mother and that actually nothing was wrong. There were many people like her, which in turn meant there were many people like ME.

## 10 POINTS ON MENTAL ILLNESS / DUAL DIAGNOSIS

1. Not all children of parents with a mental illness / dual diagnosis will experience difficulties as a result of their parent's health status.<sup>2,3</sup> Families that are well supported, socially connected, have a good understanding of mental illness / dual diagnosis and management plans are more likely to have better outcomes.
2. All families are different. Families where there is a parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis are not all the same. Their needs and wants are different and vary over time.
3. Parental and family mental health and well-being are significant determinants of young people's health and well-being.<sup>4</sup>
4. People with a mental illness or an alcohol and other drug issue are at high risk of developing dual diagnosis. Up to 80% of people receiving treatment for a mental illness may also have an alcohol and other drug issue. Up to 75% of people receiving treatment for an alcohol and other drug issue may also have a mental health issue.<sup>5</sup>
5. Between one- and two-thirds of children of parents known to adult mental health services will experience difficulties, such as social isolation or poor educational outcomes.<sup>6</sup>
6. A combination of factors can impact on a young person's mental health, including: genetics, social isolation, poverty and family relationships. Their age at the onset of their parent's mental illness, the nature, duration and severity of the mental illness, and the involvement of a consistent trusted adult can also be influential factors.<sup>6</sup>
7. Stigma affects people with a mental illness / dual diagnosis and their children. It can affect employment, life opportunities and social connectedness. People can become isolated or be bullied.
8. People with a dual diagnosis are at greater risk of exclusion from existing service provision.<sup>7</sup>
9. In 2001, approximately 15,000 children aged 0 - 17 years in the ACT live in households with an adult with a high or very high level of psychological distress, as measured by the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale -10 (K10).<sup>8</sup>
10. Workers, services and sectors must partner in supporting young people and families affected by mental illness / dual diagnosis:  
  
*"The problem is too complex and the solution too comprehensive for any one agency or organisation to address alone."<sup>9</sup>*

## YOUNG CARERS

Sometimes children take on additional care responsibilities beyond their age, and become young carers. Carers Australia estimates that there are at least 388,000 young carers in Australia, and approximately one quarter of these care for a person with a mental illness.<sup>10</sup> This is acknowledged as being a conservative figure.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT's *Young Carers Research Project*<sup>11</sup> found that:

- Young carers may experience positive impacts of caring including feelings of pride and worth, a sense of accomplishment, greater levels of fitness, greater resilience, stronger family relationships, better outcomes in education, more skills and a positive outlook on life.
- Young carers may experience negative impacts of caring including fatigue, injury, greater levels of stress, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness, family conflict and breakdown, financial insecurity, limited social and recreational opportunities and poor outcomes in education.
- Young carers caring for a relative with an alcohol or other drug issue are likely to experience similar impacts of care to other young carers, though they may experience greater social isolation, be exposed to less safe situations and be less likely to receive support.

The Youth Coalition found that:

*“While caring is not in itself neglectful and can be a positive experience for children and young people when they receive adequate levels of support, when unsupported young carers can experience significant physical, emotional, social, educational and financial hardship.”<sup>12</sup>*

Care responsibilities can include emotional care, supervision of siblings, monitoring of parents' mental illness symptoms and, when there is a dual diagnosis, alcohol and other drug intake.<sup>13</sup> The impacts can be wide ranging, and affect participation in education and social life.

There is an increasing level of support and awareness of young carers in Australia. In 2005 Carers Australia launched a national information resource, including the website *Supporting Young Carers*, [www.youngcarers.net.au](http://www.youngcarers.net.au). There are a number of support services for young carers in the ACT. These are listed in the *Support Services and Resources Section* of the Kit.

## PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN OF PARENTS WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

A national set of guiding principles for working with children of parents with a mental illness has been developed. These include:

1. Promote wellbeing and reduce risk
2. Preserve family structure by supporting families and children
3. Address grief and loss issues
4. Provide access to information, education and decision making processes
5. Prioritise care and safety issues
6. Services and families need to work together
7. Recognise diversity<sup>14</sup>

## PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH CARERS

The Caring for Carers Policy<sup>15</sup> is the ACT Government's commitment to carers. It contains seven core principles which include:

1. Carers have choices: carers have the right to decide whether to take on or continue the role of care and are supported in their choices.
2. Health and well-being is supported: the health and well-being of carers is supported through services and programs that are flexible and responsive to individual needs and circumstances.
3. Timely resources are available: resources are available to provide timely and adequate assistance to carers.
4. Resources are high quality and affordable: affordable services of a high standard are available to people who need care, complementing the role of the carer.
5. Carers are recognised: the critical contribution of carers is recognised, valued and promoted in the community.
6. Caring is a partnership: the carer and the person receiving care are regarded as a partnership, in which each person has rights and responsibilities.
7. Services support carer participation: organisations welcome and support carer participation at all levels of decision-making, with respect for the rights and choices of people receiving care.



# 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."

# USING THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SECTION

This section provides you with information and ideas on how to use the *Young People's Section* with young people.

## THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SECTION : GETTING ACQUAINTED

There are a number of ways that you, a worker, can use this Kit. These may depend on factors such as your relationship with the young person and their family, the degree or impact of their parents' illness, and their maturity. You may want to give them the Kit to look over in their own time, or you may want to sit down and fill out specific sections that you think are particularly relevant or that they have identified as being of interest. Ideally you will assist the young person to fill out the Kit with their parents or carer. This may not always be practical, if for example, their parent is significantly unwell. However, the Kit is more likely to be useful if it is approached in a family focused manner.

## HOW TO INTRODUCE THE COLOURED KIT

Sit down with the young person. Talk about the rationale behind developing a **Care Plan**. You can point out that a **Care Plan** can:

- Assist families to prepare for an emergency
- Help young people learn more about their parent's illness and bring issues out into the open, and
- Make young people's voice and opinions heard

Developing a **Care Plan** can be an empowering process because you are asking the young person about their wants, needs and opinions. You are involving them in decisions about their care and the care of their family members.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality has different meanings to different people in different professional roles. So it is important to be up front with young people about what confidentiality means for you in your professional capacity. Otherwise young people may disclose personal information to you without realising that you may have to share this information with others. This can damage trust, making young people less likely to share in the future. Let them know beforehand about what kind of information you can't keep confidential, for example, any information relating to their safety and the safety of others. Parents do not have an automatic right to know what their children have said to you.

## Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting occurs where a person is obliged by law to report specific forms of child abuse to a government authority where that person reasonably suspects that that abuse has occurred. In the ACT that government authority

is Care and Protection in the Office of Children Youth and Family Support under the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. Section 159 of the *Children and Young People Act 1999* outlines which professions are mandated to report in the ACT.

**It is best practice to let the young person know if you are a mandated reporter and what it may mean for them.** These and related issues are addressed in the booklet *Keeping Children and Young People Safe - Reporting child abuse: a shared community responsibility* (August 2006) produced by the Department of Disability Housing and Community Services (DHCS). The updated booklet, reflects recent amendments to the *Children and Young People Act 1999* as of 1 August 2006, is available from [www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/publications/keeping%20childweb.pdf](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/publications/keeping%20childweb.pdf). Anyone with contact with children and young people should make themselves familiar with the Act and this document.

For free training, information and resources, or questions regarding Care and Protection matters contact the Learning and Community Education Unit in DHCS on 6207 1982 or visit [www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/care\\_protection.htm](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/care_protection.htm)

## LITERACY : SUPPORTING THE YOUNG PERSON

If the young person has literacy issues you will need to provide more extensive support. Statistically young carers are more likely to have had their education disrupted and may have missed out on key periods of their schooling. A young person who presents as articulate and self-confident may surprise you by having poor literacy, and as a result may avoid any written work to avoid embarrassment. Your skills in developing trust will be crucial in this situation. It may be useful for you to point out that many young people with similar family backgrounds experience similar challenges. This is also a good opportunity to look at getting additional support for their education.

## **STEP BY STEP : WALKING THROUGH THE KIT**

The *Young People's Section* of this Kit is divided into four colour-coded sections:

- 1. The Introduction**
- 2. Getting Support**
- 3. My Care Plan**
- 4. Getting Info & Keeping in Touch**

### **THE INTRODUCTION SECTION**

Tells you why the Kit has been developed, what it's for and how to use it. It contains messages for you from the young people who developed the Kit, a glossary and a discussion on rights.

#### **Welcome to our Kit**

Point out that the Kit was made by young people who have a parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis, and it contains personal tips and messages from them.

#### **What is this Kit and how to use it**

Provides a quick overview of how to use the Kit. It is desirable for the young person to complete it with a parent / carer and a worker. Read through the steps and keep in mind that you may need to support the young person to action each step. When involving a parent / carer explain the purpose and process to them – they may need assistance in filling it in, so offer some help. Once completed offer to make copies and deliver it to key support people as necessary.

#### **Some key words that might help**

This is an opportunity to explain and normalise mental illness and mental health. By having a discussion with the young person you can explore their understanding of their parents' illness. People with a mental illness and their families can have a limited or distorted understanding of mental illness and their specific condition. This can happen because they haven't had it properly explained or maybe they were too afraid to ask. Misinformation, fear, confusion and social isolation can significantly compound difficult situations.

Basic information can go a long way to dispelling myths, and rebuilding confidence and social connections. Don't pretend to be the expert. If you don't know the answer let them know you will find out or support them to ask their parent or a health professional. There is quality youth specific mental health information on the internet, including books and fact sheets. The *Services and Resources Section* provides a great list of web-based and other resources for young people, parents and workers on issues such as mental health, dual diagnosis and parenting.

Remember some young people may have a thorough understanding of mental illness and their parents' condition – particularly if they've been in the role of primary carer. A good way of respecting young people's knowledge and

empowering them to take personal control is by using a strengths-based approach and treating them as experts in their own lives. You may also learn a lot yourself.

#### **What we want to say to you**

These are personal messages from the young people who developed the Kit.

#### **Your rights**

Discussions of rights can be neglected and are often attached to responsibilities. Rights are important not only from a social justice perspective, but also as a way of letting young people know that they have choices and entitlements. A discussion of rights can be a useful way to engage young people, and can lead to discussions about respect and fairness. It is not the young persons responsibility to know their rights but the responsibility of workers. The *Services and Resources Section* provides local, national and international links to information on young people's rights.

### **THE GETTING SUPPORT SECTION**

This section looks at who can help, why and how to ask for help, getting support at school, making a support list, getting help for their parent, who to call, how to call when you have no cash, and how to call 000.

#### **Who can help?**

This exercise can help both you, the worker, and the family identify supports. These supports may already exist or be networks that can be used or further developed. Friendships are important for young people. Peers are often their first port of call for support, especially if they don't have a relationship with an adult or a health professional, such as a counsellor.

#### **Asking for help**

This section opens the discussion about asking for help. It acknowledges that many young people may be scared or confused. It encourages them to ask for help and provides some tips on how to do this. Workers need to be aware that asking for help can be hard and that it is important to support young people to feel comfortable to access the help they need - when they need it.

#### **Getting support at school**

There is limited research regarding the experience of young people who have a parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis and schooling. However it seems that young people's experiences of school can vary widely. Some young people find school to be a safe haven where they feel supported by staff and students. Others find it to be a place where they feel isolated, bullied or victimised. If a young person has missed significant periods of their schooling they may be academically behind their peers and / or socially isolated.

It's not necessary for schools to know details about a young person's home life to provide a safe and nurturing environment. School may be the only place where a young person feels "normal". However, the young person may be

able to identify someone in the school community they trust and may want them to know what's happening. As a key worker you can be a facilitator for the young person by assisting them to identify supportive staff, and by setting up a meeting to discuss how the school can provide additional support in the short term. This could include looking at getting extensions for assignments, or having someone identified within the school that can help to resolve issues as they arise. This could also be an opportunity to link the young person into student support services, such as the school counsellor, a youth worker (if available), and an Individual Support Plan. See the *Services and Resources Section* for information about school based supports, alternative education programs and Individual Support Plans.

Remember, the young person should always be included and consulted in these discussions. Young people reported that having their confidentiality breached in a school setting has resulted in them simply refusing to trust adults in positions of responsibility. The COPMI National Resources Centre provides advice and tips for teachers and workers on how to support young people in school settings, visit [www.copmi.net.au/education](http://www.copmi.net.au/education). The ACT young carers service, CYCLOPSact, has developed a kit called Making Education Work. Call 6232 2432 or visit [www.cyclopsact.org](http://www.cyclopsact.org) for further information.

### Creating my support list

This is a space for young people and their families to create a contact list of support people. You can assist by prompting with people identified in the previous Who can help? section. If appropriate, you can offer to make copies of this page to provide to the people on the list.

### Getting help for my parent in a crisis

This section provides tips on calling Mental Health Services in a crisis, provides a scenario and an example of what to say if a young person is concerned about their parent.

### Who can I call?

This is a contact list of emergency and support services divided into two sections: "Free and 24 hr numbers" and "Local calls".

### Using a phone when I have no cash

Not everyone has easy access to telecommunication services in a crisis. Phones can get lost or broken, and services can be cut off. You can assist the family to get essential services reconnected through the Essential Services Consumer Council, call 6207 7740. However it's important for young people to have backup plans in a crisis. Encourage young people to be sceptical of using some commercial reverse call services as they can be very expensive to the call recipient. There are cheaper alternatives such as phone cards.

Further online resources:

- Telstra's Access for Everyone program is designed to assist people on a low income or facing financial hardship to maintain telecommunications access. For further information freecall 1800 804 591 or visit

[www.telstra.com.au/accessforeveryone/index.htm](http://www.telstra.com.au/accessforeveryone/index.htm)

- The Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) has developed a consumer factsheet regarding telecommunications service options if you're experiencing financial hardship. For further information visit [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)
- The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is a free and independent alternative dispute resolution scheme for small business and residential consumers in Australia with unresolved complaints about their telephone or internet services. For further information freecall 1800 062 058 or visit [www.tio.com.au](http://www.tio.com.au)

### How to make an emergency phone call

A basic script is provided to give the young person an idea of what might happen when they call 000. Sometimes young people are scared to ask for help, particularly if their concerns have been dismissed or minimised in the past. With the young person and their family you could work through: a range of scenarios, discuss what constitutes an emergency, when it is better to call another support person, or an alternative service such as the Mental Health Crisis Assessment Treatment Team (CAT Team) on freecall 1800 629 354. The safety of the young person and their family should be highlighted as a priority.

## MY CARE PLAN

This section is the Care Plan. There's space to put important information about the young person, help on planning where to stay, things to remember to take with them, a calendar, some thoughts on money, space to list their medical details, and a section to sign off on the plan.

### About me

A handy list of important details about the young person, including details about their personal interests that distinguish them as an individual.

### Where am I going to stay?

This section gets the young person and their family thinking about temporary accommodation or substitute care. There may be options available such as other family members or family friends. If this isn't the case, you will need to assist them to look at alternative options.

Depending on the age of the young person and their circumstances it may be necessary to involve *Care and Protection*, call 1300 556 729. Whether you're a mandated reporter or not, you can anonymously call them to discuss a scenario.

*Barnardos Temporary Family Care*, call 6241 5466, is available and isn't dependant on a notification to Care and Protection. A youth refuge may be another option. See the *Services and Resources Section* for information about youth refuges and accommodation support for young people in the ACT.

### **Things to remember if I'm staying away from home**

Prompts young people to think about what things they should take with them, and other details to consider.

### **Organising my week**

A calendar, so in the event they are staying away from home, substitute carers have an idea of their weekly activities, so that disruptions can be minimised. There is also space to list upcoming events, such as family birthdays and other events.

### **Money**

This section looks at income and expenses. If a young person is staying away from home, it is important to have an idea of their income and expenses so you can help minimise disruptions to their life. If Care and Protection are involved they may be able to make arrangements, however there may be a number of ways for you to assist the family and young person. They may be eligible for Youth Allowance or other entitlements they may not be aware of.

Some young people may be able eligible for the Carers Allowance or Carers Payment from Centrelink, call 13 10 21 or visit [www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/carer\\_index.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/carer_index.htm). Centrelink Social Workers can help with applying for entitlements. There is a Social Worker allocated to every Centrelink branch. They can provide counselling and support to Centrelink customers with difficult personal or family issues; provide information about, or refer customers to, community support services; and help with claims for payments from Centrelink. If unsuccessful in their application, remember that appeals mechanisms exist. A young carer support service may also be able to provide assistance in accessing entitlements.

Additional financial support and financial management assistance is available through community agencies, such as Care Inc. Financial Counselling Service, call 6257 1788.

### **My medical details**

A place to record medical information, including the family doctor and dentist.

### **Signing off**

Making a Care Plan is one thing, using it is another. As the worker who has assisted the young person and their family complete this Kit there is an expectation that you will be there to help enact it if or when required. If you can't do this then you'll need to find someone who can take on this role.

There is space to set a review date and to list others who may need a copy of this plan or particular sections. Offer to do this after assisting them to identify who may need a copy. Make clear that just because people have signed it doesn't mean the document has legal authority. It is a tool to assist the family plan for emergencies.

## **GETTING INFO & KEEPING IN TOUCH**

This section has suggestions on how to be kept informed

if their parent requires care, and advice on how to keep in touch with parents when they need to get treatment away from home.

### **How do I find out what's going on?**

The purpose of this section is to give permission to young people to ask questions about their parents' illness and treatment, and take steps towards dealing with their fears and worries. Sometimes young people are left in the dark, often because it is assumed that telling them may cause distress. Young people, like adult carers, reported being frustrated when information about the care of their parent had been kept from them. It is critical to keep the young person involved and informed, particularly if they are the primary support, because when the crisis is over and the services disappear they are still there.

This section is a chance for young people to identify people they trust, to think about questions they may have regarding their parents' illness and care, and to articulate their worries. The young person may have been too scared or embarrassed to bring up a number of issues like:

- Can I catch it?
- Is it my fault that my parent is sick?
- Will I get it when I'm older?
- Can I make them better?

Further online resources:

- Reachout! Problem Solving  
[www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=2336](http://www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=2336)
- St Luke's Innovative Resources  
[www.innovativeresources.org](http://www.innovativeresources.org)
- Brief Therapy Institute of Sydney  
[www.brieftherapysydney.com.au](http://www.brieftherapysydney.com.au)

### **How do I keep in touch with my parent?**

Maintaining contact when a parent needs treatment is important. There may be times where visiting is difficult or impossible. Alternative ways of maintaining contact can be found, and you can assist in brainstorming options. This section offers some suggestions, and also provides contact numbers for some mental health facilities.

### **Some Mental Health Terms**

Provides a brief list of Some Mental Health Terms written in a youth-friendly way. They were developed by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Clinicians from Mental Health ACT for *The Coloured Kit*.

# CHECKLIST FOR WORKERS

This is a one page quick reference checklist with some key issues to address when supporting children of parents with a mental illness / dual diagnosis.

## Information sharing

- What has the parent told the young person about their mental illness / dual diagnosis?
- Has the parent given consent for you to talk with the young person?
- Have you sought the young person's consent to share information?

## Confidentiality

- Is the young person aware that in some circumstances confidentiality can't be upheld? (e.g. child protection issues)

## Safety issues

- Is the young person safe? If not, has appropriate action been taken to ensure their safety?

## About the mental health problem

- What does the young person understand about the parent's mental illness / dual diagnosis?
- Who is there to answer the young person's questions or concerns regarding the mental illness / dual diagnosis?

## The young person's feelings

- The young person may be experiencing a range of emotions. Is there someone for the young person to talk with about their feelings, their response to their parent's mental illness / dual diagnosis and its impact on them?

## What about when the parent is hospitalised

- Is there an existing Care Plan in place for the young person?
- Does the young person know what's happening with their parent?
- Have ways of having regular contact been established?

## Young people's needs

- What is the level of support that the young person is providing?
- What about emotional support?
- What impact is this having on the young person?
- Who is supporting them?

## What help is out there?

- Support networks: Does the young person have access to a trusted adult other than their parent with a mental illness / dual diagnosis? Is the young person involved in peer activities?
- Does the young person know that there are other young people out there with parents with a mental illness / dual diagnosis? Have you connected or referred them to that service?

## Care Plan

- Do they know what to do in a crisis?
- Has the plan been created, distributed, signed off?
- Does the family, the young person, the key worker and other key people have copies?
- Where is it? Who will activate it?

## Coordination of care

- Are you aware of and connected with other workers who support the family?

## Acute and long term considerations

- It is important to pay attention to the short term, immediate issues as well as longer-term issues for young people. Consider those times when family situations change such as Christmas, school holidays, re-admissions, and leaving school.

[Adapted from Partners in Care: Working Together to Make a Real Difference. *Professionals coming into contact with the children of parents with mental health problems*. Royal College of Psychiatrists: UK 2004.]

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