



# UNDERSTANDING & MANAGING MENTAL ILLNESS

For dads with kids in mind ...

## 4 Dads

**Understanding** signs and symptoms

**Finding** treatment

**Telling** others

**Living** with & recovering from mental illness

“Having the information certainly helped the whole family.”

Kids Talk

“If you can learn to accept the illness, you can move on.”

Dads Talk

“It’s important fathers understand the illness so they can moderate their children’s experiences, and make sense of their own, to keep it in perspective.”

Health Workers Talk

It can take months or more to gain a good understanding of the mental illness you, or your partner, experiences.

### Understanding signs and symptoms

It can take several months or longer to get a good understanding of a mental illness. With effective support and information, it may be quicker, but more importantly, you can continue to carry out your role as a dad.

It’s important for the family to know the behaviour of the person with the mental illness may change throughout recovery.

Taking time to understand as much as possible about the illness, its effects and treatment can be vital for the wellbeing of your children and the ongoing stability of your family.

### What you can do

**Know the signs.** You and your family members are in the best position to notice any early signs of mental illness. By learning more about the symptoms, and developing a care plan, you may avoid more serious interventions like hospitalisation.

**Research.** Find out as much as possible about the illness and the types of support and treatments available. Do this as early as possible to gain some stability in your and your family’s life. There’s a lot of information on the internet about mental illness (see links overleaf).

**Talk to your GP** or mental health worker to learn more about the illness, or to seek information on services and treatments.

### Finding treatment

With ongoing research into mental illness, there are various talk therapies, medications and treatments available to alleviate symptoms and assist in recovery.

Finding the right treatment can take time. It may be something to decide with your partner. You should tell your health care professionals, including your GP, about any alternative therapies or complementary medication you might think of using.

Practitioners vary in their experience, preferences and recommendations. By informing yourself, you can make decisions in the best interests of you, your partner and your children.

### What you can do

- Visit the recommended websites overleaf for information on treatments.
- Get a range of information from GPs and mental health workers so you can make better decisions to treat and manage the illness.
- Investigate all treatments and medications to understand any limitations and/or potential side effects.

### Should you tell others?

Once you have a better understanding of the illness, it will be easier to discuss its effects with your children and other family members. Understanding it also helps you manage other peoples expectations too.



There may be a range of advantages or disadvantages in disclosing a mental health issue. Determining what is best for you, your partner and your children—considering their relationships too—will help you decide who to talk with about the illness. For example, your children's teachers or their friends' parents, your work colleagues or employers.

### What you can do

Decide, or help your partner decide, if disclosing a mental illness will be beneficial. This can be challenging. Talking to a trusted friend or mental health professional can help you with your decision. Weighing up the advantages and disadvantages can also help you decide. Think about whether any of the points below might influence the person you are considering disclosing the illness to.

#### Possible advantages of disclosing

- You can access support you might need and be referred to the right services.
- Receive correct advice about rights and advocacy.
- More positive interactions because of an understanding of the illness.
- Increased emotional support from family and friends.
- Others will understand changes in behavior.

#### Possible disadvantages of disclosing

- There may be a stigma associated with the illness where people treat you differently.
- You might feel misunderstood if others place an emphasis on your behavior instead of 'you'.
- You may get less emotional support from family and friends.

If the 'advantages' outweigh the 'disadvantages' then perhaps disclosure will be helpful.

If you decide to disclose a mental illness, particularly to an ex-partner, you may want to consider the following questions.

- Why am I disclosing and what are the benefits?
- What do I want to say? (It may help to write down.)
- Will they tell other people and how will I or we feel about it if they do?

### Living with and recovering from mental illness

Living with and managing mental illness can be a multi-faceted, ongoing process. Initially it can be a challenge to accept a diagnosis. Acceptance is a significant first step in the recovery process and can lead to understanding the value of treatment. This can help in sticking to a treatment plan, which may or may not involve medication, to promote wellbeing.

Sometimes hospitalisation might be part of the recovery for some families. Being prepared for a first time hospital admission, or a repeat-admission, is something useful to think about ahead of time. A parent's hospitalisation can have a significant impact on children and that can be reduced by planning ahead.

### What you can do

**Develop a care plan** (see COPMI website for examples) with your family. If a family member becomes unwell and is temporarily unable to participate in family life, a care plan can help everyone understand what will happen. Having a plan in place can help children feel secure and be prepared for changes, especially when they've been involved in developing the plan.

**Find out if hospitalisation might be necessary** at some point. Get as much information as possible about what to expect, and determine the best way for your children to stay in touch while you (or mum) are in hospital.

**Be prepared.** Find out about the mental health issue affecting your family, the treatment options and any related effects. Ask different health professionals for their points of view. Ask what you can expect.

Visit [www.copmi.net.au/dads](http://www.copmi.net.au/dads) to view video and links to more information



**Talk to someone | Get more info**

**Mensline** | 1300 78 99 78 | [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

**Beyond blue** | 1300 22 4636 | [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**SANE Australia** | 1800 18 SANE (7263) | [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)