

When You Are A Carer Of Someone With Mental Illness

- Mental Illness can happen to anyone and is not that uncommon. It cannot be prevented, so do not blame yourself. Severe mental illness affects over half a million people in this country. It seems rare because people do not like to discuss it. Talk to relatives and friends who are compassionate. Sharing your concerns and feelings can give you emotional support and help them to understand what mental illness is and how it affects lives.
- Gather as much information on the subject as possible. Staff working in services can help you. If you are informed of the diagnosis ask for specific information about that illness.
- As a carer you need to recognise the pressures of being a carer and how those pressures can increase. A lot of carers find it useful to join a Carers' Group and increasingly training is available for carers providing both education and support. Do ask services what is available in your area.
- Unconditional self-sacrifice can affect caring and coping. Spending a lot of time with the person who is ill is not always a good idea. They need to learn to become independent and you need your space as well.
- Remember not to neglect the rest of the family. It is always a good idea to keep in contact with friends and take part in activities that take you out into the wider community.
- You may need help to adapt and change to these new circumstances and begin to look at things differently. Looking after yourself is essential.
- The government recognises the role that carers play in supporting the person they care for. If you provide regular and substantial care you are entitled to an assessment of your own needs – a Carer's Needs Assessment. Statutory services must offer you this opportunity to reflect and plan support for yourself, get the help you need to lead your own life and keep well.