



**minds, myths and ME**

**FACT PACK:** for young people  
who live with someone  
with a mental illness



# **minds, myths** and **ME**

Produced by Gloucestershire Young Carers

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the four dedicated young carers, **Becca, Elliott, Kieron** and **Laura**, who spent many hours compiling this resource pack; Barnardo's Action with Young Carers in Liverpool for giving us the inspiration and allowing us to use sections of their pack; Gloucestershire Partnership NHS Trust for development support; Stroud Valleys Artspace for access to computers and design packages and to Chris J Bailey and Kel Portman for working with the young people in designing the pack. Thanks also go to The Big Lottery, Gloucestershire County Council, Connexions Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire Partnership NHS Trust for funding the project.

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# Contents

## **Introduction**

- 4** Welcome
- 5** What is mental illness?
- 6** What causes mental illness?
- 7** Different kinds of mental illness

## **Disorders and illnesses explained**

- 8** Eating Disorders / Bipolar Disorder
- 9** Anxiety / Depression
- 10** Schizophrenia / Psychosis
- 11** Personality Disorders
- 12** Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- 13** Phobias / Dementia

## **Information**

- 14** Who's Who?
- 16** What does that word mean?
- 18** Quiz
- 20** Mental health and the law
- 22** Hospital care
- 23** Poem

## **Looking after yourself: top tips and getting help**

- 24** Knowing your rights
- 25** Your rights as a young carer
- 26** When things are getting worse
- 28** Ten Top Tips
- 30** Where do I go for help?
- 32** Poem

# welcome

**Hiya,**

Welcome to **Minds, Myths and Me.**

We are a group of four young carers who have used our own personal experiences to put this pack together.

We decided to write the pack because we felt that there was very little information around for young people like us. It includes all sorts of information that we would like to have been given. We hope you find it useful.

The image shows four handwritten signatures in black ink. From left to right: 'Becca' with a small 'x' below the 'c', 'Elliott' with a decorative flourish below, a signature that appears to be 'Kieron' with a flourish below, and 'Laura' written in a simple, cursive style.

**Becca, Elliott, Kieron and Laura**

# What is **mental** illness?

We've all felt sad, stressed or worried at times. It's just part of life. Usually these feelings come and go fairly quickly and don't cause us any problem.

The term 'mental illness' is used to describe when feelings become overwhelming and begin to affect personality or the way that people think and behave.

Periods of mental illness can come and go throughout people's lives. Some people experience their illness only once and then get better. For others it occurs throughout their lives.

With the right treatment most people with a mental illness get better or can learn to cope with the illness.

One in four people will become ill with a mental health problem at some point in their lives.

**We have included a short description of some illnesses. Check out the websites at the back of this pack to learn more.**



**Mental health = what's happening in our minds**

**Physical health = what's happening in our bodies**



# What causes mental illness?



**No-one really knows all the reasons why people become mentally ill and it could be due to more than one thing.**

**Possible causes could be:**

- **Too Much to Manage:** Sometimes things can happen in life which people can find hard to cope with like the death of a loved one, the break up of a relationship or losing a job. Our brains can normally filter out what we can't manage, so we can focus on what matters to us. Sometimes this filter cannot cope with too many thoughts or feelings and we get overwhelmed. In mental illness this may happen from too many feelings and thoughts left over from problems in the past, from too much stress now, or from illness making the filter become weak.

- **Family History:** If there is a history of mental illness in the family this can sometimes mean that the children of the ill person may be a bit more likely to develop a mental illness.

**This does not mean that because someone in your family has a mental illness that you will get it too.**

## **REMEMBER:**

**It is not your fault. You can not cause someone else's mental illness**

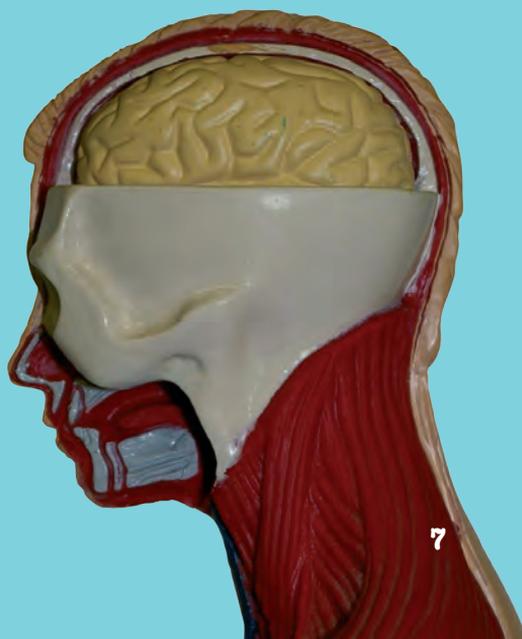
# Different kinds of mental illness

Just as there are different kinds of physical illness, like diabetes, there are different kinds of mental illness. These are just some examples:

- **Depression**
- **Bipolar Disorder (Manic Depression)**
- **Schizophrenia (Psychosis)**
- **Phobias**
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**
- **Anxiety**
- **Eating Disorders**
- **Dementia**

It can be really difficult to understand mental illness, especially when someone you care about is behaving strangely or thinking and saying strange things. In this pack we've tried to explain some facts about mental illness so that you can begin to understand.

**Check out the websites at the back of this pack to learn more.**



# Eating Disorder

## Anorexia Nervosa

People with **anorexia** are often very underweight but believe that they are fat. They can have extreme weight loss which can be caused by strict dieting or sometimes by making themselves sick or doing too much exercise.

## Bulimia Nervosa

With **bulimia** people long for lots of food and eat huge amounts in one go and then make themselves sick or take tablets called laxatives to get the food out of their bodies. They may appear to be in control of their lives but actually swing between eating far too much and starving themselves.

# Bipolar Disorder

## Bipolar Disorder (Manic Depression)

When people have bipolar disorder they have periods of time when they feel extremely **high and happy** followed by times when they feel really **low and depressed**. These feelings are difficult to control and are obvious, not like the usual ups and downs of life. When people feel really good (called **mania**) they will have loads of energy and will want to keep on doing things. They find it difficult to sleep. This sometimes leads to people spending too much money or taking risks that they would not usually take when they are well.



# Anxiety

Most of us feel a bit **worried or anxious** when we're doing exams or even when we meet new people. Sometimes this can push us to try a little harder which then helps us to cope a bit better when we face the same situation again. Anxiety is only a problem if people become so worried that it stops them from doing **every day things** like shopping or answering the phone. This level of anxiety can make people feel very unwell. People who have anxiety problems often get depressed as well.

# Depression

When people have depression they can feel very **low and unhappy**. Some people feel very tired although they can't seem to get to sleep, whilst others seem to sleep for ages. Everything seems like a huge effort and this can make people feel like they're completely **useless**. Depression is much more than feeling a bit fed up. It can be so bad that some people with severe depression may feel like they want to kill themselves. If someone you know is feeling like this you should always take this seriously and tell a trusted adult.



# Schizophrenia or Psychosis

Schizophrenia (or Psychosis) is likely to affect one person in a hundred. It is caused by an **imbalance** of chemicals in the brain. People with Schizophrenia may have to take tablets to get the chemical **balance** right. They may not be able to tell the difference between what is **real** and what isn't. This can lead to extreme feelings such as panic, anger, confusion, fear and anxiety.

## Possible symptoms of psychosis are:

- **False beliefs (delusions)** e.g. believing that people are spying on them or listening in on their phone conversations.
- **Hearing voices.** Voices may be someone they know or someone from the past. The voices can tell them to do all sorts of things and can be good or bad.
- **Muddled speech and thoughts.** They may get the days muddled up or you might not understand the words that they say.
- **Loss of feelings or emotions.** They may not react as you expect and may seem not to care.
- **Loss of energy** or interest which makes people behave out of character.

# Personality Disorders

**A long term disorder in the way a person feels, thinks and behaves.**

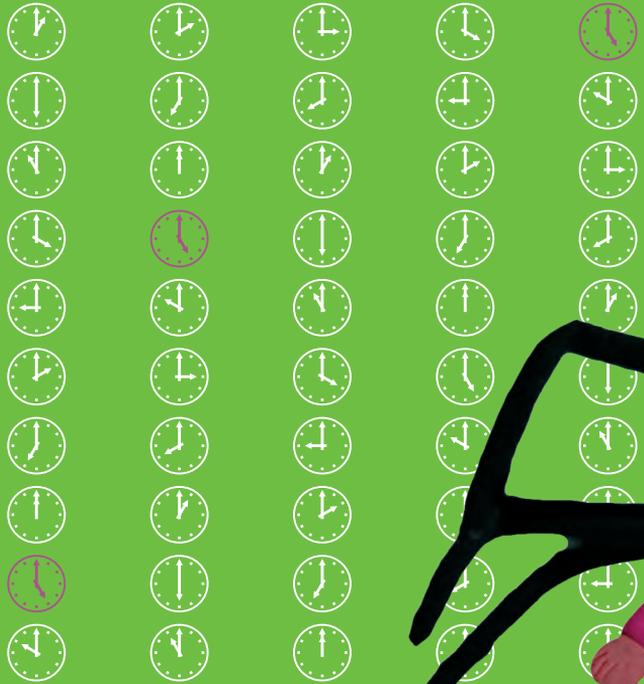
It is not completely clear what causes personality disorders but **previous trauma** including mental, physical and emotional distress or abuse seem to be related to it. It is difficult to understand this type of illness especially if someone you care for has one. There are many different types of personality disorder.

## **Personality Disorders may cause people to become:**

- paranoid
- less able to make friends and to socialise
- more nervous
- more emotional
- more dependent on other people
- angry very quickly
- liable to self-harm
- to have a sense of emptiness
- to have mood swings
- emotionally switched off



# Obsessive Compulsive Disorder



## OCD

OCD causes people to have **obsessions** or **compulsions** that they have to complete everyday or every hour or every minute depending on what it is e.g. some people can become obsessed with cleanliness, germs, tidiness and washing. People can have worrying **thoughts** that they can't get out of their head or they carry out **repetitive** actions that don't need to be done. It can cause a lot of stress to the person if they do not do these things as it seems wrong or strange that they haven't done them. OCD can be very stressful for the rest of the family.

# Phobias

Phobia describes when a person is totally overcome by a **fear** or **anxiety** about something. For example if a person is agoraphobic they are scared of open spaces. This can result in the person being too scared to leave their house. People can develop phobias about all sorts of different things.



# Dementia

Dementia affects people's ability to **remember, think** and **reason**. **Different** people experience dementia in different ways. They may experience loss of memory and forget names, places and events. They may have difficulties with everyday tasks and feel sad, frightened and angry about what is happening to them.

Dementia usually occurs in people in their mid 60's and older but people younger than this can also be affected. Dementia generally gets worse with age but the development of symptoms can often be slowed with drugs or other treatments.

**All sorts of people can help families where someone has a mental illness and it can be really confusing if you don't understand what they do. Here's a guide to help you through.**



**Family Doctor (GP):** The doctor will try to find out what the problem is and how it should be treated. This may mean writing a prescription for **medicine** or 'referring' the patient on to the Community Mental Health Team.

**Mental Health Teams:** There are lots of different mental health teams with different names. The teams might include social workers, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, mental health nurses and support workers, as well as other specialist workers. Everyone in the team should work together to develop a **care plan** to help the person who is ill to get better.

**Psychiatrist:** a trained doctor specialising in the **treatment** of mental health problems. They work out what the illness is, what treatment may be required and whether or not someone needs to go into hospital.

**Community Mental Health Nurse:** a nurse who has specialist training in mental health. The Nurse visits people at home to provide **support and advice** when someone has a mental health problem. They keep an eye on the person's treatment and help to talk through any problems.

**Occupational Therapist (OT):** helps people to regain their interests and skills and to build up their **confidence**. This helps them to get back to work and perhaps to gain new hobbies and interests which are great for good mental health.



# Who's Who?

**Social Worker:** gives advice to people who are experiencing problems in their lives and helps to get the **services** they need. This might be things like help at home, counselling, money, a break from caring or giving you information about organisations, like how to contact your local young carers support workers.

**Approved Social Worker (ASW):** with specialist mental health training, becomes involved when someone in the family has a **serious** mental illness. They help to decide when a person needs to be admitted to hospital.

**Care Co-ordinator:** When several people are involved in looking after and treating someone with a mental illness, their care needs to be co-ordinated, so that everyone knows who's doing what. This is the **responsibility** of the care co-ordinator. The care co-ordinator must check out how family carers, including young carers, are coping and include them in the care plan.

**Crisis Team:** a specialist team who help the person and their family at times of crisis. Where possible, this team provides **extra support** when it is needed, to keep people at home instead of being admitted to hospital.



**Do you always understand what professionals mean? Here are some key words explained to help you out.**



**Confidential** usually means that what you say will be kept **private** and not be passed on to anyone else without your permission. Always check out what someone means when they say they will keep information confidential.

**Referral** means an agency passing details about someone onto another agency because they think they will be able to help, e.g. the doctor may **refer** someone to a psychiatrist or social worker who can help with things that the doctor cannot.

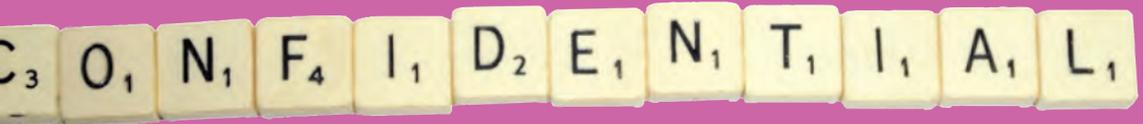
**Respite Care** means that someone else looks after the person you care for, for a short time. This could be in your home, a hospital, a residential home or day centre.

**Advocacy** is when someone helps you to get your viewpoint across to someone else. They help you to work out what you want to say, so that either you feel more confident to get the message across yourself or they can speak on your behalf. Perhaps this could be helpful if you feel you are not being listened to by people supporting the person you care for.



# What does that **WORD** mean?

**Assessment** is the word used to describe when someone comes to find out what you or the person you care for **needs**. Usually they will fill in an 'assessment form'. Sometimes people are asked to fill in a 'self assessment' which means that you can fill in the form yourself. You can always ask for help to fill in a form if you need it.



**Care Programme Approach (CPA)** describes the way that mental health services work. People with a severe mental illness are given a **care co-ordinator** who is responsible for making sure that they get the right treatment.

**Care Plan** This is a written plan explaining what treatment and care the person will receive to help them get better.

**Outreach** means someone will come and visit you, at home, school or somewhere different.

# So how much do **YOU** really know?

**1 Which of the following does not treat people with mental ill health?**

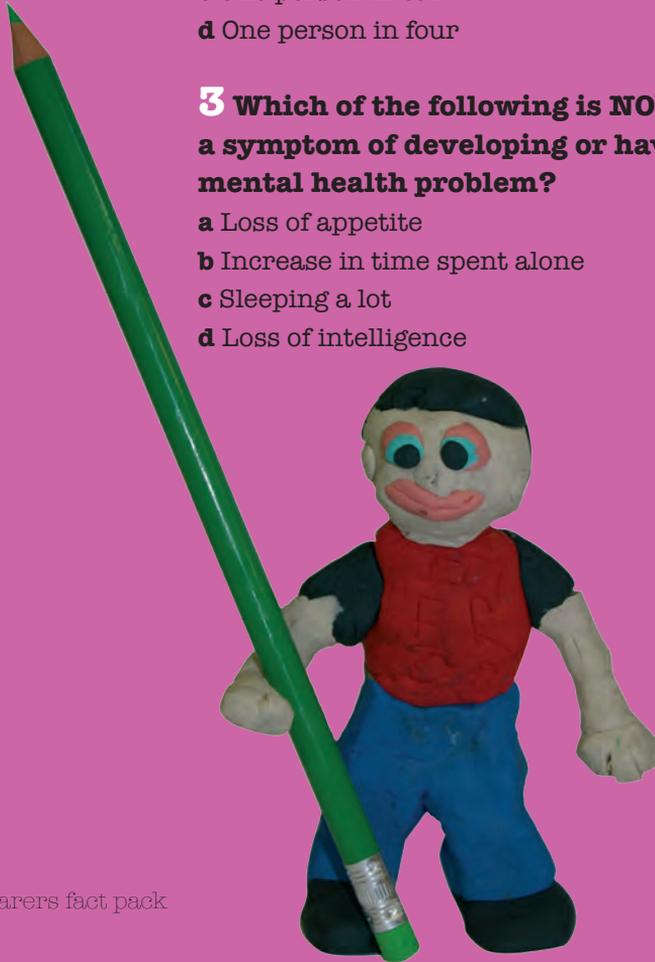
- a Doctor
- b Community Mental Health Nurse
- c Chiropodist
- d Psychiatrist

**2 How many people will experience some kind of mental health problem at some point in their lives?**

- a One person in every hundred
- b One person in fifty
- c One person in ten
- d One person in four

**3 Which of the following is NOT a symptom of developing or having a mental health problem?**

- a Loss of appetite
- b Increase in time spent alone
- c Sleeping a lot
- d Loss of intelligence



**4 Which of these is NOT a treatment for mental ill health?**

- a Drugs
- b Sports
- c Alcohol
- d Talking

**5 Which of the following is NOT a mental health problem?**

- a Anorexia
- b Anxiety attacks
- c Down's syndrome
- d Schizophrenia

**6 Which of these people is more likely to be a danger to the public?**

- a Young men under the influence of alcohol
- b People with mental health problems

**7 Which of these groups is UNLIKELY to experience mental health problems?**

- a Doctors
- b Young people under 25
- c People who live in the countryside
- d People who are wealthy

**8 If your mum or dad has a mental illness, which of the following statements is true?**

- a It is most likely that I will develop a mental illness myself
- b It is most likely that I will NOT develop a mental illness myself

Quiz adapted with thanks from 'Change your Mindset' Mindout for Mental Health

Answers: 1c, 2d, 3d, 4c, 5c, 6a, 7 none of these - anyone can experience a mental health problem, 8b

# Mental Health and the law

Sometimes, when people become very unwell, they may not want to go into **hospital**. This may be because they don't believe they are ill or because they just don't want to go. If they do not receive care and treatment, their condition might get worse or they might be in **danger** of hurting themselves or others. In some cases mentally ill people can be admitted to hospital against their will under the Mental Health Act 1983, this is called '**sectioning**'.

Different sections of the Act can be used for different circumstances.

There are a lot of 'sections' in the act. These are some (but not all) of the main 'sections' that are used when someone is very unwell:

**Section 4 is for 72 hours. This is used in an emergency and allows the hospital to work out if the person needs to stay in hospital longer.**

**Section 2 is for up to 28 days. This is for a longer period of assessment. Two doctors need to put this in place; one must have mental health knowledge.**

**Section 3 is for up to six months. This allows the hospital to treat a person, usually with medicine, to make them better.**



**Section 136** This allows police officers to take a person with mental health problems to a ‘place of safety’ (usually a hospital). This only ever happens if someone is suspected of being in danger. Also it’s for them to be assessed by a doctor and an approved social worker. This must be done within 72 hours.

People can **appeal** against sections and have the period of time they have to stay in hospital reduced. The hospital can tell you all about how to appeal.

The law is very complicated. If you want to know more, contact your local **Young Carers Project** or support worker.

# Hospital care

## The 'ins' and 'outs'



- When the person you care for goes in to or comes out of hospital it can be a difficult time. Try to remember that a mental health hospital is just like any other, where people who are really unwell can be treated and can begin to get better.
- It's important to keep contact with the person who is in hospital and you should be able to visit them. Some hospitals have family rooms for visiting but in others you may need to ask for somewhere private to meet. If you can't visit, letters and drawings are a great way of letting the person you care about know that you're still there for them.
- If your mum or dad needs to go into hospital it's important that you know who will look after you whilst they are away. It's good to talk about this, especially if the illness has a history of coming and going.
- When people leave hospital they should have an 'aftercare' or 'discharge' plan. The plan should help them to find their feet again by looking at what they need to cope at home. If you are a young carer you should be asked if you can cope and what you need.
- Sometimes the 'CRISIS TEAM' can help someone to stay at home instead of going to hospital, by making sure that they have extra help when they are unwell.
- Why not use the booklet 'Safe, Sorted and Supported' to help you plan ahead in case there is a health crisis?



# Mental Health

You think it destroys your life  
You see your little sister playing with a knife  
It breaks you up inside  
You feel that you should hide  
People are always there to help  
From north, east, west and south  
All it takes is a little talk  
It does you wonders to go for a walk  
Before you know it, it all gets better  
With the support you get  
from friends and letters  
Just remember, it's not your fault  
Always look after your health  
And always be yourself



Becca

# Knowing YOUR Rights

All children and young people have rights: It's the law!

It's YOUR  
right to:

- Be able to take a break and enjoy leisure time
- Have an education
- Be heard, listened to and believed
- Be protected from physical and psychological harm
- Have privacy and respect
- Information and advice
- Health and social care
- Be consulted and fully involved in discussions which affect your life



# Your Rights as a Young Carer

If the person you care for has a **serious** mental health problem, they are likely to be on the Care Programme Approach (C.P.A.). The type of care you are giving may be more **emotional** support rather than physical but this counts as '**caring**'.

## You have the right to:

- An 'assessment' to check out what help and support you need
- Make choices about the amount of care you can give
- Practical help and support with caring
- Be recognised and treated separately to the person you care for
- Advice about what to do and who to contact in an emergency
- Some information about the illness and any side effects of the medication



**Do you regularly need to care for someone like your mum, dad, brother or sister? If you do then you're a young carer.**

**To find out more about how to get an assessment, call your local Young Carers Project or Support Worker.**

# 'I get worried that my is getting worse - but no

**When you live with someone with a mental illness you are often the person who knows the signs when they are getting ill, but who's out there to listen to your concerns?**

## **Remember**

**YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR PARENTS  
MENTAL HEALTH  
but PROFESSIONALS SUPPORTING YOUR PARENT  
SHOULD LISTEN TO YOUR CONCERNS**

Remember that the person you care about may be getting help from a doctor or mental health team. Sometimes adults don't want to worry children by talking about the illness too much or they may want to keep some things **private**.

If your mum or dad has a serious mental illness, a Care Co-ordinator should help your family to draw up a plan of what to do if there is a **crisis** and who to contact.

If you feel that things are getting **worse** and that the person you care for is not asking for help then why not:

- talk to a trusted adult. Explain clearly why you are worried.
- talk to a doctor or mental health worker who is supporting your parent. Tell them about the way the person is behaving or the things that they are saying. They should **listen**.



# parent's illness

## one listens to me'

- **If you still don't feel that anyone is listening then ring your local Young Carers Project or SupportWorker who will listen to your concerns and help you to identify who to tell.**

**If you feel that you or the person you care about is in real danger then dial 999 and ask for the police.**

**Why not make a note of some useful contact numbers – just in case. There's a page at the end of this pack to help you out.**



# Ten Top Tips

1

Make sure u get a break and have lots of **fun**, make sure u find the time 2 spend on things u enjoy, like goin' swimmin' or shoppin' or chillin' with friends.

2

Don't **bottle** everything up, talk 2 some 1 that u like 'n can trust about how u r feeling.

3

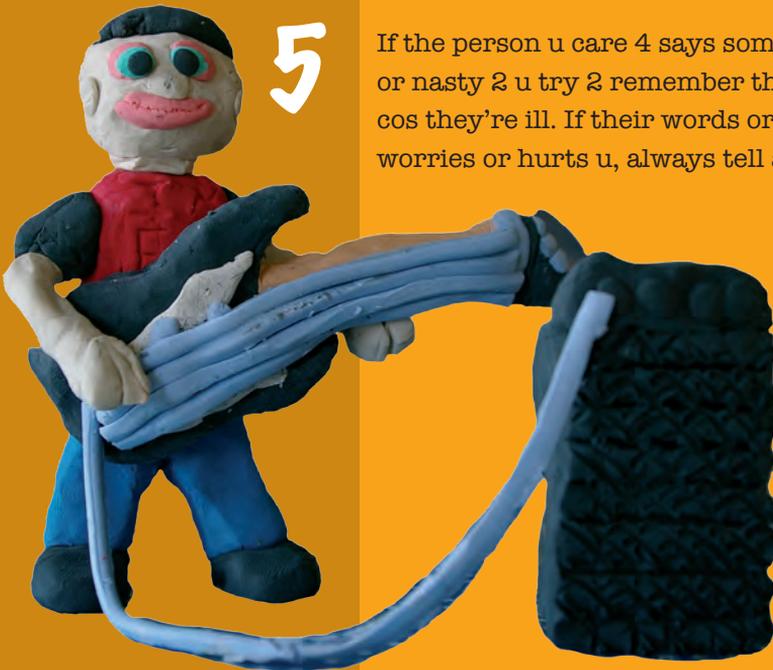
Always remember that it is **not ur fault**, u can't cause the illness.

4

Try not 2 get in2 arguments when ur angry, wait till things **calm** down, then it will be easier to get ur point across.

5

If the person u care 4 says something **strange** or nasty 2 u try 2 remember that this may be cos they're ill. If their words or behaviour worries or hurts u, always tell a trusted adult.





6

Try 2 learn as much as u can about what is wrong with the person that is ill. Knowing more about their illness might help u to understand what they are going through.

7

Don't believe everything u read in the papers or see on the T.V. When u know the real facts about mental illness you'll realise that they put all the dramatic stuff in but they often forget about everyday reality.

8

When people say bad things about people with mental illness, it's probably because they don't understand. If u know the facts, u can help them to change.

9

Eat well 'n drink sensibly and accept who u are. Looking after ur own health is really important.

10

Don't be afraid 2 ask 4 help. If u try to do everything, u might get ill urself. Ask a relative, doctor or social worker 4 help if things are difficult to cope with.

# So where do I go for help?



## Y not get on the net @...

- **www.youngminds.org.uk**  
Type 'mental illness in family' into the search box at the top of the screen for loads of information about when someone in your family has a mental illness
- **www.mind.org.uk** click on 'information' for loads of information about mental illness and how to cope if someone you care about has a mental health problem
- **www.childline.org.uk** where you can get advice, chat online with a counsellor or send them an email about any issue, big or small. It's free, it's confidential and you can get help at any time, day or night. You can also call them on **0800 1111**

## Or make a call to get help ....

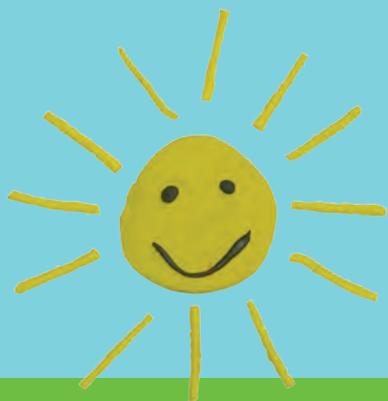
- **NHS 111** call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency
- **Samaritans 0845 790 9090**  
email: jo@samaritans.org
- **Police (non-emergency) 101**  
if you want to speak to the police about a general enquiry

or how about talking to a relative, favourite teacher, school nurse or your doctor. They're all there to help.

# Local Contacts

- .....
- .....
- .....
- **G.P. (Doctor)**
- **Community Mental Health Nurse**
- **Care Co-ordinator**
- **Trusted adult friend/relative**





## Poem

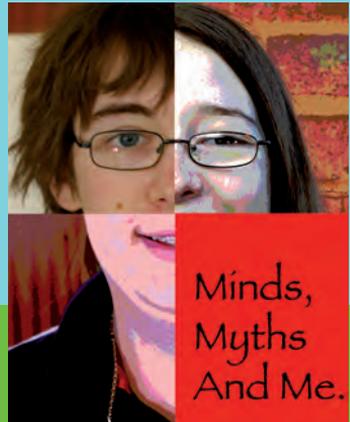
Not everyone has enough luck  
To smile everyday  
Some kids have tough lives  
In all sorts of different ways

That's where Young Carers come to help  
To help you enjoy yourself  
You will soon feel better  
With your inner self

Then soon you will find  
You're smiling on your face and in  
your mind.

*Laura*

**Laura**



LOTTERY FUNDED



**design:** Becca; Elliott; Keiron; Laura;  
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**models:** Becca; Elliott; Keiron; Laura  
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