

TALK TO EACH OTHER



When someone in the family is affected by
mental illness or mental health problems.

GUIDANCE

This is your book. You can read it together with an adult, or you can read it on your own.

When your mum or dad has a mental illness, you may need someone to explain why he or she sometimes behaves differently. You need to know that it is the mental illness that is causing this.

The book explains what mental illness is and the different ways adults may behave when they have a mental illness. Based on the short stories in the book, you can talk to an adult about how you think the characters in the book feel. For example, when their mother or father is tired most of the time or seems very cross.

You can choose to look up situations that you know or want to know more about. You will find an explanation of what mental illness is, what a family meeting is and who helps your mum or dad when she or he is are ill. There are some exercises at the back of the book that you can do. See the table of contents on the next page.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

● WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS	1	● EXERCISES	35
● WHAT IS WRONG MUM AND DAD?	7	● WHAT HAVE YOU NOTICED?	36
● WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?	9	● COMPLETE THE SENTENCE	37
● AFRAID	11	● DILEMMA QUESTIONS	39
● TIRED	13	● THINK ABOUT IT	41
● SAD	15	● WHAT CAN YOU DO?	42
● CROSS	17	● HOPES AND DREAMS	43
● DOES STRANGE THINGS	19	● MY HELPERS	44
● HAS TO DO CERTAIN THINGS	21	● FOR DRAWINGS AND NOTES	45
● DRINKS TOO MUCH	23	● USEFUL WEBSITES AND COUNSELLING	52
● EATING IS DIFFICULT	25	● IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE	53
● HOPE AND JOY	27	● ABOUT THE BOOK	54
● WHO HELPS MUM AND DAD?	29		
● WHAT IS A FAMILY MEETING?	32		

WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?

When we talk about illnesses, we usually think of physical illnesses. For example, we might think of a broken leg, the flu or cancer. A physical illness affects how our body works and whether we can manage school and work.

There is also something called mental illness.

Mental illness affects the way we think, how we feel and how we behave.



Mum or dad may become far too angry and scold a lot, be very tired, or become upset very quickly. Mental illness goes by a number names: It can be called anxiety, depression, OCD, psychosis, PTSD and eating disorders.

We call it mental illness because it is something that happens in our psyche (or mind), which is inside the brain. Treatment can take place at a hospital, which we call a psychiatric hospital, or it can be done with a doctor whom you visit from time to time.

Not everyone calls it mental illness. Some call it a mental disorder, a mental health condition, psychological vulnerability, stress or bad nerves.

Mental illness is also common. In each school class, there are between two and four children who have a parent with a mental illness.

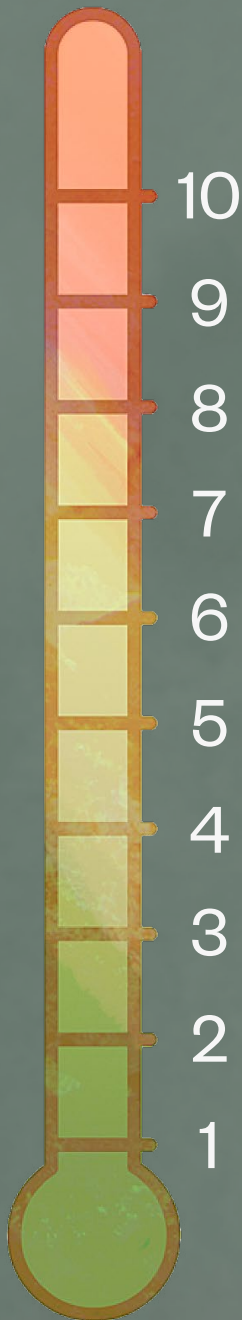


When people are affected by mental illness, they may find it difficult to do what they most want to do, such as spending time with their children.

It can seem as if it is the mental illness, and not the people themselves, that decides how they think, feel and act.

**When one person in a family has a mental illness,
everyone in the family is affected.**





Have a look at the figure.

Just as you can be slightly or very ill with other illnesses (e.g. influenza), you can also be slightly or very ill with a mental illness. This is shown in the figure.

At the green end of the chart, you react normally most of the time when something is bothering you, and you can cope with everyday life. Everyone can be scared, angry, confused and sad.

At the red end of the chart, you often have thoughts and feelings that are unpleasant and that you cannot control. Others can see this because you behave differently. It is called mental illness because thoughts and emotions are affected by illness.

Sometimes the mental illness takes up a lot of space. Other times it does not.

As a child, you may wonder why your mother or father is finding things difficult, or why she or he says and does strange things.

Many children may feel that it is their fault, that something they did caused their parent's mental illness. Or they think about what they can do to help their mum or dad feel better.

However, it is never the children's fault that their mum or dad develops a mental illness.

No one is to blame for getting a mental illness. You might sense how mum or dad is feeling, but mental illness is not contagious, and you won't die from it.



Children can help their parents with many things. However, they can't make mum or dad well.

It can take a long time to recover from a mental illness, but most people get better and can become completely well again.

The doctors who know a lot about mental illness are called psychiatrists. They can help your parent feel better.

The psychiatrist will ask your parent about different signs of the illness and how long the signs have been there.

You can read more about this on the following pages.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH MUM AND DAD?

Maybe you had already noticed something about your mum or dad before she or he went to the psychiatrist? Something you couldn't understand?

Anton has noticed that his mum has been very tired lately.

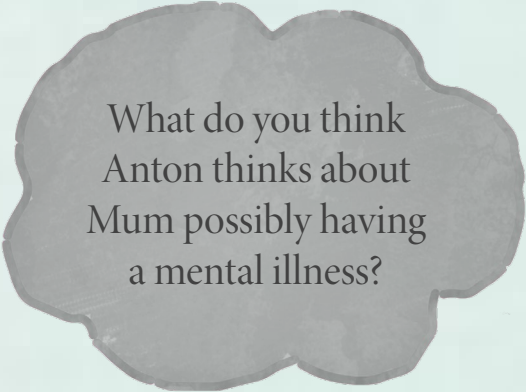
She has also seemed more bad-tempered than usual. She also worries about everything, so Anton is not allowed to do as much any more.

One night Anton wakes up and finds his mother sitting and crying in the living room. He doesn't dare ask what is wrong.

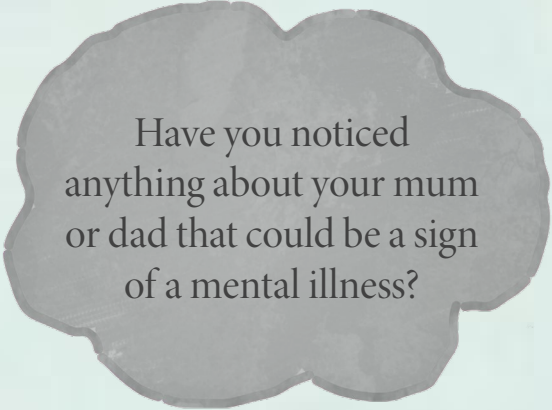
One day, his mum tells him that she has been to the hospital because she has been feeling unwell.

Now they have to find out what is wrong with her. Maybe it is a mental illness.

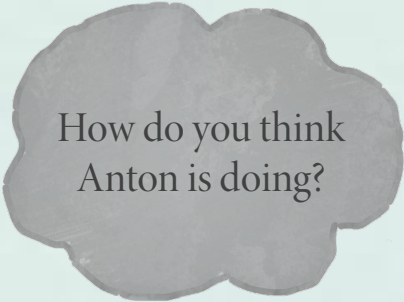




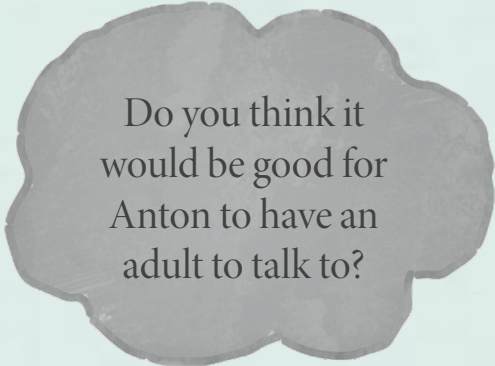
What do you think
Anton thinks about
Mum possibly having
a mental illness?



Have you noticed
anything about your mum
or dad that could be a sign
of a mental illness?



How do you think
Anton is doing?



Do you think it
would be good for
Anton to have an
adult to talk to?

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

When one has a mental illness, it can show up in different ways.

On the next page there are some pictures of different signs of mental illness that you might notice in your mum or dad.

Do you recognise any of them?

You can read more about this on the following pages in the book.



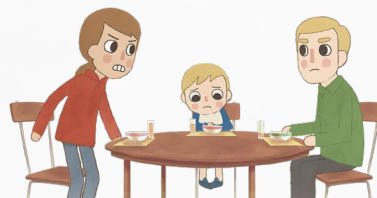
AFRAID
PAGE 11



TIRED
PAGE 13



SAD
PAGE 15



CROSS
PAGE 17



DOES STRANGE THINGS
PAGE 19



HAS TO DO CERTAIN THINGS
PAGE 21



DRINKS TOO MUCH
PAGE 23



EATING IS DIFFICULT
PAGE 25

AFRAID

Tobias's dad has a mental illness. He becomes scared even when there was no reason.

Dad can sometimes look as if something is really wrong. Then he can't do the things he wants to do. He just sits and stares into space. It is not Tobias's fault at all – it is the illness that is taking over.

Several mental illnesses can make us afraid for no reason.

What is it like for your mum or dad?

How do you
think Tobias
feels?

Have you ever noticed
your mum or dad
seeming afraid?

What do you think
Tobias thinks
when Dad looks
like this?

What do you
think Tobias
should do?



TIRED

Sofie's mum often lies on the sofa in the middle of the day.

She has a mental illness that makes her feel tired and exhausted, even though she hasn't done anything special.

It has nothing to do with Sofie. It is the illness that is getting in the way. A number of mental illnesses can make us very tired.

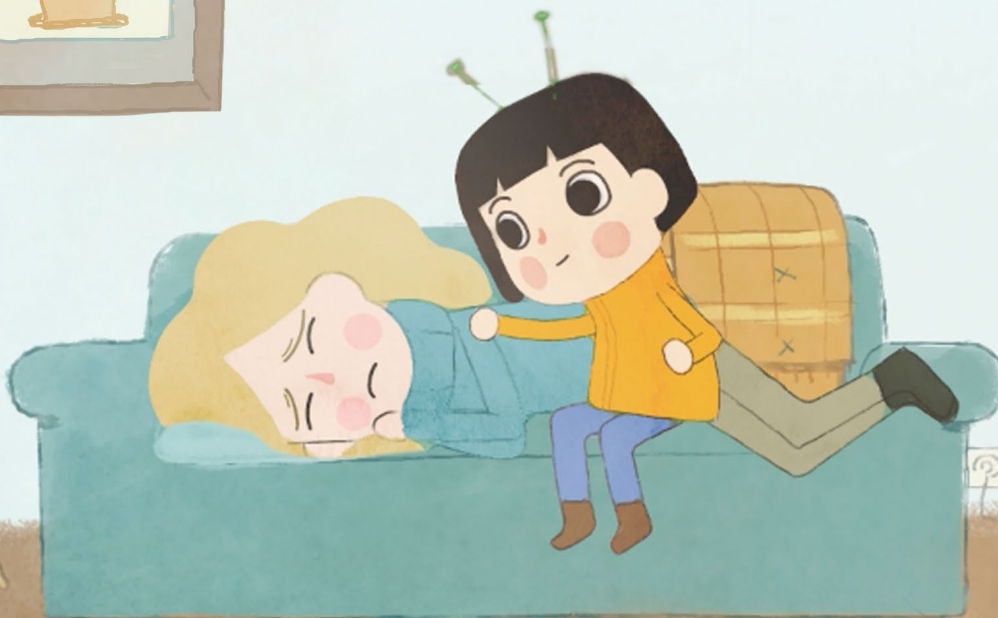
What is your mum or dad's mental illness called?

Have you ever
experienced your
mum or dad being
very tired?

What do you
think Sofie
should do?

How do you think
Sofie feels?

What do you think
Sofie thinks when she
sees her mum lying
on the sofa?



SAD

Oscar's mum has an illness in her thoughts and feelings.

It is a mental illness and it means she gets very sad. Sometimes so much that she cries.

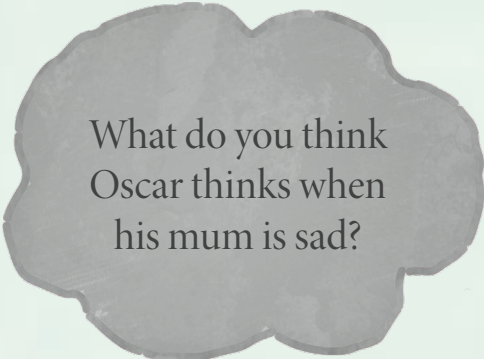
Mum finds it really hard to feel happy again. That makes Oscar sad. It isn't nice when she cries.

Mum being sad has nothing to do with Oscar. However, Oscar feels sad when she is like that.

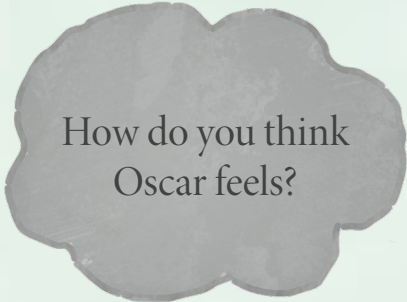
It is the nasty illness that takes up all the space.

How do you talk about the illness at home?

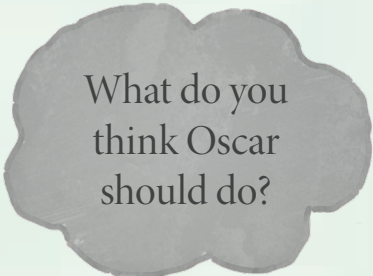




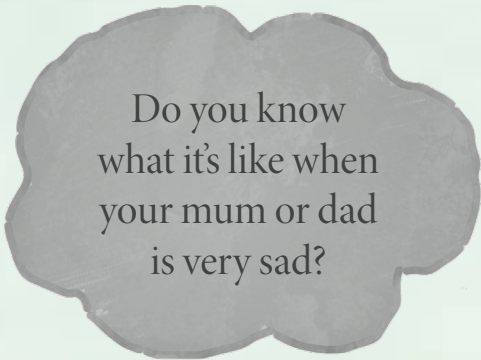
What do you think
Oscar thinks when
his mum is sad?



How do you think
Oscar feels?



What do you
think Oscar
should do?



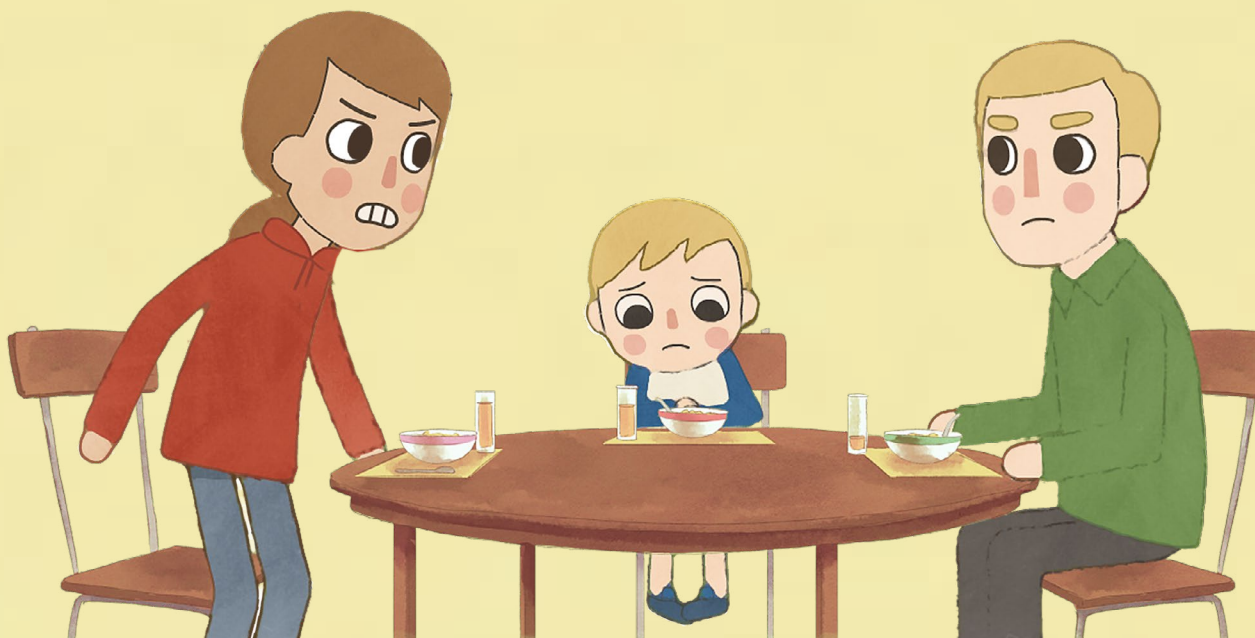
Do you know
what it's like when
your mum or dad
is very sad?

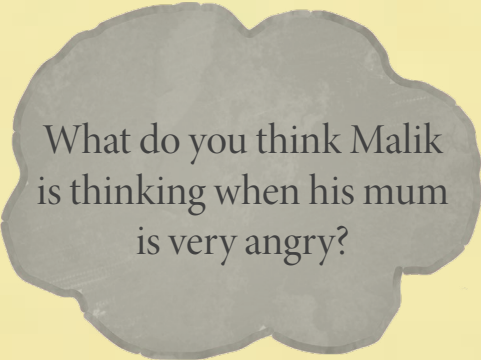
CROSS

Malik's mum can sometimes get very angry for no reason. Especially on the bad days. Malik gets scared when that happens. He thinks it might be because he has done something wrong.

Her anger has nothing to do with Malik. It is the mental illness that makes his mum far too angry. Many mental illnesses can make you get angry over almost nothing.

What is the name of your mum or dad's mental illness?

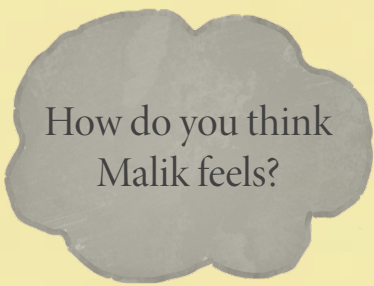




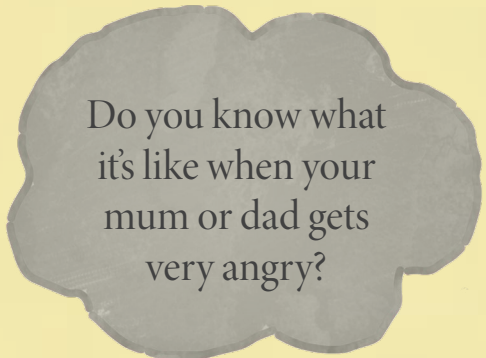
What do you think Malik
is thinking when his mum
is very angry?



What do you
think Malik
should do?



How do you think
Malik feels?



Do you know what
it's like when your
mum or dad gets
very angry?

DOES STRANGE THINGS

Emilie's dad has a mental illness that makes him think, say or do strange things. He may believe that someone wants to hurt him, or he may hear a voice that tells him silly things.

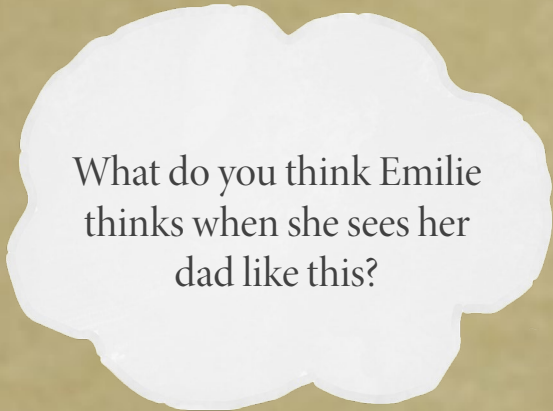
Emilie gets scared when she can see that her dad is like this. She wonders whether it is something she has done. However, it has nothing to do with Emilie. It is the mental illness that makes her dad think and do such strange things.

What have you noticed when your dad or mum starts to feel strange?





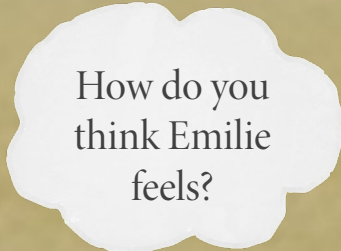
What do you
think Emilie
should do?



What do you think Emilie
thinks when she sees her
dad like this?



Do you know what
it's like when your
mum and dad do and
say strange things?



How do you
think Emilie
feels?

HAS TO DO CERTAIN THINGS

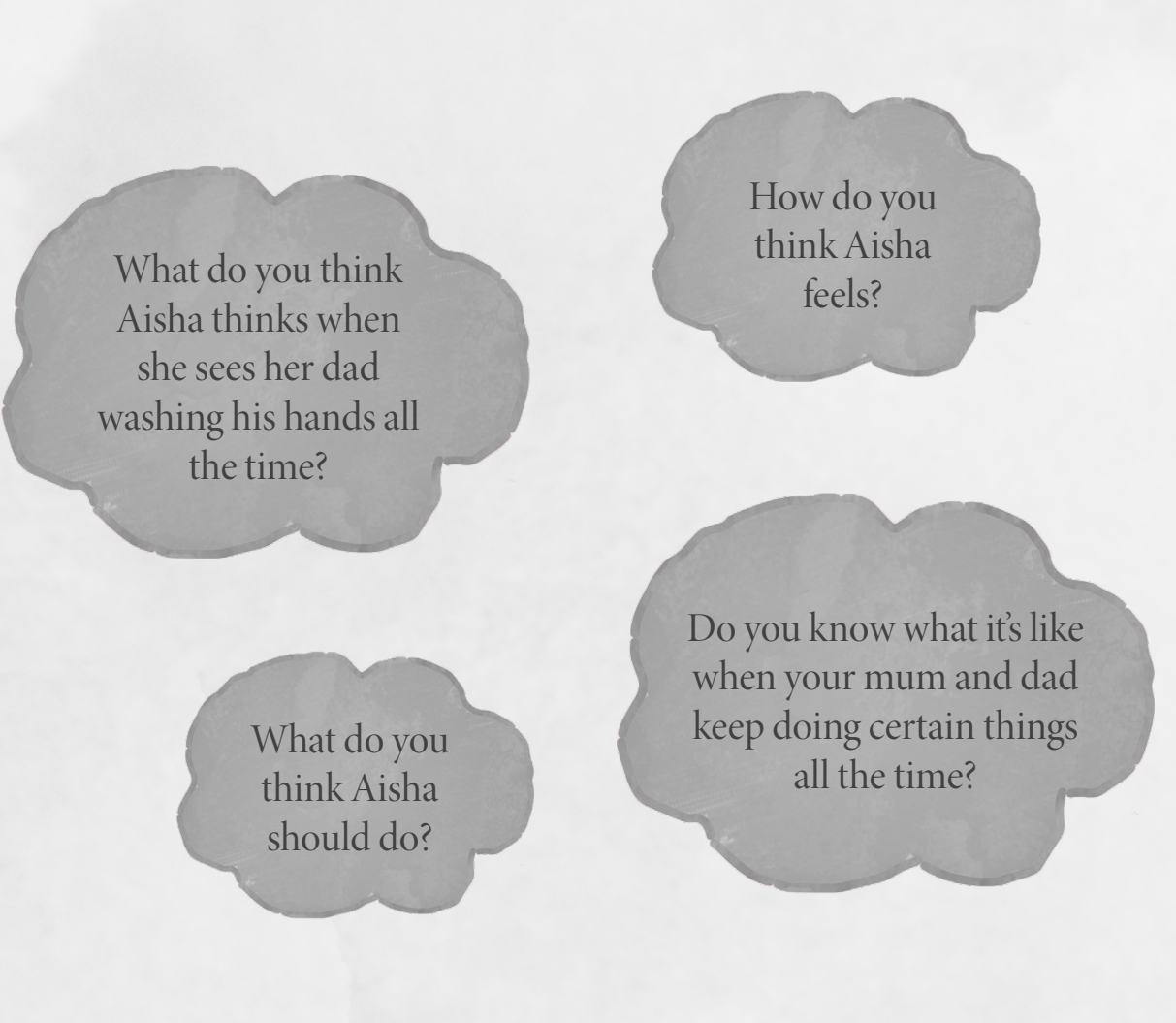
Aisha's dad washes his hands all the time. He thinks something bad will happen if he does not wash them every hour. Aisha has started to wonder whether it is right to wash your hands so often and whether she should also wash her hands more.

Her dad's thoughts have been affected by an illness that gives him silly thoughts that make him do certain things. When her dad washes his hands all the time, it is the illness that takes over.

Different mental illnesses can make a mum or dad do certain things again and again.

Does your dad or mum do or say certain things?





What do you think
Aisha thinks when
she sees her dad
washing his hands all
the time?

How do you
think Aisha
feels?

What do you
think Aisha
should do?

Do you know what it's like
when your mum and dad
keep doing certain things
all the time?

DRINKS TOO MUCH

Jonas has noticed that his mum drinks too much when she is feeling bad.

Jonas can tell that she is getting drunk in an unpleasant way. Jonas often wonders whether it is his fault and what he might be able to do to make his mum stop.

However, her drinking has nothing to do with Jonas.

His mum has become dependent on alcohol. That means she drinks too much. This is something his mum finds hard to manage on her own, and she needs help to stop.

How is it with your mum or dad?

What do you think
Jonas thinks when
he sees his mum
drinking alcohol and
getting drunk?

How do you
think Jonas is
feeling?

What do you
think Jonas
should do?

Do you know what it is
like when your mum or
dad sometimes drinks
too much?



EATING IS DIFFICULT

Julia's mum is very preoccupied with food. Julia does not know what her mum is thinking, but she can tell that her mum behaves strangely when there is something to eat.

Julia's mum has a mental illness that makes her think negatively about herself and her body, and that makes things difficult with food. It is a mental illness that makes her mum feel this way.

Mental illness can cause a parent to lose his appetite or to eat far too much.

What is your mum or dad's illness like for you?

How do you
think Julia's
mum is feeling?

What do you
think Julia
should do?

How do you
think Julia
feels?

What have you
noticed about your
mum and dad?



HOPE AND JOY

Mum or dad can still be good parents, even if they are affected by a mental illness. Mental illness does not affect things in the same way all the time. It is like the weather. Sometimes the sun shines, and other times it rains.

Mum or dad can have good days and bad days. It can also change during the day. When the illness is not taking over, it is nice to relax with your family and do good and fun things together.

It is important to know that there are other adults who help your mum and dad to get better.

It is important to remember the good experiences.



WHO HELPS MUM AND DAD?

When a mum or dad has a mental illness, it is time for a talk with a doctor. Often, parents also talk to a psychologist, nurse or social worker.

When a mum or dad is feeling really unwell, she or he may be admitted to a psychiatric hospital to get help.

If a parent of yours is hospitalised, has a room where he sleeps. There is also a shared living room where everyone who is admitted can eat and spend time together.

You can visit your mum or dad at the hospital.

Sometimes it is best to start by talking on the telephone or writing to each other before you come to visit. Mum or dad can also send a picture of what it looks like at the hospital.





WHAT IS A FAMILY MEETING?

It can be difficult to understand what mental illness is, and how you can see it in your mum or dad.

That is why it can help to get support to talk about what the illness does and what you think about what is happening.

At all psychiatric hospitals there are adults who are good at talking with children and parents about mental illness. They invite your parents and you to a family meeting where you talk about your mum's or dad's illness.

Many children are happy to come and talk about everything that is happening in their family.

On the other hand, many are also unsure what to say and do not really feel like saying anything.

That is completely fine. You do not have to say much if you do not want to do so. You can just listen to the discussion.

Before the family meeting, your mum or dad will have told the staff about you. They will have talked about how old you are and what your name is.

During the family meeting, you talk about your mum's or dad's illness and, if you want, you can talk about your experiences and thoughts about the mental illness.

Most children think it is nice to know what is happening to their mum or dad.

You may have a few "butterflies in your tummy" before you come to the meeting, but afterwards you know more, and that feels good.

You also talk about whether you need more help or support in your family.

An illustration of a woman and a young child standing in a library. The woman, on the left, has dark skin, black hair in a ponytail, and rosy cheeks. She is wearing a light grey long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The child, on the right, also has dark skin and rosy cheeks, and is wearing a bright blue hooded jacket and dark pants. They are both looking towards the right. The background consists of several shelves filled with books, rendered in a soft, painterly style with warm tones. Two yellow, cloud-like speech bubbles are positioned above the child, containing text.

“It is the best thing that
has happened to our
family in a long time.”

Mother of a 9-year-old child

“They were really kind, and
it was good to talk about
what is wrong with Mum.”

Child aged 9

EXERCISES

In the rest of the book, you can do different exercises that can help you understand more about the mental illness. You can draw and write down some of the things you talked about during the family talk, and that you think about afterwards.



WHAT HAVE YOU NOTICED?

You've probably noticed many things about your mum or dad.
Both when the illness takes over and when your mum and dad are doing well.

When the illness takes over (bad days)	When the illness doesn't take over (good days)
<i>Really, really tired</i>	<i>Listening carefully</i>
<i>Afraid</i>	<i>Well</i>
<i>Cross</i>	<i>Wants to have a cosy time</i>

COMPLETE THE SENTENCE

When you complete the sentences, say the first thing that comes into your mind. So you shouldn't think for too long. Your "answers" may be about mental illness or about something completely different. If you think a sentence is too difficult, skip it. It's fun to complete sentences together with others and hear different answers.

- I worry about
- I wish my mum or dad
- If I had to talk to someone about my mum's or dad's illness, it would be
- I would like to know more about
- What I like best to do together with Mum/Dad is
- Mum/Dad is in hospital because
- The worst thing about my mum's or dad's illness is
- It is sad that
- I would like to talk about

- I would like my teacher to... ..
- The other boys or girls probably think I... ..
- Sometimes I get scared when
- I get angry when
- I am happy when
- At home with us
- I feel alone when
- What helps me the most is
- My best friend is
- My best grown-up friend is
- If I need help, I will contact
- I think it's important to talk about

DILEMMA QUESTIONS

THE STORY OF TOBIAS AND ANNA

Anna and Tobias live together with their mum and dad. Their mum has a mental illness. The illness makes their mum very sad and upset all the time. Sometimes their mum also gets very angry, even when there is no reason.

Who or what do you think can help Anna and Tobias' mum to feel better?

Choose one or more of the following options:

- 1** Anna and Tobias, by being quiet, not pestering and staying at home with their mum?
- 2** Dad, by being kind to Mum?
- 3** Being admitted to hospital?
- 4** Medicine?
- 5** Conversations with someone who knows something about mental illness?
- 6** Fresh air and exercise?
- 7** Healthy food?
- 8** Being with others who have a mental illness?
- 9** Being with friends and family?
- 10** Do you have any other suggestions?

DILEMMA QUESTIONS

THE STORY OF JONAS

Jonas is 10 years old and in grade 4 at school. Today he is going to his best friend Martin's birthday party. He has been really looking forward to it, because they have planned an exciting treasure hunt for their classmates.

However, Jonas is not so happy when it's time to go, because Mum has told him that his dad is not feeling very well. He has to go to hospital and talk to a doctor. Jonas's dad has been admitted to hospital with depression before. That time he was in hospital for a very long time.

Jonas doesn't know whether to go to the birthday party or to stay at home.

Questions:

- 1 How do you think it will be for Jonas to go to the birthday party?
- 2 How do you think Jonas will feel if he stays at home?
- 3 Do you think Jonas could go to the birthday party for a short while?
- 4 What do you think Jonas should do?
- 5 What do you think Jonas' mum and dad think he should do?
- 6 Do you think there is someone looking after Jonas' dad?

THINK ABOUT IT

Think about what it is like for you with your mum's or dad's mental illness. Choose the answer (number) that best fits each question.

- 1** = Nothing or not at all
- 2** = A little or once in a while
- 3** = Sometimes or often
- 4** = A lot or very often

- How much do you know about mental illness?
- How often do you talk to your parents about mental illness?
- How often do you talk to friends about mental illness?
- How difficult would it be to tell other people if there were mental illness in your family?
- What does it mean to you that others know about your situation at home?
- How many times a day do you think about whether your mum or dad is doing well while you are at school?
- How affected are you when things are going badly for your mother or father?
- What does it mean to you if your mother or father is doing well?
- Can your classmates tell when looking at you that things are going badly?
- Do your teachers see how you are doing?
- How often do you cancel plans with your friends because the mental illness is taking up too much of your thoughts?

Tell an adult you trust about your thoughts.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Here you can think about what you can do yourself, and what others can do.

What have you noticed about yourself when the illness is taking up a lot of space?

I feel sad



What can help you to feel better when the illness is taking up a lot of space?

Visit my friend



What can your mum or dad do to help you when the illness feels like a lot?

Explain that the illness is a big part of things right now and say that it's okay for me to go and see my friend



HOPE AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

**What hopes and
dreams do you have
for the future?**

That my dad can be there for my birthday

**How can they
be fulfilled?**

That my dad will get better: The doctor can help my dad.

**Who can help you
fulfil them?**

My parents

MY HELPERS

Name	Telephone

FOR DRAWINGS AND NOTES

USEFUL WEBSITES AND COUNSELLING

- www.somandre.dk (for older children): Film: “Viktor's Book”, for young people.
Advice and guidance
- www.psykiatrifonden.dk/BUSP
- Counselling from the Danish Psychiatric Foundation: 39 25 25 25
- The Children's Helpline: 35 55 55 59 or www.boernetelefonen.dk
- The regions: Search for “PsykInfo” on Google. Information about what is happening in your region.
 - PsykInfo Region H
 - PsykInfo Region Zealand
 - PsykInfo Region South Denmark
 - PsykInfo Region Central
 - PsykInfo Region North
- “Talk about it”: Films are available at psykiatrifonden.dk/BSP

IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE

Books for children that can be borrowed from the library:

- What is the matter?: for children and young people who have parents with mental illness. By Tytti Solantaus, Social Development Centre SUS, 2006
- How can I help my child?: for parents with mental illness. By Tytti Solantaus, Social Development Centre SUS, 2005
- Tomorrow everything will be as usual. By Lina Stoltz, Carlsen, 2015
- Inside me, inside others. By Karen Glistrup, Gyldendal, 2015
- The Battle for Troll Power. By Ingelise Nordenhof, Ørnens forlag, 2012
- Karl and Emma's mum has gone crazy. By Susanna Gerstorff Thidemann, Social Development Centre SUS, 2007
- The Lump. By Teddi Doleski, Ørnens forlag, 2000
- My father's illness. By Bente Gran, Forlaget Mikro, 2017
- Rosa's mum is in a psychiatric hospital. By Mala Moszkowicz et al., Social Development Centre SUS, 2007
- Talk about it. With all children. By Karen Glistrup, PsykInfo Forlaget, 2011
- Viggo and Walther's world. By Nanna Sofie Højstrøm, www.en-af-os.dk, 2016
- We have to show them. By Bente Bratlund, Høst & søn, 2013

ABOUT THE BOOK

This book was created as part of the project "Taleboblen", which is a collaborative project between the Danish Psychiatric Foundation and psychiatric services in the five regions.

The project is supported by the Velux Foundation and aims to support and promote children's involvement when a parent is affected by a mental illness.

The book is aimed at children and is given to parents at the parent consultation in psychiatric services. The book can be used at home by parents and children, by the children alone, or together with staff during the family session.

We hope that the book will help both parents and staff to involve the children even more when the family is affected by mental illness.

Thanks to professional consultant Ingelise Nordenhof (www.nordenhof.com) for a valuable contribution.



psykiatri
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VELUX FONDEN

REGION
H Psykiatri

REGION
Sjælland
- vi er der for dig

Psykiatrien i
Region Syddanmark

midt
regionmidtjylland

REGION NORDJYLLAND
- i gode hænder