
Relationships, family and mental health

Summary

- If you are experiencing relationship problems, call Relationships Australia on 1300 364 277 for telephone counselling.
 - If you are a parent with mental illness, your doctor can point you towards services that can help you, such as Early Parenting Centres.
 - If your child has a mental illness, there are lots of mental health support services for young people, such as ReachOut, Youthbeyondblue and Headspace.
 - If you are experiencing mental illness, speak with your family and close friends and work out a plan for crises.
 - You may be eligible for personal and financial support if you care for a family member with a mental illness. **Contact Centrelink** and ask what your options are.
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When you, your partner or someone in your family has a mental illness, it can cause stress and worry for everyone. Mental illness affects people, couples and families in different ways but you can get information and help to support your family in many ways.

How mental illness can affect couples

Many relationships have their ups and downs but if one or both people in a relationship is experiencing mental health problems, it can bring additional challenges. You might find that living day-to-day with a mental illness, or with a partner who has a mental illness, can affect your relationship in different ways. While conflict is a normal part of a healthy relationship, if you find that you and your partner are arguing more often than usual, it might help you both to find support and guidance through counselling or other relationship support services such as courses. Violence in a relationship is never acceptable.

Call Relationships Australia on 1300 364 277 for telephone counselling. They help people in Victoria who are isolated geographically or through other circumstances.

See the page '[Relationship support services](#)' for a range of relationship support services available.

Relationship break-ups and mental illness

It is always sad and stressful when couples break up, but if one or both of the people in the couple has a mental illness, it may prove additionally stressful.

If you are worried about your own mental health in the midst of a break-up the best place to start is by making sure you are taking care of yourself. Are you getting enough sleep, eating healthy food and drinking enough water? Try to exercise every day, even just by going for a walk. Talk to trustworthy friends and family about your worries.

You can also talk to your doctor about it; tell them you are worried about how your break-up is or might affect your wellbeing, your ability to work or care for yourself or your children. A counselling session or two can really help clarify things for you as well.

If you are worried about your relationship and not sure what to do, see [what support resources are available](#) to help you.

How mental illness can affect families

When you or someone in your family has a mental illness, it can affect everyone. Some types of illness can cause big changes in the family's routines, activities and finances. Different people in your family will react differently to these changes.

There are training courses for people caring for or living with a family member with a mental illness. Training has a good track record for helping the whole family. It is not just about how to care for the person who is ill, but also

about how you can manage your own health and stress levels. Ask your doctor about local or online courses you can access.

Parenting while experiencing mental illness

Parenting can be challenging as well as rewarding. If you or your partner has a mental illness, it can increase the challenges for your family.

If your children are under three years old, you can get support at an **Early Parenting Centre**. They can help with getting your little one to sleep, feeding, discipline, and your own health and wellbeing. If you are outside of Melbourne, ask your doctor to refer you to a centre.

If your children are over three years old, your healthcare team can direct you towards services in your area that might suit you and your family. Ask your doctor, counsellor, nurse or another healthcare professional where you can get support.

Crisis plans for you and your children

It is a good idea to have a plan ready in case you or someone in your family experiences a sudden or rapid deterioration in their mental health. Make a list of people you can ring for support. Make sure the people who support you have each other's contact details too.

If your children are old enough to use the phone, keep the numbers somewhere they will be able to find them if they need to. Have a chat with them about what a crisis such as this could look like. Let them know that they can call someone they trust whenever they feel worried — about you or themselves.

Parenting a child or young person experiencing mental illness

Mental illness often appears in someone's teens or early twenties, so it is common for someone to be living with their parents when their issues become apparent. The most common mental illnesses are anxiety disorders and depression.

Parent-child relationships can be complex, and if your child is experiencing mental illness, caring for them can be difficult at times. It is very important to do your best to balance taking care of them with allowing them to be in charge of their own healthcare.

It is also really important to remember to take care of yourself — taking time out regularly, getting enough sleep, eating healthily and exercising. You can support others much better when you are healthy and rested.

You may find that your child's mental health issues are beyond your ability to care for on your own. If this is the case, you can speak with your doctor or your child's case worker about more intensive treatment and support options. Read more about **Hospitals, clinics and residential options**.

Resources for young people with a mental illness

There are a number of online counselling and information websites set up specifically for young people, including:

- **Youthbeyondblue** aims to empower young people aged 12–25, their friends and those who care for them to respond to anxiety and depression.
- **ReachOut** provides online counsellors, practical information, tools and support to young people with mental illnesses.
- **Headspace** provides a telephone helpline and drop-in centres around Australia, as well as information and places to engage online.

Becoming an official carer

If you are spending a lot of time caring for someone in your family who is experiencing mental illness, you or someone in your family might be eligible for financial support via Centrelink's carer payment. **Check the eligibility requirements with Centrelink**.

Other support for family carers can be found at:

- **Carers Australia**
- **Carers Victoria**

- **Tandem Carers**
- **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres**.

Family violence and mental illness

Having mental illness very rarely leads to a person being violent. SANE has **a good factsheet** on this topic.

Having someone you love act violently towards you or someone in your family will always have a negative effect on your mental health. It is not uncommon for people who are subject to violence at home to suffer from depression.

Family or domestic violence is almost always done by men towards women. Therefore, support services for family violence are mainly aimed at women and their children.

There is also help for men who are victims of family violence by their partners — male or female. A good place to start is **Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria**.

For information about family violence and support, see our factsheets on:

- **Tips for children**
- **Services for women**
- **Family violence and children**
- The **Domestic Violence Prevention Centre** has statistics on domestic violence in Australia.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- SANE Helpline, call 1800 18 SANE (7263)
- SuicideLine, call 1300 651 251
- Lifeline, call 13 11 14
- Kids Help Line, call 1800 55 1800
- Mensline Australia, call 1300 789 978

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