We would like to thank the four dedicated young carers, Becca, Elliott, Kieron and Laura, who spent many hours compiling this resource pack; Barnardo’s Action with Young Carers in Liverpool for giving us the inspiration and allowing us to use sections of their pack; Gloucestershire Partnership NHS Trust for development support; Stroud Valleys Art Space for access to computers and design packages and to Chris J Bailey and Kel Portman for working with the young people in designing the pack. Thanks also go to The Big Lottery, Gloucestershire County Council, Connexions Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire Partnership NHS Trust for funding the project.

Produced by Gloucestershire Young Carers

Reviewed July 2014

Acknowledgements

Introduction

4 Welcome
5 What is mental illness?
6 What causes mental illness?

Disorders and illnesses explained

8 Eating Disorders / Bi-polar Disorder
9 Anxiety / Depression
10 Schizophrenia / Psychosis
11 Personality Disorders
12 Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
13 Phobias / Dementia

Information

14 Who’s Who?
16 What does that word mean?
18 Quiz
20 Mental health and the law
22 Hospital care
23 Poem

Looking after yourself: top tips and getting help

24 Knowing your rights
25 Your rights as a young carer
26 When things are getting worse
28 Ten Top Tips
30 Where do I go for help?
32 Poem

Contents
Hi ya,
Welcome to Minds, Myths and Me.
We are a group of four young carers who have used our own personal experiences to put this pack together.
We decided to write the pack because we felt that there was very little information around for young people like us. It includes all sorts of information that we would like to have been given. We hope you find it useful.

Becca, Elliott, Kieron and Laura

What is mental illness?

We’ve all felt sad, stressed or worried at times. It’s just part of life. Usually these feelings come and go fairly quickly and don’t cause us any problem.

The term ‘mental illness’ is used to describe when feelings become overwhelming and begin to affect personality or the way that people think and behave.

Periods of mental illness can come and go through people’s lives. Some people experience their illness only once and then get better. For others it occurs throughout their lives.

With the right treatment most people with a mental illness get better or can learn to cope with the illness.

One in four people will become ill with a mental health problem at some point in their lives.

Mental health = what’s happening in our minds

Physical health = what’s happening in our bodies

We have included a short description of some illnesses. Check out the web sites at the back of this pack to learn more.
No-one really knows all the reasons why people become mentally ill and it could be due to more than one thing. Possible causes could be:

- **Too Much to Manage**: Sometimes things can happen in life which people can find hard to cope with like the death of a loved one, the break up of a relationship or losing a job. Our brains can normally filter out what we can’t manage, so we can focus on what matters to us. Sometimes this filter cannot cope with too many thoughts or feelings and we get overwhelmed. In mental illness this may happen from too many feelings and thoughts left over from problems in the past, from too much stress now, or from illness making the filter become weak.

- **Family history**: If there is a history of mental illness in the family this can sometimes mean that the children of the ill person may be a bit more likely to develop a mental illness. **This does not mean that because someone in your family has a mental illness that you will get it too.**

**REMEMBER:**
It is not your fault. You can not cause someone else’s mental illness.

Just as there are different kinds of physical illness, like diabetes, there are different kinds of mental illness. These are just some examples:

- Depression
- Bi-Polar Disorder (Manic Depression)
- Schizophrenia (Psychosis)
- Phobias
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Anxiety
- Eating Disorders
- Dementia

It can be really difficult to understand mental illness, especially when someone you care about is behaving strangely or thinking and saying strange things. In this pack we’ve tried to explain some facts about mental illness so that you can begin to understand. **Check out the websites at the back of this pack to learn more.**
**Anorexia Nervosa:**
People with **Anorexia** are often very underweight but believe that they are fat. They can have extreme weight loss which can be caused by strict dieting or sometimes by making themselves sick or doing too much exercise.

**Bulimia Nervosa:**
With **Bulimia** people long for lots of food and eat huge amounts in one go and then make themselves sick or take tablets called laxatives to get the food out of their bodies. They may appear to be in control of their lives but actually swing between eating far too much and starving themselves.

**Bi-polar Disorder**
(Manic Depression) When people have bi-polar disorder they have periods of time when they feel extremely **high and happy** followed by times when they feel really **low and depressed**. These feelings are difficult to control and are obvious, not like the usual ups and downs of life. When people feel really good (called **mania**) they will have loads of energy and will want to keep on doing things. They find it difficult to sleep. This sometimes leads to people spending too much money or taking risks that they would not usually take when they are well.

**Anxiety**
Most of us feel a bit **worried or anxious** when we’re doing exams or even when we meet new people. Sometimes this can push us to try a little harder which then helps us to cope a bit better when we face the same situation again. Anxiety is only a problem if people become so worried that it stops them from doing **every day things** like shopping or answering the phone. This level of anxiety can make people feel very unwell. People who have anxiety problems often get depressed as well.

**Depression**
When people have depression they can feel very **low and unhappy**. Some people feel very tired although they can’t seem to get to sleep, whilst others seem to sleep for ages. Everything seems like a huge effort and this can make people feel like they’re completely **useless**. Depression is much more than feeling a bit fed up. It can be so bad that some people with severe depression may feel like they want to kill themselves. If someone you know is feeling like this you should always take this seriously and tell a trusted adult.
Schizophrenia (or Psychosis) is likely to affect one person in a hundred. It is caused by an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. People with Schizophrenia may have to take tablets to get the chemical balance right. They may not be able to tell the difference between what is real and what isn’t. This can lead to extreme feelings such as panic, anger, confusion, fear and anxiety.

**Possible symptoms of psychosis are:**

- **False beliefs (delusions)** e.g. believing that people are spying on them or listening in on their phone conversations.

- **Hearing voices.** Voices may be someone they know or someone from the past. The voices can tell them to do all sorts of things and can be good or bad.

- **Muddled speech and thoughts.** They may get the days muddled up or you might not understand the words that they say.

- **Loss of feelings or emotions.** They may not react as you expect and may seem not to care.

- **Loss of energy or interest** which makes people behave out of character.

---

**Personality Disorders**

A long term disorder in the way a person feels, thinks and behaves.

It is not completely clear what causes Personality Disorders but previous trauma including mental, physical and emotional distress or abuse seem to be related to it. It is difficult to understand this type of illness especially if someone you care for has one. There are many different types of Personality Disorders.

**Personality Disorders may cause people to become:**

- paranoid
- less able to make friends and to socialise
- more nervous
- more emotional
- more dependent on other people
- angry very quickly
- liable to self-harm
- to have a sense of emptiness
- to have mood swings
- emotionally switched off
OCD

OCD causes people to have obsessions or compulsions that they have to complete everyday or every hour or every minute depending on what it is. Some people can become obsessed with cleanliness, germs, tidiness and washing. People can have worrying thoughts that they can’t get out of their head or they carry out repetitive actions that don’t need to be done. It can cause a lot of stress to the person if they do not do these things as it seems wrong or strange that they haven’t done them. OCD can be very stressful for the rest of the family.

Phobia describes when a person is totally overcome by a fear or anxiety about something. For example, if a person is agoraphobic they are scared of open spaces. This can result in the person being too scared to leave their house. People can develop phobias about all sorts of different things.

Dementia affects people’s ability to remember, think and reason. Different people experience dementia in different ways. They may experience loss of memory and forget names, places and events. They may have difficulties with everyday tasks and feel sad, frightened and angry about what is happening to them.

Dementia usually occurs in people in their mid 60’s and older but people younger than this can also be affected. Dementia generally gets worse with age but the development of symptoms can often be slowed with drugs or other treatments.
All sorts of people can help families where someone has a mental illness and it can be really confusing if you don’t understand what they do. Here’s a guide to help you through.

**Family Doctor (GP):** The doctor will try to find out what the problem is and how it should be treated. This may mean writing a prescription for medicine or ‘referring’ the patient on to the Community Mental Health Team.

**Mental Health Teams:** there are lots of different mental health teams with different names. The teams might include social workers, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, mental health nurses and support workers, as well as other specialist workers. Everyone in the team should work together to develop a care plan to help the person who is ill to get better.

**Psychiatrist:** a trained doctor specialising in the treatment of mental health problems. They work out what the illness is, what treatment may be required and whether or not someone needs to go into hospital.

**Community Mental Health Nurse:** a nurse who has specialist training in mental health. The Nurse visits people at home to provide support and advice when someone has a mental health problem. They keep an eye on the person’s treatment and help to talk through any problems.

**Occupational Therapist (OT):** helps people to regain their interests and skills and to build up their confidence. This helps them to get back to work and perhaps to gain new hobbies and interests which are great for good mental health.

**Social Worker:** gives advice to people who are experiencing problems in their lives and help to get the services they need. This might be things like help at home, counselling, money, a break from caring or giving you information about organisations, like how to contact your local young carers support workers.

**Approved Social Worker (ASW):** with specialist mental health training, becomes involved when someone in the family has a serious mental illness. They help to decide when a person needs to be admitted to hospital.

**Care Co-ordinator:** When several people are involved in looking after and treating someone with a mental illness, their care needs to be co-ordinated, so that everyone knows who’s doing what. This is the responsibility of the care co-ordinator. The care co-ordinator must check out how family carers, including young carers, are coping and include them in the care plan.

**Crisis Team:** a specialist team who help the person and their family at times of crisis. Where possible, this team provides extra support when it is needed, to keep people at home instead of being admitted to hospital.
Do you always understand what professionals mean? Here are some key words explained to help you out.

**Confidential** usually means that what you say will be kept private and not be passed on to anyone else without your permission. Always check out what someone means when they say they will keep information confidential.

**Referral** means an agency passing details about someone onto another agency because they think they will be able to help, e.g. the doctor may refer someone to a psychiatrist or social worker who can help with things that the doctor cannot.

**Respite Care** means that someone else looks after the person you care for, for a short time. This could be in your home, a hospital, a residential home or day centre.

**Advocacy** is when someone helps you to get your viewpoint across to someone else. They help you to work out what you want to say, so that either you feel more confident to get the message across yourself or they can speak on your behalf. Perhaps this could be helpful if you feel you are not being listened to by people supporting the person you care for.

**Assessment** is the word used to describe when someone comes to find out what you or the person you care for needs. Usually they will fill in an ‘assessment form’. Sometimes people are asked to fill in a ‘self assessment’ which means that you can fill in the form yourself. You can always ask for help to fill in a form if you need it.

**Care Programme Approach (CPA)** describes the way that mental health services work. People with a severe mental illness are given a care co-ordinator who is responsible for making sure that they get the right treatment.

**Care Plan** This is a written plan explaining what treatment and care the person will receive to help them get better.

**Outreach** means someone will come and visit you, at home, school or somewhere different.
1 Which of the following does not treat people with mental ill health?
   a Doctor
   b Community Mental Health Nurse
   c Chiropodist
   d Psychiatrist

2 How many people will experience some kind of mental health problem at some point in their lives?
   a One person in every hundred
   b One person in fifty
   c One person in ten
   d One person in four

3 Which of the following is NOT a symptom of developing or having a mental health problem?
   a Loss of appetite
   b Increase in time spent alone
   c Sleeping a lot
   d Loss of intelligence

4 Which of these is NOT a treatment for mental ill health?
   a Drugs
   b Sports
   c Alcohol
   d Talking

5 Which of the following is NOT a mental health problem?
   a Anorexia
   b Anxiety attacks
   c Down’s Syndrome
   d Schizophrenia

6 Which of these people is most likely to be a danger to the public?
   a Young men under the influence of alcohol
   b People with mental health problems

7 Which of these groups is UNLIKELY to experience mental health problems?
   a Doctors
   b Young people under 25
   c People who live in the countryside
   d People who are wealthy

8 If your mum or dad has a mental illness, which of the following statements is true?
   a It is most likely that I will develop a mental illness myself
   b It is most likely that I will NOT develop a mental illness myself

---

Quiz adapted with thanks from ‘Change your Mindset’ Mindout for Mental Health young carers

Answers: 1c, 2d, 3d, 4c, 5c, 6a, 7 none of these – anyone can experience a mental health problem, 8b

---

young carers fact pack

20

young carers fact pack

21
Sometimes, when people become very unwell, they may not want to go into hospital. This may be because they don’t believe they are ill or because they just don’t want to go. If they do not receive care and treatment, their condition might get worse or they might be in danger of hurting themselves or others. In some cases mentally ill people can be admitted to hospital against their will under the Mental Health Act 1983, this is called ‘sectioning’. Different sections of the Act can be used for different circumstances.

There are a lot of ‘sections’ in the act. These are some (but not all) of the main ‘sections’ that are used when someone is very unwell:

**Section 4** is for 72 hours. This is used in an emergency and allows the hospital to work out if the person needs to stay in hospital longer.

**Section 2** is for up to 28 days. This is for a longer period of assessment. Two doctors need to put this in place; one must have mental health knowledge.

**Section 3** is for up to six months. This allows the hospital to treat a person, usually with tablets, to make them better.

**Section 136** This allows police officers to take a person with mental health problems to a ‘place of safety’ (usually a hospital). This only ever happens if someone is suspected of being in danger. Also it’s for them to be assessed by a doctor and an approved social worker. This must be done within 72 hours.

People can appeal against sections and have the period of time they have to stay in hospital reduced. The hospital can tell you all about how to appeal.

The law is very complicated. If you want to know more, contact your local Young Carers Project or support worker.
When the person you care for goes in to or comes out of hospital it can be a difficult time. Try to remember that a mental health hospital is just like any other, where people who are really unwell can be treated and can begin to get better.

It’s important to keep contact with the person who is in hospital and you should be able to visit them. Some hospitals have family rooms for visiting but in others you may need to ask for somewhere private to meet. If you can’t visit, letters and drawings are a great way of letting the person you care about know that you’re still there for them.

If your mum or dad needs to go into hospital it’s important that you know who will look after you whilst they are away. It’s good to talk about this, especially if the illness has a history of coming and going.

When people leave hospital they should have an ‘aftercare’ or ‘discharge’ plan. The plan should help them to find their feet again by looking at what they need to cope at home. If you are a young carer you should be asked if you can cope and what you need.

Sometimes the ‘CRISIS TEAM’ can help someone to stay at home instead of going to hospital, by making sure that they have extra help when they are unwell.

Why not use the booklet ‘Safe, Sorted and Supported’ to help you plan ahead in case there is a health crisis?
Knowing YOUR Rights
All children and young people have rights: It’s the law!

It’s YOUR right to:

- Be able to take a break and enjoy leisure time
- Have an education
- Be heard, listened to and believed
- Be protected from physical and psychological harm
- Have privacy and respect
- Information and advice
- Health and social care
- Be consulted and fully involved in discussions which affect your life.

Your Rights as a Young Carer

If the person you care for has a serious mental health problem, they are likely to be on the Care Programme Approach (C.P.A.). The type of care you are giving may be more emotional support rather than physical but this counts as ‘caring’.

You have the right to:

- An ‘assessment’ to check out what help and support you need
- Make choices about the amount of care you can give
- Practical help and support with caring
- Be recognised and treated separately to the person you care for
- Advice about what to do and who to contact in an emergency
- Some information about the illness and any side effects of the medication.

Do you regularly need to care for someone like your mum, dad, brother or sister? If you do then you’re a young carer.

To find out more about how to get an assessment, call your local Young Carers Project or Support Worker.
‘I get worried that my parent’s illness is getting worse – but no one listens to me’

When you live with someone with a mental illness you are often the person who knows the signs when they are getting ill, but who’s out there to listen to your concerns?

Remember

**YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR PARENTS MENTAL HEALTH**

but **PROFESSIONALS SUPPORTING YOUR PARENT SHOULD LISTEN TO YOUR CONCERNS**

Remember that the person you care about may be getting help from a doctor or mental health team. Sometimes adults don’t want to worry children by talking about the illness too much or they may want to keep some things private.

If your mum or dad has a serious mental illness, a Care Co-ordinator should help your family to draw up a plan of what to do if there is a crisis and who to contact.

If you feel that things are getting worse and that the person you care for is not asking for help then why not:

- talk to a trusted adult. Explain clearly why you are worried.
- talk to a doctor or mental health worker who is supporting your parent. Tell them about the way the person is behaving or the things that they are saying. They should listen.

- If you still don’t feel that anyone is listening then ring your local Young Carers Project or Support Worker who will listen to your concerns and help you to identify who to tell.

If you feel that you or the person you care about is in real danger then dial 999 and ask for the police.

Why not make a note of some useful contact numbers – just in case. There’s a page at the end of this pack to help you out.
Ten Top Tips

1. Make sure you get a break and have lots of fun, make sure you find the time to spend on things you enjoy, like going swimming or shopping or chilling with friends.

2. Don’t bottle everything up, talk to someone that you like and can trust about how you’re feeling.

3. Always remember that it is not your fault, you can’t cause the illness.

4. Try not to get into arguments when you’re angry, wait till things calm down, then it will be easier to get your point across.

5. If the person you care for says something strange or nasty to you try to remember that this may be because they’re ill. If their words or behaviour worries or hurts you, always tell a trusted adult.

6. Try to learn as much as you can about what is wrong with the person that is ill. Knowing more about their illness might help you to understand what they are going through.

7. Don’t believe everything you read in the papers or see on the TV. When you know the real facts about mental illness you’ll realise that they put all the dramatic stuff in but they often forget about everyday reality.

8. When people say bad things about people with mental illness, it’s probably because they don’t understand. If you know the facts, you can help them to change.

9. Eat well and drink sensibly and accept who you are. Looking after your own health is really important.

10. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. If you try to do everything, you might get ill yourself. Ask a relative, doctor or social worker for help if things are difficult to cope with.
Y not get on the net @…

- **www.youngcarers.net**
  for loads of info and advice, to chat online to other young carers and for one-to-one online support sessions if you need extra help

- **www.youngminds.org.uk**
  click on leaflets & booklets / booklets for young people / mental illness in your family?

- **www.mind.org.uk**
  click on ‘information’ for loads of information about mental illness and how to cope if someone you care about has a mental health problem

- **youngcarers@carers.org**
  for confidential 1:1 advice and support from an online youth worker

**Or make a call for info ‘n advice…**

- **Childline 0800 1111**
  free 24hr advice line

- **NHS 111**
  call 111 when you need medical help fast but it’s not a 999 emergency

- **Muslim Youth Helpline**
  **0808 808 2008**; Text: 07860 022 811; email: help@myh.org.uk

- **Samaritans 0845 790 9090**
  email: jo@samaritans.org

or how about talking to a relative, favourite teacher, school nurse or your doctor. They’re all there to help.

---

**Local Contacts**

- ............................................
- ............................................
- ............................................
- ............................................
- ............................................

- **Police** (non emergency)
- **G.P. (Doctor)**
- **Community Mental Health Nurse**
- **Care Co-ordinator**
- **Trusted adult friend/relative**
Poem

Not everyone has enough luck
To smile everyday
Some kids have tough lives
In all sorts of different ways

That’s where Young Carers come to help
To help you enjoy yourself
You will soon feel better
With your inner self

Then soon you will find
You’re smiling on your face and in
your mind.

Laura

Laura
The Royal College produces:

- A wide range of mental health information for patients, carers and professionals;
- Factsheets on treatments in psychiatry such as antidepressants and cognitive behavioural therapy.

These can be downloaded from our website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info

A range of materials for carers of people with mental health problems has also been produced by the ‘Partners in Care’ campaign. These can be downloaded from www.partnersincare.co.uk.

For a catalogue of our materials contact the Leaflets Department, Royal College of Psychiatrists, 21 Prescot Street, London E1 8BB
Tel: 020 3701 2552; Fax: 020 3701 2761; email: leaflets@rcpsych.ac.uk

This booklet was supported by the Child and Family Public Education Editorial Board.

© June 2014. Royal College of Psychiatrists. All rights reserved. This leaflet may not be produced in whole or part without the permission of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Gloucestershire Young Carers
01452 733060
www.glosyoungcarers.org.uk

7 Twigworth Court Business Centre, Twigworth, Gloucester GL2 9PG

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is a charity registered in England (228636) and in Scotland (SC038369).