

Young Carers in families affected by Parental Mental Illness

The Children's Society

No child should feel alone

In over 20 years of consulting with young carers and their families we have been given consistent messages about the challenges faced by young carers whose parents have continuing mental health difficulties. Research shows that:

- **1 in 4** adults experience at least one diagnosable mental health problem in any given year. Many of these are likely to be parents.¹
- It is estimated that there are over **50,000** young carers in the UK caring for a person with a mental illness.²
- Parents with mental ill health and their children are **1 of the 4** groups most likely to face barriers to getting their health and social care needs addressed.³
- Up to **50%** of mental health services users are parents with dependent children.⁴
- There is evidence to suggest that the person with mental illness supported by a young carer is **less likely** to be receiving treatment and support in their own right, compared to the person supported by an adult carer.⁵
- Many mental health professionals are not aware that their patients are also parents. Young carers are often hidden and their needs are only identified when there is a crisis. Even then, the extent of their caring role and the impact that it has on their own development may not be recognised quickly or fully assessed.⁶

Young carer's experiences:

'My mum has a mental illness, but no one told me why she was acting so weird. None of the doctors told me. It was scary. I had to find out for myself. They didn't think how I was feeling and worrying.'

'No one ever sat down and explained to me and my brother what a manic depressive was. Mum might have done, but no professional person... if someone had explained what it was it would have helped.'

A '**young carer**' is defined in section 96 of the Children and Families Act 2014 as: '...a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person.'

This relates to care for any family member who is physically or mentally ill, frail elderly, disabled or misuses alcohol or substances.

The **key principle** is that: 'Children should not undertake inappropriate or excessive caring roles that may have an impact on their development. A young carer becomes vulnerable when their caring role risks impacting upon their emotional or physical well-being and their prospects in education and life.'

The **Children and Families Act 2014** amended the Children Act to make it easier for young carers to get an assessment of their needs and to introduce 'whole family' approaches to assessment and support. Local authorities must offer an assessment where it appears that a child is involved in providing care.

Children Act 1989: Section 17ZA 1(a) [inserted by section 96 Children and Families Act 2014] If any child or young person is identified as carrying out a caring role, this should result in an offer of a needs assessment for the adult requiring care and support, and the local authority must consider whether to undertake a young carer's needs assessment under the Children Act 1989. Refer to our 'Supporting Young Carers and their families' introductory booklet for more information.

Although young carers need extra support, they are no more likely to find it from statutory agencies than other children (The Children's Society Hidden from View, 2013).

¹ Independent Mental Health Taskforce (2016) The Five year forward view for mental health

² Dearden C and Becker S (2004) Young carers in the UK the 2004 report. Carers UK.

³ ODPM (2004) Mental Health and Social Exclusion

⁴ Mayes, K., Diggins, M., Falkov, A. (1998) Crossing Bridges – Training resources for working with mentally ill parents and their children. DH/Pavillion

⁵ Department of Health (2002) Developing services for carers and families of people with mental illness

⁶ Emotional support for young carers. A report prepared for the Royal College of Psychiatry by The Children's Society Young Carers Initiative (2006)

Best practice top tips:

- When working with adults with mental health difficulties, remember the child and ensure to take a whole family approach. 'Think child, think parent, think family' to ensure the child is heard and their needs met. Do not leave it to someone else (SCIE Guidance 2009).
- Make sure the child has one key worker or main contact who is known to them and that they know who to contact in a crisis.
- Whenever you can, include children in discussions about their parents' mental health difficulties, the family's needs and the impact on their caring responsibilities.

- Make sure children in the household have the information suitable for their age and understanding regarding the relevant mental illness and any medication being taken. Consider who administers the medication – it is inappropriate for this to be a child.
- Have back-up care plans in place so you are prepared if the parent is taken into hospital.
- Work together with other agencies, including schools, as appropriate. Remember that if the child's health or development is impaired or there is the risk of significant harm, Children's Services must be informed.

Support

The Children's Society (2016) Supporting Young Carers and their Families resource sets out key legislation and best practice guidance. Further resources are available from the Include Programme website youngcarer.com

Those working with young carers with parents with mental health difficulties may find these resources of additional use:

- **Mental Health Act 1983 and Mental Health Act 2007, England and Wales:** These Acts cover the legal requirements of local social services to diagnose and treat individuals with mental health problems, ensuring a care plan is in place that takes account of all family members. gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-mental-health-act-1983
- **Signposts:** See me, hear me, talk to me – talk to my family as well. Working together to improve outcomes for young carers in families affected by enduring parental mental illness or substance misuse. adass.org.uk/AdassMedia/stories/Policy%20Networks/Carers/signposts131011.pdf
- **No Health Without Mental Health:** A Cross-Government Mental Health Outcomes Strategy for People of All Ages, 2011. This strategy set out six objectives to improve mental health, well-being and outcomes for people with mental health problems. gov.uk/government/publications/no-health-without-mental-health-a-cross-government-outcomes-strategy
- **The Five Year Forward View of Mental Health (2016):** A report from the independent Mental Health Taskforce to the NHS in England. Sets out the start of a 10 year journey of transformation for NHS England including recommendations for improving parity of support, improving inequality and involving carers. england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf
- **Being Seen and Heard:** A training package including a video and CD-ROM of additional resources providing practical suggestions for working with parents and children effectively. Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandyoungpeople/resources.aspx
- **Keeping the Family in Mind:** A 15min DVD, booklets and advice sheets on supporting families with a parent who has a mental illness. barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/policy_research_unit/research_and_publications/keeping-the-family-in-mind-resource-pack-2nd-edition/publication-view.jsp?pid=PUB-1600
- **Minds, Myths and Me:** A fact pack for young people who live with someone with a mental illness. glosyoungcarers.org.uk
- **Young and Caring – Caring for Someone with a Mental Illness:** This guide is to support young people caring for someone with a mental illness, to help young carers make sense of things and to get the help they need. It also contains advice and stories from young carers about what has helped them; The Children's Society General Practice Pack which contains 'A guide for supporting, identifying and signposting young carers in your practice'; a poster for the GP waiting room; two posters for the staff room and an information leaflet for young people with a family member with an illness or disability. rethink.org/media/1535519/young_and_caring_for_someone_with_a_mental_illness.pdf
- **SCIE: E-learning Parental Mental Health.** These e-learning resources are freely available to all. They provide audio, video and interactive technology to assist in exploring the nature of parental mental health and its impact on families. scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/parentalmentalhealthandfamilies/

Please note these organisations and resources are listed for your information. The Children's Society does not necessarily endorse them.