Adults in your child's daily life can be a support for your child

It is great comfort for children when someone knows about their situation at home, as it also affects their well-being outside of home. Involve social networks that can be an extra support for your child.

Involve your child's school or daycare center

If adults around your child understand your child's reactions, they can provide extra support. Talk to your child's teachers and educators about what is best for your child. For example teachers can educate the class on mental illness to increase students' understanding of mental illness without it concerning your family. This can also make it easier for the child to tell their good friends about the situation at home.

Teachers and childcare professionals can also provide long-term support if needed.

When should I say it?

It is never too late or irrelevant to inform the school or nursery about something that may affect your child's well-being. You can arrange a meeting, make a call or send a message if that feels safer.

Who should I contact?

Contact someone you or your child has a good relationship with (the class teacher, a childcare professional or other employees). If you don't have contact details, check the school/nursery's website or ask at the office.

If you need support at home, you can contact a social worker in your municipality to find out about options.

Why do professionals have to notify when there is concern about a child?

Professionals are obliged to act if they have reason to be concerned about a child. In collaboration with your family they can provide support for your child. If this is not enough, they can notify the social services to request additional support for your family.

A notification is a tool to obtain help from the municipality so the family is supported when a parent is ill and there is concern for a child.

Many parents are concerned about what it means to involve the municipality. For some, it raises concerns about having their child removed. Municipal authorities follow guidelines that children do best remaining at home. Therefore they aim to support families extensively rather than remove the child.

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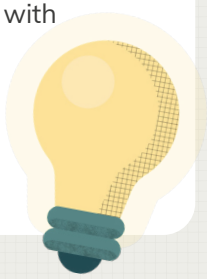
NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN FAMILIES AFFECTED BY MENTAL ILLNESS

Talk to your child about mental illness

When parents are affected by mental illness, it's important to talk to your children about it, because mental illness affects the whole family.

Why it's important to talk to your child about mental illness

- Children sense how their parents feel and if they don't get an explanation, they may believe that their parents' condition is their fault.
- Children may need to clarify important questions such as: Is the disease contagious? Will my mom or dad die? Is it my fault?
- Children can easily keep thoughts, feelings and concerns to themselves and avoid asking questions (especially if adults are trying to hide symptoms for the sake of the children).
- Children may try to protect their parents by not talking about the illness.
- Children may take on too much responsibility in an attempt to help.
- Children may feel distress when they feel alone with a parent's illness. This can be manifested as stomach aches, headaches, restlessness, concentration problems, problems with socialising, sadness and anxiety.



Advice on how to talk to your child

It's important to tell your child about your illness, even though it can be difficult, and it's okay to tell your child that it's hard to talk about.

"I find it hard to talk about, but we'll figure it out together. It's important that you know what's going on in the family."

Invite your child to talk and ask about their experience. Explain the illness in an age-appropriate way and answer questions honestly.

"Mental illness messes up my thoughts and feelings and sometimes makes me behave differently."

"I can feel drained because the illness uses up all my energy."

It helps your child to know that someone is helping you feel better.

"You can get so ill from the mental illness that you need someone to take extra care of you."

"I get help from a doctor/psychologist/at a psychiatric hospital - it's a kind of hospital for your thoughts."

Tell your child that it's not their fault that you have become ill and are feeling this way.

"I'm sad/tired/get angry quickly... because of the illness. It's not your fault, but the illness."

Be clear about good and bad days so that the child doesn't have to guess. Prepare the child if possible - or explain afterwards if you reacted differently than you intended.

"Mental illness makes ordinary emotions extra strong, so I can get much more worried/sad/angry/scared... than is reasonable."

"Sometimes I can't keep my appointments even though I want to, and I can have a hard time listening to what you say. It's the mental illness that gets in the way."

Remember that there are adult topics

Make sure you talk to other adults about your concerns and problems. It's not the child's job to help you get better. Don't share adult thoughts without a filter. Worries about finances and relationships, among other things, can be particularly burdensome when you have a mental illness. Be specific and adapt the information to the child if you need to involve them.

About financial issues, you can say:

"Unfortunately, we can't afford that."

"When you've been ill for a long time, you have less money."

About problems between you as parents, you can say:

"Adults can also find it hard to talk sometimes."

"Sometimes it can take time to make up after a disagreement."

"We do our best to be good parents, even if it's not always good enough."