

Understanding Mental Illness in Your Family

For Young People Who Have a Loved One with Mental Illness

If you have someone in your family with a mental illness, you may be wondering what is going on. When a person has a mental illness, it means their brain is not working right. Our brain controls how we think, feel and behave, so mental illness changes how a person thinks, feels and behaves.

A person with mental illness might have strong feelings like anger or sadness and they might say or do things that don't make sense. They might act in ways that seem strange, confusing and even scary to the people around them, but it is important to remember that mental illness is an illness and it can be treated. It is also important to know that mental illness is not anyone's fault. It's not your family member's fault and it's not your fault.

There are many different types of mental illnesses, here are just a few:

Schizophrenia

When a person has schizophrenia, their thinking gets mixed up. They might see, hear or feel things that are not really there, like hearing voices. They might believe things that aren't true, like thinking someone is trying to poison their food. Their speech might be jumbled up and they might say things that don't make sense. They might also lose interest in things they used to enjoy, stop spending time with their family and friends, and stop taking care of themselves.

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder can be like a rollercoaster. People with bipolar disorder go through times when they feel full of energy (mania) and times when they have very low energy (depression). With mania, a person might get really excited, talk really fast and believe they are extra special. They might also get angry and annoyed. With depression, a person is very sad for long periods of time. They might stop doing things they enjoy and taking care of themselves. Sometimes, people with bipolar disorder also hear, see and feel things that aren't real.

Depression

When a person has depression, they might feel very unhappy for long periods of time for no reason. They might have very low energy and lose interest in the things they used to enjoy such as hobbies and spending time with family and friends. Sometimes people with depression believe they are worthless and might lose hope that things will ever get better.

Remember the Three C's:

- I can't cause it
- I can't change it
- I can care for myself

RESOURCES

Kids & Teens in Control Groups

www.bcss.org/kidsincontrol

Canadian Mental Health Association - BC Division

www.cmha.bc.ca
1-800-555-8222

COPMI (Children of Parents with a Mental Illness)

www.copmi.net.au/kids-young-people

HeretoHelp

www.heretohelp.bc.ca

B.C. Schizophrenia Society

www.bcss.org
8-1-1

Foundry BC

foundrybc.ca

YouthinBC (online chat service)

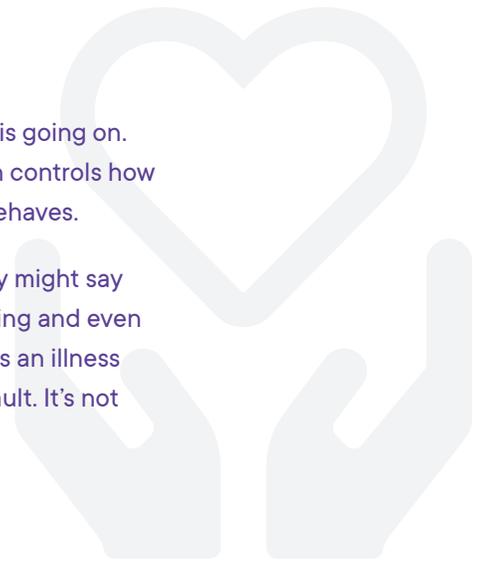
www.youthinbc.com

Kids Help Phone

www.kidshelpphone.ca
1-800-668-6868

Crisis Centre Suicide Line

1-800-SUICIDE
(1-800-784-2433)



Commonly Asked Questions

What causes mental illness?

Mental illness is caused by a combination of different things. A person's genes may make them more likely to develop a mental illness. Genes are the building blocks that make us who we are and determine things like the colour of our hair or eyes.

If a person has genes that make them likely to have a mental illness, stressful situations in their life can add to this and cause them to develop a mental illness. Some examples of stressful situations are the death of a loved one, trauma, or a car accident.

The use of substances like drugs and alcohol can also affect the likelihood of developing mental illness if a person already has genes that can make them prone to developing a mental illness.

Will I get mental illness?

Mental illness can run in families, because genes are passed from parents to children. But this does not mean that just because you have a parent or a family member with a mental illness, that you will get a mental illness. If you are worried about your mental health or notice any changes in your thoughts, feelings or behaviour, talk to someone you trust.

Can it be treated?

Just like many other illnesses, mental illnesses can be treated. Medications can help people with mental illness feel better. Counselling or therapy also helps people learn to understand and manage their illness.

Here are some important things to remember if someone in your family has a mental illness:

- It's not your fault – No one can cause another person to have mental illness.
- All your feelings are okay – You may have a lot of different feelings and it is okay to feel whatever you feel. Feelings are not good or bad, nor right or wrong. It's okay to feel confused, worried, angry, guilty, scared, sad, or embarrassed.
- Talk to someone you trust – Share your feelings with someone you trust – a parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, counsellor, teacher, etc.
- Take care of yourself – Find things you enjoy doing. Take a break, be active, or spend time with friends and family. Get enough sleep, take deep breaths, and remember it's okay to just relax, have fun, and forget.
- It can get better – With medication and help from doctors, counsellors, family and friends, people with mental illness do get better.
- Knowledge is power – It can be helpful to learn more about mental illness, so you understand what is happening for your family member. Then it won't seem so scary or confusing.

Remember you are not alone.

There may be local groups for children and youth who have a parent with a mental illness, like *Super Fun Groups*, *Kids in Control*, and *Teens in Control*. Through these groups you may be able to take part in fun activities and monthly outings, learn more information about mental illness and meet other children who have a parent with mental illness. To find or start a local group near you, contact www.cmha.bc.ca or www.bcscs.org/kidsincontrol.