

Parenting is very rewarding; it can also be very challenging. When a parent has a mental illness, these challenges grow for the family. It's important that parents find the support they need to help the family manage these stresses.

Children who have a parent with a mental illness need understanding and knowledge so they can deal with the special challenges of their situation. Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District employs COPMI Coordinators to assist children and their families with this. Contact the COPMI Coordinators on 02 4725 9800.

Children cope better when they can talk with their family about mental illness, and when it's not kept a secret. Their resilience is further increased when they can access education and information about mental health. It also helps when children have the opportunity to do something they're good at; it may be school, sport, music, dance or some other activity.

Talking to an adult they trust is important; this might be a parent, friend, counsellor or school teacher. Children and young people also appreciate the chance to talk to other children in similar family situations.

Key messages for children who have a parent with a mental illness are:

- They need to know they are not alone and that it is not their fault;
- They need to know that they can easily find out what they want to know about mental illness, and
- It's important for them to talk to people they trust about how they are feeling.

Parenting courses that help people manage the demands of parenting may be helpful, as are opportunities to meet up with other parents and talk about common issues. Proactive plans to ensure the care of children can include childcare and plans for what parents want to happen when they are unwell or admitted to hospital.

There are a range of resources and services that can assist. Family Support Services, Family and Community Services, Community Health Centres, and Brighter Futures can all help, as well as youth services, childcare centres, parenting groups and playgroups.

To find out about these services talk to your doctor, counsellor or mental health worker. Your local mental health team and the COPMI Coordinators have resources they can give you. You can also talk to these people for further information or about any concerns you have about your children's emotional or physical wellbeing. They can refer you to the right service. (See the separate Contacts Guide)

There is a range of age-appropriate mental health information for children.

Useful websites include:

www.copmi.net.au

www.easternhealth.org.au/fapmi.aspx

www.youngcarersnsw.asn.au

www.raisingchildren.net.au

The following phone lines may also assist you if you need someone to talk to:

NSW Parent Help Line: 1300 130052

Kids Helpline: 1800 55180

