

How can I look after myself?

Caring for a child with a mental health problem can often lead to feelings that can be overwhelming such as anger, guilt or sadness. These may be normal responses to the stress that you are experiencing. It is important that you have enough support from family and friends to help you. It may also be helpful to find out about any support groups that you could contact.

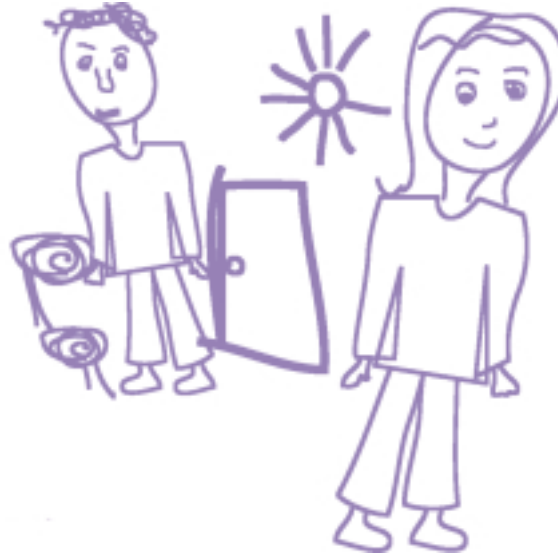
By looking after yourself, you will be better able to look after the special needs of your child.

Dealing with a child who has a mental health problem can often have an effect on other parts of your life. For example, it can put a strain on your relationships with other family members. Counselling may be helpful in working through some of these issues. Sorting out these problems will also help your child.

What can I do to help?

As a way of promoting your child's mental health and wellbeing and showing that you care, you could try the following:

- learn as much as possible about your child's situation
- be aware of any changes to their behaviour
- show affection – let your children know that you love them
- spend time with your children and take an interest in what they are doing
- talk to your children about how they are feeling. It can be better to hear what they have to say than to come up with answers yourself
- comfort them when they need it.



Who can I contact?

If you are concerned about your child, it may be useful to contact:

- your general practitioner
- a paediatrician
- a psychologist
- your local community health centre.

If you feel that your child's situation is urgent and you live in the Western Metropolitan Region, you may consider contacting:

- **The Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health Service**
Intake Service on **1800 44 55 11**
between 9.00am – 5.00pm,
Monday to Friday.



child & adolescent mental health

Child and adolescent mental health

Nothing pleases parents more than when their children are happy and successful. There are times however when parents worry about how their children are feeling or behaving. In some cases children may be upset or behave in unexpected ways. These feelings or behaviours usually only last for a short time. If they last for a long time or interfere with everyday life, it could be a sign of a more serious problem.

People outside your immediate family may notice changes in your child's behaviour before you do. However they may not always feel comfortable talking to you about it and hope that it is just a phase. Many families feel embarrassed about asking for help and may decide to wait. For most mental health problems, getting help early gives the best results.

Trying to deal with a child who has a mental health problem can be overwhelming and it is easy to feel alone. However, we know that about one in five children and adolescents may experience a mental health problem at some point.



What can contribute to mental health problems?

Many factors can contribute to mental health problems, for example:

- family problems
- learning difficulties
- relationship problems
- abuse
- death or loss of someone close
- serious illness or injury
- divorce
- genetic factors such as temperament
- unemployment
- homelessness.

Mental health problems that affect children and adolescents can include:

- depression
- anxiety disorders
- unresolved grief
- challenging and disruptive behaviour
- post-traumatic stress reactions
- eating disorders
- drug and alcohol abuse
- serious mental illness.

How do I know what to look for?

Mental health problems can happen at any time. The sooner children get help, the less likely these problems are to become worse.

Children will react to situations in different ways. Some children will be open about their feelings whilst others can withdraw and adopt other ways of managing their feelings. The way children behave is often a sign of how they are feeling.

If your child shows any of the following signs, and if they last for more than a few weeks, it may be a good idea to seek professional help:

- ongoing distress
- changes in personality
- difficulties separating from you
- inability to get along with other children
- not being able to keep an interest in what they are doing
- deterioration in school work
- changes in usual sleeping or eating patterns
- noticeable weight loss or gain
- reluctance to go to school or take part in normal activities
- restlessness, fidgeting and trouble concentrating
- excessive disobedience or aggression
- lack of energy or motivation
- irritability
- social withdrawal
- constant crying
- feeling hopeless or worthless
- odd ideas or behaviours
- nightmares
- frequent outbursts of anger.