



# Mental Health, Families and Carers

“The worst part is when you are not sure how ill she is and if you should call a doctor or a friend. Sometimes she just sits and cries. My sister had to do a lot of housework when mum was ill.”

## Who is this for?

People affected by mental health problems, all those providing services for people affected by mental health problems, including primary care and voluntary sector staff, teachers, children and family staff.

## Key facts

- There can often be a gap between the service provision for adults with mental health problems and services provided for children. As a result parenting and family issues are not always given the attention they deserve.



- Parents can have difficulty accessing mental health services to plan for their own and their families' needs before crises occur. Mental health services do not always address the caring responsibilities of people with mental health problems.
- An estimated one-third to two-thirds of children whose parents have mental health problems will experience difficulties themselves.
- A high proportion of adults with mental health problems – 46 per cent of women and 28 per cent of men – feel that their parenting abilities have been unfairly questioned because of their mental health.
- Carers can lack information about how best to help someone with mental health problems and the support that is available to them. Carers who provide substantial care are twice as likely to develop mental health problems themselves.
- An estimated 6,000 to 17,000 children and young people care for an adult with mental health problems.

## Promoting social inclusion

There are a number of ways in which families, carers and people with mental health problems could be better supported and enabled to maintain their social networks.

### Recognising the importance of people's families

- Building explicit links between adult mental health services and children and families' services to provide a comprehensive service to meet families' needs.
- Assigning responsibility for liaising with and supporting families to specific workers in key treatment teams – eg in Early Intervention Teams.
- Ensuring that the training received by professionals working with children and families addresses parental mental health issues.

### **EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICE, SOUTH WORCESTERSHIRE**

The team seeks to engage with families right from the point of referral. All the staff are trained in family interventions and there are six Behavioural Family Therapy trained staff on the team. Out of all the individuals on the team caseload who are in contact with their family, only one individual has not consented for the team to contact them. For all the other clients the team is supporting the family either by involving them in the treatment process or carer support.

Families are invited to meet with other families to share experiences and to gain information and support. The team has also provided specific support for siblings and has recently produced a booklet about psychosis from a sibling perspective.

Contact: Tony Gillam on 01905 681511 or  
e-mail: [tony.gillam@worcsh-tr.wmids.nhs.uk](mailto:tony.gillam@worcsh-tr.wmids.nhs.uk)

### **Reducing the fears and concerns experienced by families**

- Parental hospitalisation can be a worrying and uncertain time for families, with parents and children fearing family separation due to loss of contact. Ensuring there is a designated space where a family can be together when visiting is important.
- Families can benefit from psycho-educational approaches (known as family interventions) to help them care for and understand the needs of people with severe mental health problems. There is evidence that they are at least as effective as other interventions but they could be spread more widely (see *National Institute for Clinical Excellence Guidance 2002*).

### **FAMILY WELFARE ASSOCIATION, BUILDING BRIDGES, LEWISHAM, LONDON**

In partnership with health and social services, the Building Bridges service provides support for families where a parent or carer is experiencing severe mental health problems and is caring for a dependant adult. It provides specialised support to bridge the gap between children's and adult mental health services. Services include:

- family-focused work to increase parenting skills, plan for periods of crisis, and provide home-based emotional and practical support and counselling for children;
- confidence building group work for mothers, with a crèche for children; and
- training for local children's and community mental health team staff.

In 2002–2003 nearly 80 per cent of clients were on income support, over 50 per cent were ethnic minorities and 70 per cent were lone parents.

Contact: Rose De Paeztron on 020 7272 4412 or e-mail [rose.depaeztron@fwaprojects.org.uk](mailto:rose.depaeztron@fwaprojects.org.uk)

### **Increased support and recognition for carers**

- Recognising carers as valued partners in decision making can be crucial for ensuring the right package of care for the individual and for alleviating feelings of frustration and anxiety for their carers.
- Access to, and knowledge of, the financial and emotional support available to carers can be limited. It is important to make this information readily available, eg referring people to the Direct Payments Scheme (see below for more details).
- For some carers it will be helpful to raise awareness of their entitlement to a comprehensive needs assessment and their own care plan (see below for more details).

## Further information

### Families

*Every Child Matters*, the Green Paper on Children published in 2003, set out five main outcomes which services should work towards: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and economic well-being. This is now leading to major changes in how services for children, young people and families are organised and delivered, covering issues such as early intervention, accountability and workforce reform (see Useful Contacts and Resources for further information).

### Carers

The Department of Health produced *A Commitment to Carers* that provides an overview of what families and friends should expect from mental health services. As part of this commitment, carers are entitled to a needs assessment and they may also be entitled to financial help.

- **The Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995** gives people who provide 'substantial care on a regular basis' the right to request an assessment from social services.
- **Standard 6 of the National Service Framework for Mental Health** states that all individuals who provide regular and substantial care for a person on the Care Programme Approach (CPA) should have an assessment of their caring, physical and mental health needs. This assessment should lead to their own care plan and should be repeated on at least an annual basis. For more information on the CPA see the **Health and Social Care** fact sheet.
- **Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act** (Sam's Act) – the new act is likely to be implemented on 1 April 2005. The principal aims of the Act are to ensure that work, life-long learning and leisure are considered when a carer is assessed. It will give local authorities new powers to enlist the help of housing, health, education and other local authorities in providing support to carers; and it will ensure that carers are informed of their rights.
- **Direct payments** – following on from an assessment of their needs, carers may be entitled to an amount of money to help pay for support. For more details on direct payments see the **Day Services** fact sheet.

**Partners of Care** – in January 2004, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers launched Partners of Care. This joint campaign will run for one year and will concentrate on the problems faced by carers of all ages (see Useful Contacts and Resources below).

### **THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT REPORT ACTION POINTS**

- The Department of Health (DH) will commission the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to conduct a systematic review of evidence and existing practice by health and social care services in supporting parents with mental health problems with their parenting needs, including meeting the needs of ethnic minority parents; and will publish new guidelines. (SCIE from early 2005.)
- The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) will work with DH to ensure that the common core of training for professionals working with children and families addresses mental health issues. (DfES/DH from 2004.)
- DfES will encourage the emerging local structures for children and families' services to take explicit account of the needs of parents with mental health problems and their children, and will collaborate locally with adult mental health services. DfES will work with DH to help develop greater awareness in adult mental health services of the need to support parents with mental health problems in their role as parents. (DfES/DH from 2004.)

DfES will help improve access to family and parenting support by:

- highlighting the needs of parents with mental health problems and their children in the emerging family policy strategy; and
  - encouraging local Sure Start programmes, children's centres, other early years settings and other local statutory and voluntary services, such as Home Start, to be accessible and to reach out to and support parents with mental health problems, and respond to their needs and those of their children. (DfES from 2004.)
- DH will give priority and seek appropriate funding for a review of the quality of and access to family visiting facilities within hospitals, and to the general attitudes towards family visiting and young carers when a parent is in hospital. (Review to be undertaken by 2006.)

## Useful Contacts and Resources

Department of Health Women's Mental Health strategy – for information on women's needs in relation to families and their mental health.

Every Child Matters – for more information see [www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters/)

Connexions work with young people aged from 13–19. They can help with information and advice on learning, careers, health, relationships and money. They can be contacted on 0800 800 13 2 or at [www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com)

Parentline Plus is a UK registered charity that offers support to anyone caring for a child. It runs a free phone helpline, courses for parents, develops innovative projects and provides a range of information ([www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)).

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) promotes good practice in social care by reviewing and sharing practice, and they have set up the Parental Mental Health and Child Welfare Network to improve joint working ([www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)).

Sure Start covers children from conception through to age 4, and up to age 6 for those with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as parents and communities across the country. The Public Enquiry Unit can be contacted on 0870 0002288 ([www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)).

The Institute of Psychiatry provides mental health information for carers and relatives ([www.mentalhealthcare.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealthcare.org.uk)).

The Partners of Care campaign have developed a series of three separate checklists to help people with mental health problems, carers and psychiatrists talk to each other more clearly. These checklists can be viewed at [www.partnersincare.co.uk](http://www.partnersincare.co.uk) or requested by calling 0207 235 2351 and asking for extension 127 or 154.

Carers UK provide information and advice on all issues relevant to carers. They can be contacted on 020 7490 8818 ([www.carersonline.org.uk](http://www.carersonline.org.uk)).

Crossroads – Caring for Carers are a charity who consider that carers should be entitled to practical support to reduce the stress of caring. They are able to offer 'in-home care' to allow carers some time to themselves ([www.crossroads.org.uk](http://www.crossroads.org.uk)).

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers is a national charity that works to make things easier for carers to cope by providing information, support and practical help ([www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org)).

NIMHE has a Knowledge Community where people can exchange information and experiences relating to mental health. This can be found at [kc.nimhe.org.uk](http://kc.nimhe.org.uk).

Scottish Executive – for information on mental health policy and services in Scotland, contact the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being (part of the Scottish Executive). Visit [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk)

[www.socialexclusion.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk)

Tel: 020 7944 5550 Orderline: 0870 1226 236

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