

# Tips from people with mental illness who have raised children



*“My kids were much happier once we had a plan in place in case I became unwell or had to go to hospital again.”*

Planning for your children’s needs is vitally important and ensures you have a say in what happens to them should you become ill.

Include the children in the planning when they are old enough so that they can be reassured that everything will be OK and that you love them. They might have concerns like who will give them their pocket money or who will feed the cat that you had not thought to plan for. An example plan is in the ‘Supporting Our Family Kit’ which is downloadable from the COMIC website <http://www.howstat.com/comic>

Some organisations run holiday, evening and weekend programs especially for children or young people with a parent with mental illness and most participants really enjoy these special, safe and structured activities. Ask your health worker about them or check the programs listed on the website <http://www.copmi.net.au>

*“I used to get very tired during the school holidays so it was great to be able to take a break from my sons and they really enjoyed themselves at camp.”*

Sometimes children may require a break from their parents and parents may require a break from their children - especially if the parent has low energy levels due to illness or medication. Older children may also like a break from extra responsibilities they may have in your family.

- **Preschoolers** often enjoy a regular time at a childcare centre or with a baby sitter. (Call the Child Care Access Hotline for information about services near you Ph: 1800 670 305.)
- **Primary School Children** might enjoy a more formal activity such as a sport or a hobby club.
- **Adolescents** may prefer to just be with friends, having a pizza or going to a movie.

*“Talking to the kids about my own feelings helped them open up about some of their worries - which I could then set their minds at rest about.”*

It's natural for people in families affected by mental health problems to have strong feelings such as bewilderment, anger, grief or loss from time to time. However, children often hide these feelings, especially if they sense there is some 'secret' attached to the illness.



It is important for all family members to have a chance to have their questions answered. You may like to ask your key health professional (e.g. your case worker or GP) for a time with your family to answer their questions.

*“When I stopped hitting the grog, the kids were happier and so was I.”*

People sometimes feel that using alcohol and other drugs (including misuse of prescription drugs) will help them feel better. It may do so in the short term but can affect your physical and mental health and it really hinders anyone's ability to parent well. However, there are non-judgmental services available to help. (Call the Family Drug Support Line on 1300 386 186.)

*“It was great when my sister offered to help with the weekend chores so that I could get to my daughter's netball games.”*

We all need friends or family to help us through; be honest with them about what helps you most. If you don't have friends or family who can help, other household support may be available in your area – ring the Commonwealth Carelink Centres on 1800 052 222 (Freecall).

You have a right to ask for help if you don't feel that you or your children are safe. Speak to a health worker you trust or contact Lifeline Ph: 131 114.