

**Learning about
Mental Illness**

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This is a booklet to help you to understand more about what mental illness really is.

It is specially designed for children whose parent, brother or sister are experiencing mental ill health.



A lot of people will have a mental illness at some time in their lives. Most people get well again quite quickly. Some people will need treatment for a while to help them. Some will continue to need treatment, help and support to stay well.

There are many kinds of mental illness and they affect each person in different ways. This booklet has some information that can help you understand what it means to you and your family.



What is mental health?

Mental health is mostly about feeling contented and being able to manage things in your life. We all feel fed up, angry, even sad and upset at times but these feelings pass quickly when something good happens.

These are the ordinary ups and downs of life.

What is mental illness?

Mental illness is to do with the mind and the feelings. It is more than just the ordinary ups and downs that we all have.

You cannot see mental illness like you can see a bruise or a cut. It can be confusing trying to work out what is going on. The doctor will take some time to identify what is best for someone who is feeling mentally unwell. It can't be seen on an x-ray and doesn't show up in a blood test. So there can be a good bit of uncertainty and upset before things settle down again.

What is it called?

There are different kinds of mental illness and some of the medical words you might hear are:

- **Depression**
- **Manic Depression**
- **Bipolar Disorder**
- **Schizophrenia**

You might also hear people talking about 'nerves', 'anxiety' or 'nervous breakdown'.



How will I know that a person is unwell?

Mental illness is different for everyone but some of the signs (symptoms) are:

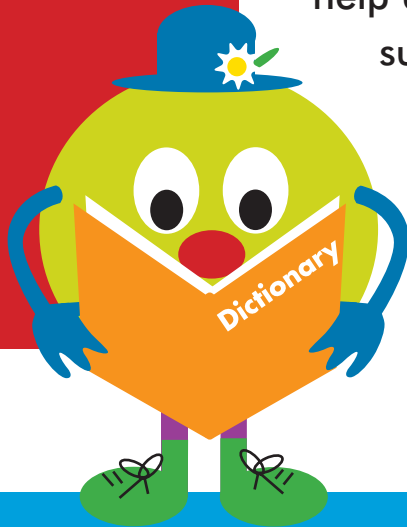
- Being tired all the time and staying in bed a lot
- Sudden changes in mood or behaviour for no reason
- Being very sad and crying a lot
- Hearing voices or seeing things that no one else can
- Not wanting to do things they used to enjoy
- Wanting to be left alone
- Being afraid to be left alone
- Being confused and unable to concentrate on simple things
- Losing interest in how they look, not wanting to wash or dress properly
- Feeling anxious and needing to move about all the time

Psychiatrist

What happens next?

Doctors who specialise in treating mental illness are called psychiatrists. If a member of your family is experiencing mental illness they will probably see a psychiatrist who will help decide what treatment and support is best for them.

This can take time, and your mum, dad, brother or sister will probably need to visit the doctor over a number of months.



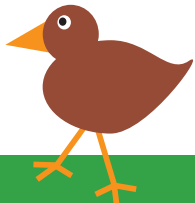
There are lots of different types of treatment that can help a person get better. Many people will need to take tablets (medication) each day and some people will also be helped by counselling which is called a 'talking therapy'. Most of all, people need to be supported in just the same way as anyone else who is feeling unwell.



Will they need to go into hospital?

Your mum, dad, brother or sister might need to go into hospital for a while. A psychiatric ward is a bit different to a general ward. People do not need to be in bed all the time. They are up and about so you will be able to visit if you want to with other members of your family.

Sometimes a person can feel very unwell quite suddenly and might not want to go to the doctor or to hospital. Going into hospital for any reason can be upsetting. It is even harder when the person does not want to go. This can be a very frightening and worrying time for everyone.



How will I feel?

Always remember it is not your fault. Talk about how you are feeling to an adult you trust. You will probably find that everyone is feeling the same and it can help to share your worries and fears with someone else. Talk to your grandparents, an aunt, uncle or perhaps a teacher you like. They can listen and help you to understand what is happening.

You might think that what you are feeling is bad or will add to the upset of your family. Maybe you even feel a bit responsible for making the person ill. Their behaviour may have embarrassed you in front of your friends. People at school or on your road might tease you about what is happening.

You might be feeling a lot of things at once, angry, sad, hurt or afraid.

This is how most people will feel but remember, talking is helpful and good.

It is much easier to manage when we have information and support. So don't be afraid to ask questions and don't be afraid just to talk. It is important to know that you can ask questions if you are confused or worried.



What can I do to help myself?

- Keep doing things you enjoy
- Ask for help and support
- Write a story or keep a diary and share it with an adult
- Make a list of the good things that happen each day
- Talk about your worries and feelings
- Take special care of yourself – treat yourself
- Remember, you are not alone



Here are the names of some organisations that can give you and your family more information and support when you need it:

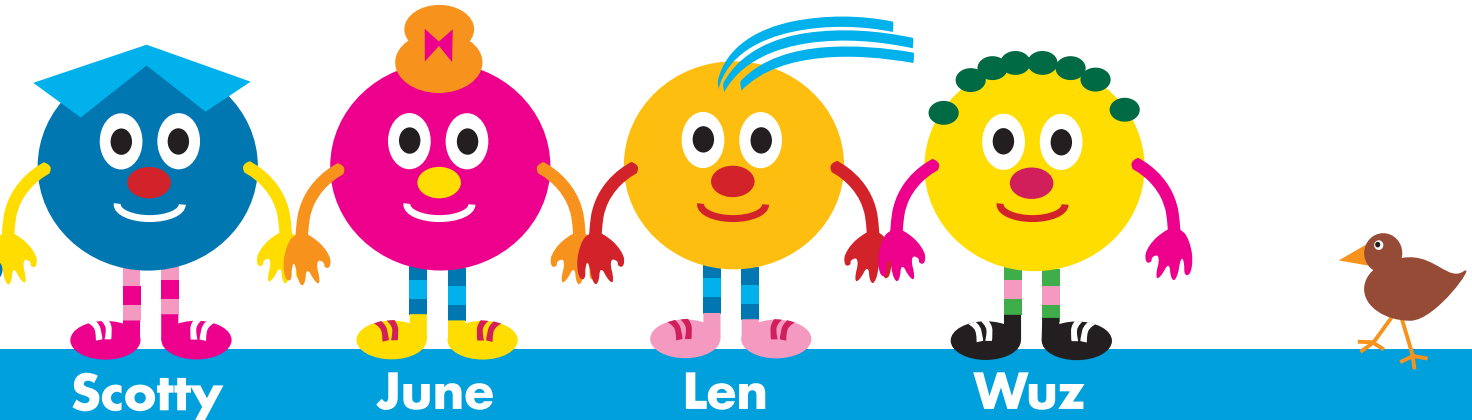
Schizophrenia Ireland
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1890 621 631 www.sirl.ie

Aware Helpline **1890 303302**
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