Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI Program)

Information for families where a parent has a mental illness
Introduction

This kit has been designed to provide information to parents who have a mental health issue. Families are welcome to take a copy to discuss at home and Mental Health Staff are able to use it to assist discussions with families or parents. The Information has been compiled by the Children Of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) Coordinators throughout Western Sydney Local Health Network.

The book is organised into 5 sections.

Section 1: Supporting Your Children.
This section gives a brief description of how a parent can support their children through different stages of their development and age from Babies to Teenagers.

Section 2: Some Tips for talking to children about mental illness.
This section provides a guide to talking with children about Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, Anxiety, Causes of Mental Illness, Hospitalisation, Medication, Self harm and Experiences of Children. The language used in this section allows the parent to simply explain these things to their child.

Section 3: Care-Planning.
This section gives some practical tips and examples for discussing plans and putting plans in writing so that family wishes can occur when times are more difficult such as when a parent has to be absent from their children.

Section 4: School.
This section has been compiled in consultation with the Western Sydney Department of Education and Training. It gives some practical information about how to discuss information about parental mental illness with schools and provides a letter that can be used.

Section 5: Resources for Families.
This section provides a list of local services that you can seek assistance from in your local community.
Many people who use mental health services live at home with their children.

Mental illness can be very stressful for everyone in a family, including children.

Stress can make children and young people act and feel differently.

Some families find it helpful to talk together about how everyone is coping and what has been happening.

Open and honest talking can help children deal with the impact of mental illness.

Understanding about mental illness will help everyone throughout their lives.
Babies and Preschoolers

When you are apart:

- babies need to feel safe
- babies need to have a regular routine
- staying in a familiar or consistent place can help them feel safer and happier
- tell young children in a simple but truthful way what is happening
- regular visits and photos can help children deal with separation
- visits could involve play so that children enjoy these times
- normal reactions to change may include being clingy, tearful, angry, throwing tantrums or changing sleeping and eating patterns.
- children need reassurance and closeness from a trusted adult at these times.

When you are together:

- close contact and play are important for babies and small children
- try to smile while you interact with your baby
- playing time is the most precious time of all
- let your baby or child teach you what and how they want to play (you could ask your Early Childhood staff for ideas)
- crying is small people’s way of expressing their needs. They are incapable of being manipulative or stubborn. They are trying to tell you something
- it’s ok to take time out for yourself, just make sure your children are somewhere safe
- it’s OK to ask for help!
As children get older they try to understand their world.

- It is important for them to know what is happening and why. Honest and simple explanations can help them to feel less worried or scared.

- If a parent is in hospital, regular visits or phone contact with their ill parent can be very important for children. Talking with staff can assist you to make these visits go well.

- Even when things are unsettled, children still need to feel like children. This might mean that you have to tell them that it is ok to keep playing, laughing and seeing their friends.

- Talking about mental illness can help children understand their parent’s behaviour and feelings. If no one tells them about it, sometimes children think that it’s all their fault.

- Children can sometimes be scared by the way they feel too. Sometimes they feel angry or embarrassed about the person who is sick, even though they want to look after them.

- Showing the child appropriate ways to let out these feelings, such as crying, kicking a ball or punching a pillow, can help them to know that these feelings are OK.

- Children might be scared of being teased or bullied if other people know about the mental illness. Maybe you can help your children to know what they can say to people if they want to. Sometimes children don’t know what words to use or if they will get in trouble.

- Many children are afraid that they will get sick too. Try to explain the illness in a way that helps children know that it is not anybody’s fault and it is not because the person is ‘bad’ or ‘naughty’.

- Sometimes children feel as though it is their job to look after everybody. You can help them to know what they can do to help, while also making sure that they stay in their role as a child.
Adolescence is a time of trying new things, discovering one's identity and moving towards independence.

Teenagers need concise and truthful information about what is happening and what is going to happen in their family's future.

Lots of reassurances can help them feel OK about their goals. Sometimes teenagers want to spend more time with their friends than with their families; this can help them retain a sense of normality.

Having someone who will listen to their feelings and experiences can help teenagers cope. This can be any adult they trust and feel comfortable with.

Some behaviours, such as impulsiveness, mood swings, oppositional behaviours and substance use, can be intensified in reaction to stress.

Allowing teenagers time to express themselves and share their observations of their world can boost self esteem and help them know that they are respected individuals within the family.

Honest communication is an important part of maintaining positive relationships with teenagers.

Teenagers have shared their tips for coping:

- Find out more information about your parent's illness, watch a DVD, talking to a friend on the phone, scrapbooking, bushwalks, listening to music, playing sport, playing with your sister or brother, dancing, art, talking to family, writing in a diary, reading and writing poetry, time alone, exercise, visit friends, and help parents.
Section 2:
Some tips for talking to children about mental illness

An explanation can help kids cope!

Parents are sometimes concerned about whether it is OK to talk to their children about mental illness and, if it is, what to say. They may feel worried about how to start the conversation or what words to use.

Having honest and open conversations with your children can be a positive experience for everyone.

Giving children an understanding of what is happening in their family and the opportunity to express their experiences can help keep them feeling happy and safe.

Use simple and truthful descriptions of mental illness and its symptoms and allow children to describe what they have noticed or experienced. You may be surprised by how much they already know!

The following pages might help you plan how to explain your illness to your children. They are guides that use simple language that children understand. Spend some time thinking about your illness and what words you would use to describe it.

It is normal to feel fearful of talking about things that are too often left unspoken. It can be useful to speak to your mental health worker, or someone else you trust, about any concerns you may have.

“Secrets and silences are far more harmful than any of the most clumsily expressed questions”

(Absler, 1999, pp194)
This guide has tips for talking with children about the following mental illnesses and related circumstances:

- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Anxiety
- Borderline personality disorder
- Self Harm
- Causes of mental illness
- Hospitalisation
- Medication
- Experiences of Children

If there is a topic not covered here or if you require additional support talking with your children, please ask your mental health worker or contact your local community health centre for assistance.
Children and young people can sometimes understand the impact of your illness a bit more easily than they can understand its cause. This means that it may be best to describe what depression does to you rather than what depression is.

**Depression can cause:**

- no energy (makes it harder to play)
- difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much (makes it hard to get out of bed or means you stay up late)
- crying a lot (sometimes when there is no apparent reason)
- losing or gaining weight (because you don't feel like eating or you eat too much)
- not enjoying the things that you used to (means that sport or dancing or cooking or whatever it is doesn't make you smile anymore)
- make you tired and cranky (can make you get grumpy at the children for no real reason)

**What does your depression make you do?**

Depression is an illness. It's like having a cold or having asthma except it affects your brain. Your brain controls things you feel, think and do.

Everybody feels sad sometimes.
Everybody thinks about sad things sometimes.
Everybody has things that they wish they could do, but can't.

What makes your children feel sad?
What sort of things do they think about?
What do they wish they could do but can't?

When someone has the illness called depression, they can feel sad for a long time and not know how to feel better.
Depression can stop people being able to do things that they used to do and enjoy.
Everybody feels sad sometimes. Everybody feels happy sometimes.

When people have an illness called Bipolar Disorder, these feelings get confused. They might have times of ‘depression’ (see previous page) but they will also have times when they are ‘too happy’.

This means they get too busy and too excited for no reason. It can be scary because they no longer know what they are doing and they may act in ways that are strange. This is called being ‘manic’.

What things make your children happy?
What do they do when they are happy?

What things happen to you when you are manic?

Mania can make people:

- cranky (even though they seem happy, they may not be thinking about how other people feel)
- talk too much or too loud (kids might find this scary, embarrassing or funny)
- not make sense (if too many thoughts come at once they might get all jumbled)
- not wanting too sleep (they may stay up all night!)
- get into trouble (sometimes people might spend too much money, say rude things or do dangerous things because they aren’t thinking properly.)
Schizophrenia

Try explaining what your children might notice about you when you are not well.

Some illnesses give people trouble walking or breathing.

Schizophrenia is an illness that affects the brain. The brain controls what we think, feel and do. This means that schizophrenia can make people think strange things or feel strange things or do strange things.

What have your children noticed that you do when you are sick?

Some people with schizophrenia:

• Hear things that aren’t really there (this can make them ‘talk to themselves’ or act unpredictably)
• See things that aren’t really there (this can make people move in strange ways or be scared for no reason)
• Think things that aren’t real (this can be really confusing for everyone!).

What happens then?

People can feel scared or sad or worried or angry or fearful and other people may not understand why. This can mean that the person with schizophrenia might do things that seem odd, like not leaving the house, or making strange things, or yelling at nothing, or being really worried about things that used to be OK or saying things that don’t seem true.

Children can feel scared when they don’t know what is true and what isn’t

How do you feel when you are sick?
When somebody has anxiety, they worry about lots of things, or a specific thing, more than usual.

Everybody has things that they worry about and sometimes everybody gets really worried about something. Children feel worried too sometimes. It is important to reassure them that this is a normal feeling to experience.

Can your child remember a time when they felt really worried? Perhaps the first day of school? Or going in the deep end of the pool? Can they remember what it felt like inside their body?

Sometimes it’s good to be worried about things because it can help to keep you safe. But when people have anxiety, it can stop them from doing things that they might otherwise have done. Some people find it hard to leave the house or even answer the phone.

How does your anxiety affect your life?
How does your anxiety affect your child’s life?

When people get really, really worried, sometimes they have a ‘panic attack’. This is their body’s way of trying to cope with the amount of worry it is feeling. A panic attack can make it hard for a person to breathe and they might get really scared that it won’t get better. Seeing a parent have a panic attack can be really scary (or embarrassing) for a child. Try talking to them about what they thought was happening and what actually happened. Perhaps make a plan for what you both can do if it happens again. Reassure them that once you calm down, you will be OK.

Sometimes when people feel anxious they develop their own ways of trying to feel better. This can mean that they do things that seem ‘funny’ or odd, like washing their hands over and over to try to feel clean.

Children learn from watching what we do.
What do your children see you do?
What else could they do if they feel worried?
**Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)**

Having a diagnosis of A Personality Disorder can be difficult to understand and to explain. The causes of Personality disorders are usually from childhood experiences, which your children do not need to know. What is helpful to them though is to understand how the disorder affects you now.

What is a personality?
- The way you THINK
- The way you FEEL
- The way you BEHAVE
- The way you ARE

What does it affect?
- Your moods
- Your relationships
- At, school, at home or anywhere.

People cope with ‘big’ stress in different ways. A personality disorder is when people have developed unhelpful ways of coping, which affects their work, family, relationships and their whole life. It can affect people so badly that they have trouble coping with ‘small’ stress. Sometimes people hurt themselves or the people around them. This is part of the illness and not the person.

Borderline Personality Disorder can make people:
- FEEL Out of control, scared and anxious… sometimes people say they are living their life on a roller coaster.
- THINK Bad about themselves and FEEL depressed. They may have mood swings.
- FEEL So Bad that they can BEHAVE in a way that means they may hurt themselves because they can’t THINK of another way to make themselves feel better.

Borderline Personality Disorder can improve with the right kind of help like talking to a counsellor; however, it can take a long time to improve which may be hard for children to understand.

Children often feel confused about Borderline Personality Disorder, as adults do. Most importantly they need to understand that they are important and in no way are to blame for the illness.
Self-harm

Self harm means hurting yourself.

This can be really, really hard for children (and other adults) to understand. Sometimes the person who is self harming can’t even understand why they do it.

It doesn’t always mean that the person wants to die. In fact, it doesn’t always even mean that the person really wants to hurt themselves. Self-harm is not an illness - it is a behaviour. With help, behaviours can change.

People can harm themselves in different ways. Have your children seen you harm yourself in any way?

Children instinctively want to look after their parents. It can be very confusing if the person they want to protect is the same person who is causing the harm. Make it very clear that children do not ever cause parents to self-harm and, similarly, it is not a child’s job to stop a parent from self-harming.

It is NOT OK for children to see their parent self-harming.

People self-harm for different reasons:

- sometimes people say it is their way of expressing something that they have not yet found the words for
- sometimes people do it to communicate to others about the pain inside
- sometimes people think it may distract them from the pain they feel inside
- sometimes people think it helps them to cope for just a little while.

If you self harm, your children need to know that it is not a good coping strategy. This can be hard for parents to admit. What’s even harder is showing your children better coping strategies.

Talking together as a family about ways of coping when things get tough can help. Write it down.

Talk with your health care professional about the best way to address these issues within your family.
What caused it?

Nobody really knows what causes mental illness, just like people don’t always know what causes cancer or asthma.

Sometimes people talk about ‘chemicals in the brain being unbalanced’, which can be hard for children (and adults!) to understand.

Be honest.

Sometimes lots of stress can make people get sick.
Sometimes drugs and alcohol can make people get sick.
Sometimes things that happened a long time ago can make it hard for people to cope with things that are happening now.
Sometimes people seem to get sick for no reason.
There are lots of reasons why people get sick.

But children can never make people get sick.
It is no-one’s fault that someone got sick.
They are not ‘bad’, ‘mean’ or ‘lazy’.

It is not the sort of illness that people can ‘catch’.
Just because you might have it, does not mean that your children will also develop it.

Some people get better quickly. For some people it can take longer. Some people get sick one time and then never again. Some people get sick on and off forever.
Medication can help people get well and stay well.
Sometimes when people get sick they have to go to hospital. People always have to go to hospital for a reason.

Sometimes when the sickness is in the brain, people get confused and don’t think that they need to go. If their sickness means that they might do something silly or hurt themselves or not look after themselves, they might have to go any way. This can be scary if the police or an ambulance has to come.

Explain to your children that no one is trying to hurt you, that going to hospital is necessary and that hospitals are there to help people, like yourself, get better.

You, or someone else if need be, should try to explain to the children what the hospital is like before they visit (you could draw them a picture). Tell them about the doctors and the nurses and how it looks different to some other hospitals.

Try explaining to them what happens at the hospital, how some people just need a bit of a rest and sometimes people have to take medications.

Talk about what it is like for them when you are in the hospital.

Who would they like to stay with?
How can they keep in contact with you?
Who will take them to school or help them with their homework etc?

Be honest about the fact that you don’t know how long you will have to stay. Don’t make promises you can’t keep.
Medication

Sometimes doctors say people need medicine to help them feel better and stay better. These medicines can be tablets or needles. It can take a while to find the right one to help the person.

Do your children know about medications?
Have they ever been sick and had to taken medicine?

Occasionally these medications can have ‘side effects’. This means that as well as helping the person feel better, they might make the person:

- get fatter
- be really thirsty
- feel tired
- get shaky or wriggly

What does your medication do?
Have your children noticed any ‘side effects’?

Sometimes people get grumpy about having to take medication all the time and want to stop. This is something for the person to sort out with their doctor as it can make the person get sick again. It is not a child’s job to make sure that an adult takes their medication.
Being a child whose parent has a mental illness

Can you imagine what it would be like to be your child?
Does your child have an opportunity to express what it is like for them to be a child in your family?

Do they know:

- that it is Ok to feel sad?
- that it is OK to cry?
- that it is still OK to laugh?
- that they are special?
- how to call someone they trust if they don’t feel safe?
- what to say to their friends?
- that you love them?
- that it is not their fault?

Do they have someone to talk to about their worries? (This might need to be someone not in the immediate family)

Do they have a special place they can go to and be by themselves if they need?

Do they have times when they can ‘just be a kid’?

Do they have recognition for the times when they are so much more than ‘just a kid’?
Section 3: Care Planning

What is a care plan?

A care plan is a written plan developed as a family together, that can be used to best support them if a parent becomes unwell.

Sometimes when people feel well, they don't want to think about what would happen if they became unwell again.

There are lots of reasons why it can be a good idea to sit down as a family and plan for times when things may become difficult.

A care plan is useful because:

- children (and adults) feel more secure when they know what to expect
- children feel happier when they feel listened to, included and able to, in some way, control their environment
- it can be a good way for families to talk together about events and experiences
- it ensures children know who to contact if they need to
- it can reduce stress for parents at times of illness or hospitalisation.
SAMPLE CARE PLAN

Members of family:
Name/Date of Birth-..............................................
Name/Date of Birth-..............................................
Name/Date of Birth-..............................................
Name/Date of Birth-..............................................
Name/Date of Birth-..............................................
Name/Date of Birth-..............................................

Family Doctor name and contact number:
..........................................................................

General medical information for all family members:
..........................................................................
..........................................................................
..........................................................................

Current Medications (who and what and why):
..........................................................................
..........................................................................

Emergency Numbers:
Police/Fire/Ambulance- 000
Kids Helpline- 1800551800
Mental Health Team-..............................................
Friends/Neighbours/Relatives:
1.................................
2.................................
3.................................

Symptoms:
What would children notice if their parent was becoming unwell?
..........................................................................
..........................................................................
..........................................................................

Who should they tell?
..........................................................................
..........................................................................

What else can they do if they feel worried?
..........................................................................
..........................................................................
...........................................................................
If a parent goes to hospital:

Where will the children stay?

How will they get there?

What will they need to take?

How will they see their parent?

How will they get to school?

How will they get home?

Who will help with homework?

What will they have for lunch?

Will someone tell the school?

How will children get to after school/weekend activities?

Who will care for pets?
Other important information about our family:

Keep this plan somewhere safe where everyone can access it if they need.
Perhaps give a copy to a friend, neighbour or relative that you feel comfortable with.
Section 4: School

School time

Children spend a lot of time at school.

If things are unsettled at home, school can be a source of constancy and support.

Parents and young people sometimes express reluctance to inform school of issues that are happening at home or within the family.

This section will discuss reasons why it may help to inform your child’s school of the situation at home. It will also cover what the school will do with any information it receives and what actions can be expected.

Remember - it is important that your child is included in any decisions that may affect them wherever possible.
Benefits of informing the school of parental mental illness

- Child or young person may gain extra support through the school system, including extensions or exemptions in times of difficulty.

- Allows the child or young person the chance to discuss any concerns or worries they may have with a teacher they trust or the school counsellor.

- Gives teachers a context to inform their responses to behaviour difficulties, school absences or peer interactions.

- Breaks down stigma – children whose parents have other illnesses often receive special attention and support!

- Gives parents a freedom to participate in discussions about their child without feeling they need to hide their illness.

- Can be a good “just in case” option - “just in case” you need to go to hospital, “just in case” your child is upset at school, “just in case” your child wants to talk about their experiences. It can be helpful if the school is already aware of potential difficulties or disruptions to learning.

- Creates an open environment for services to deliver appropriate care to your family. Mental health services and schools can work more effectively together to achieve the best outcomes for your family if information is shared.
What will the school do with the information I give them?

Students, parents or others can suggest that a child may want to speak with a school counsellor.

A class teacher may request that a school counsellor see a child to discuss their well-being.

As a parent, you are also able to approach your child’s school counsellor if you have any issues or concerns you want to discuss in relation to your child. This would be best done, if possible, through the school principal.

**When a child is in primary school**, parents are involved in the process of a school counsellor assisting their child. The class teacher should also, if possible, be made aware of what is happening. The class teacher can play a large care-giving role with young children. Children often feel comfortable about approaching their teacher if they have any worries.

**When a child is in high school**, they can ‘self-refer’ to the school counsellor without their parents being involved. This confidentiality does not apply in situations where the young person may be seen to be at ‘risk of harm’. This could mean that they discuss being harmed by others, harming (or intending to harm) themselves or someone else.

It is very important to respect the young person’s wishes regarding who has knowledge of their circumstances. Perhaps there is a specific teacher that they would trust to talk with about their family situation?

Sometimes young people express concern that if they see the school counsellor, everyone in the school will know. It is worth reassuring your child that any information they share with the school counsellor is confidential and the school counsellor would inform the young person if they felt it was important to share any aspect of it with another person. A school counsellor would not speak with any other service - even with parents - without consent or explanation. The exception to this is if the young person’s safety is at risk.
In both primary and high school, the school principal has a responsibility for the welfare of every child at their school and therefore play an important role in any support planning. There may be times when the school counsellor may need to share information with other members of staff in order to work effectively to support a child. This would usually be done through the school principal and the learning support team and would occur on a ‘need to know’ basis. School counsellors also keep separate records to the child’s school record.

Self-image, independence and peer relationships are high priority during teenage years. If a young person requests that the school not be involved in their home situation, this request should be respected.
What action can be requested from the school?

- Additional support for your child during times of stress or disruption.
- Special consideration for schoolwork, exams or attendance during times of stress and/or increased responsibilities.
- Discussion of schooling options with family, if attendance or concentration is challenged.
- Additional information for teachers regarding possible impact of parental mental illness on child.
- Mentoring for your child. This is a common idea where schools organise a teacher or a student who your child feels comfortable with and who they can approach when needed.
- Exchanging information to request assistance from another agency or to support their involvement in assisting your child. This would require your written permission.
- Discussion with you around the aspects of the curriculum, which may include scope for additional mental health education in order to normalise your child’s experience.
- Assistance in maintaining your child’s involvement in school activities of interest.
- None! Sometimes families don’t want any action but they still would like the school to be aware.
Approaching the school

You may like to organise a time to meet the school counsellor at your child’s school if you want to discuss any issues of relevance to your child.

Most school counsellors rotate around several schools and may not be available every day. You can ask the principal, class teacher or the school receptionist what days the counsellor is available at your child’s school.

It is important to include your child in this discussion so they know what is being said and what they can expect to happen in the school environment.

If you do not feel comfortable discussing these issues face-to-face, you could use the attached guide to write a letter to your child’s school. Spend some time discussing this process with your child and thinking of what would be helpful for the school to do to support your child and family.
This is an outline of a letter that you could write to your child’s school

You may like to include any specific requests for additional ways that the school can support your family.

To: The class teacher/ The school counsellor/ The principal

I am writing to you about-

Child’s name ..........................................................
Class .................................................................

who has a family member who sometimes experiences symptoms of mental illness. There may be times when this child would benefit from extra support through the school system.

In the event that the primary carer in the family is hospitalised, this child will be cared for by-

Name .................................................................
Relationship ........................................................
Telephone (h)............................(m)..............(w)........................
Address ........................................................................................................

I have also spoken with-

Name .................................................................
Relationship ........................................................
Telephone (h)............................(m)..............(w)........................

who will advise the school, if necessary, should our family be experiencing a stressful time.

At these times, the school could assist by:

...........................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................................

If you have any further questions about this or if you wish to discuss anything regarding my child, you can contact me on-

Telephone (h)............................(m)..............(w)........................

Yours Sincerely,

...........................................................................................................................

SCHOOLS: Please keep this letter in secure storage where it can be kept as a confidential letter.
This is an outline of a letter that you could write to your child’s school

You may like to include any specific requests for additional ways that the school can support your family.

To: The year advisor/ The school counsellor/ The principal/ The welfare coordinator

I am writing to you about-
Young person’s name .................................................................
Year ............................................................................................

who has a family member who sometimes experiences symptoms of mental illness. There may be times when this young person would benefit from extra support through the school system.

In the event that the primary carer in the family is hospitalised, this young person will be cared for by-

Name ..........................................................................................
Relationship ..............................................................................
Telephone (h)…………….…..(m)………….……..(w)………………..
Address ...........................................................................................

I have also spoken with-

Name ..........................................................................................
Relationship ..............................................................................
Telephone (h)……….………..(m)………….……..(w)………………..

Who will advise the school, if necessary, should our family be experiencing a stressful time.

At these times the school could assist by:
........................................................................................................
........................................................................................................
........................................................................................................

I have spoken with my child about my intentions to inform the school of our situation. If you have any further questions about this letter or if you wish to discuss anything regarding my child, you can contact me on-

Telephone (h)......................................(m)..............................(w).................................

Yours Sincerely,

Parent: .............................................................. Student: ..................................................

SCHOOLS: Please keep this letter in secure storage where it can be kept as a confidential letter
Section 5: Resources for Families

When things are unsettled in families, people may act in ways that surprise other members of the family. This can be confusing and lead to misunderstandings and disagreements.

Seeking help individually and as a family can help everyone to deal with issues before they worsen.

Ask your mental health worker, staff member at the hospital or contact any of the resources on the enclosed sheet for further assistance.
Blacktown/Mt Druitt Areas

COPMI (Children of Parents with a Mental Illness, Western Sydney Local Health Network)

**Eastern Sector**- Parramatta, Merrylands, Hills, Auburn, Dundas: 8838 6262  
**Central Sector**- Blacktown, Mt Druitt: 9881 8888  
**Western Sector**- Penrith, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, St Marys, Lithgow: 4732 2388

Mental Health Teams

Blacktown: 9881 8888

Community Health Centres

Blacktown: 9881 8700  
Doonside: 9881 8650  
Mt Druitt: 9881 1200

Hospitals

Auburn: 9563 9500  
Blacktown: 9881 8000  
Blue Mountains: 4784 6500  
Cumberland: 9840 3000  
Lithgow: 6350 2300  
Mt Druitt: 9881 1555  
Nepean: 4734 2000  
St John of God, Richmond: 4588 5088  
St Joseph’s: 9649 8941  
Westmead Children’s: 9845 0000  
Westmead: 9845 5555

Community Services (CS)

Helpline (and all other enquiries): 132 111
Family Support Services

Anglicare Family Support, Rooty Hill: 9832 2300
home visits, playgroups, parenting groups.
Doonside to St Mary’s

Aunties and Uncles: 9638 2480
extended family, mentoring and friendship network for families in stress, crisis or without support.

Family Counselling Services

Centacare, 9671 2011
counselling and family support, Blacktown:

Salvation Army, 9622 3108
counselling and emergency relief, Blacktown:
24-hour helpline: 9331 6000

Uniting Care/ Burnside Family Work Program: 9628 0897
free family counselling and groups for parents and children, Bidwill

Youth Services

Blacktown Adolescent and Family counselling: 9622 0787
12-18yo’s and their families

Mental Health Reconnect: 9805 1200
addresses needs of young people at risk of homelessness due to mental health issues in the family. Support, counselling, advocacy, groups, information.

NSW Young Carers: 1800 242 636
support, information and referral for young people under 26 caring for someone with long-term illness, disability, mental illness or drug and alcohol dependence
www.youngcarersnsw.asn.au

Resources for Adolescents and Parents (RAPS): 1800 654 648
service for teenagers and their families or carers when there are problems that could lead to family breakdown. All areas.

Western Area Adolescent Team: 9881 1230
counselling, health care, young parents, drop in, needle exchange
12-20 year old, Mt Druitt
Carer Support

ARAFMI: 9887 5897
(Association of Relatives And Friends of the Mentally Ill)
provide support groups and information.
7-day helpline: 9805 1883

Consumer Network: 9840 3868
Sydney West Area Health
advocacy and support for mental health consumers and recovery focused
collaborations with service providers

Uniting Care Mental Health/Parramatta Mission: 9891 6212
carer support program, including groups for children

Parenting Services

Swinson Cottage Family Centre: 9621 2454
parenting skills, playgroups and home visits, Blacktown:

Sydney West Area Parenting Program: 9840 3587
parenting groups across Western Sydney

Tresillian: 4734 2124
support and advice for parents of 0-3yr olds.
24hr: 1800 637 357

Charmian Clift Cottages: 9622 3066
Medium-term accommodation, support and programs for women with mental health
diagnosis’ and dependent children
Parramatta, Merrylands, Auburn, Hills Areas

COPMI
(Children of Parents with a Mental Illness, Western Sydney Local Health Network)

**Eastern sector** - Parramatta, Merrylands, Hills, Auburn, Dundas: 8838 6262

**Central sector** - Blacktown, Mt Druitt: 9881 8888

**Western sector** - Penrith, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, St Marys, Lithgow: 4732 2388

### Mental Health Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auburn</td>
<td>9646 2233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>9638 6511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hills</td>
<td>8852 4500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrylands (extended hours)</td>
<td>9682 3133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parramatta</td>
<td>9843 3222</td>
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### Community Health Centres

<table>
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### Hospitals

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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Blue Mountains</td>
<td>4784 6500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>9840 3000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lithgow</td>
<td>6350 2300</td>
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<td>Mt Druitt</td>
<td>9881 1555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepean</td>
<td>4734 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St John of God Richmond</td>
<td>4588 5088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Joseph’s</td>
<td>9649 8941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmead Children’s</td>
<td>9845 0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmead</td>
<td>9845 5555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Services (CS)

Helpline (and all other enquiries): 132 111

Family Support Services

Aunties and Uncles: 9638 2480
extended family, mentoring and friendship network for families in stress, crisis or without support

Barnardos: 9646 2770
“buddy” programs, family support, domestic violence programs, home visits, youth work, legal help - Auburn

Granville Family Support Services: 9637 7600

Hills Family Centre: 9899 2944
family support, group activities

Parramatta/Holroyd Family Support: 9636 8337
home visits, support groups, counselling, advice

Telopea Family Support: 9638 7955
practical and emotional support for families who are stressed or in crisis

Family Counselling Services

Centacare: 9630 7788
counselling and family support - Parramatta

Salvation Army: 9891 4526
Counselling and emergency relief, Parramatta
24-hr helpline: 93316000

Uniting Care/Burnside Family Work Program: 9768 6866
(North Parramatta)
96384779
(Ermington)
Youth Services

Anglicare Youth Services: 9895 8181
casework, support and advocacy for young people 12-25
Parramatta

Auburn Youth Centre: 9646 2122
Support, counselling and social activities for 12-24

Cumberland Prospect Carer Respite Centre: 1800 059 059
short-term respite care for young carers at risk of not completing their secondary
education or vocational equivalent - Auburn, Hills, Blacktown, Holroyd and
Parramatta

High Street Youth Health Service: 9687 2544
confidential support and assistance to homeless or at risk youth -
Wentworthville

Mental Health Reconnect: 9805 1200
addresses needs of young people at risk of homelessness due to mental health
issues in the family. Support, counselling, advocacy, groups, information.

NSW Young Carers: 1800 654 648
support, information and referral for young people under 26 caring for someone with
long-term illness, disability, mental illness or drug and alcohol dependence
www.youngcarersnsw.asn.au

Resources for Adolescents and Parents (RAPS): 1800 654 648
service for teenagers and their families or carers when there are problems that could
lead to family breakdown. All areas.
Carer Support

**ARAFMI:**
(Association of Relatives And Friends of the Mentally Ill)
provides support groups and information
7-day helpline: 9805 1883

**Consumer Network:**
Sydney West Area Health
advocacy and support for mental health consumers and recovery focused
collaborations with service providers

**Uniting Care Mental Health/Parramatta Mission:**
carer support program including groups for young people

Parenting Services

**Sydney West Area Parenting Program:**
parenting groups across western Sydney

**Tresillian:**
support and advice for parents of 0-3yr olds.
24-hr

**Charmian Clift Cottages:**
Medium-term accommodation, support and programs for women with mental health
diagnosis’ and dependent children
Blue Mountains, Penrith, Hawkesbury Areas

Nepean/Blue Mountains Local Health Network

COPMI
(Children of Parents with a Mental Illness)
Eastern Sector - Parramatta, Merrylands, Hills, Auburn, Dundas: 8838 6262
Central Sector - Blacktown, Mt Druitt: 9881 8888
Western Sector - Penrith, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, St Marys, Lithgow: 4732 2388

Mental Health Teams
Access Team 1800 650 749
(24hr new referrals for Penrith, Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury)
Hawkesbury: 4587 7599
Katoomba: 4782 2133
Lithgow: 6350 2300
Penrith: 4732 9450
Springwood: 4751 0100
St Mary’s: 9833 4307

Community Health Centres

Centralised intake for new referrals: 1800 222 608
Cranebrook: 4730 5100
Hawkesbury: 4560 5714
Katoomba: 4782 8201
Kingswood: 4759 8700
Lawson: 4759 8700
Lithgow: 6354 0600
Penrith: 4732 9400
Springwood: 4751 0100
St Clair: 9834 0500
St Mary’s: 9833 6800
Hospitals

Auburn: 9563 9500
Blacktown: 9881 8000
Blue Mountains: 4784 6500
Cumberland: 9840 3000
Lithgow: 6350 2300
Mt Druitt: 9881 1555
Nepean: 4734 2000
St John of God, Richmond: 4588 5088
St Joseph’s: 9649 8941
Westmead Children’s: 9845 0000
Westmead: 9845 5555

Community Services (CS)

Helpline (and all other enquiries): 132 111

Family Support Services

Aunties and Uncles 9638 2480
extended family, mentoring and friendship network for families in stress, crisis or without support

Barnardos: 4729 1211
“buddy” programs, family support, domestic violence programs, home visits, youth work, legal help - Penrith

Blue Mountains Family Support: 4782 1555
information, support, emotional and practical assistance to families experiencing difficulties, Hazelbrook to Mt Victoria

Hawkesbury Community Services Inc: 4587 8091

Hawkesbury Family support: 4578 3322

Lower Mountains Family support: 4739 5963
Lapstone to Woodford
Penrith Family Support: 4721 5331
counselling and support to families with children 0-16
where issues impact on safety, wellbeing or development

Peppercorn Inc. Family Services Branch: 4577 9530
family support including parenting and counselling

Family Counselling Services

Adolescent and Family Counselling service: 4782 4436
Katoomba

Anglicare counselling: 4731 6467
counselling and groups for individuals, couples, families,
adolescents and children
Penrith

Centacare: 4721 5331
counselling and family support
Kingswood

Family Skills Program (Relationships Australia): 4731 4577
variety of programs for parents and children
Penrith, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury

Salvation Army: 4731 1554
Counselling and emergency relief,
Penrith
24hr helpline: 9331 6000

Unifam counselling: 4732 2313
Penrith

The Women’s Cottage
Groups, support and courses for women and children
Hawkesbury 45784190
Youth Services

**Bridging the Gap:**
---
counselling for at risk young people aged 10-18 and their families, St Mary’s

**Mental Health Reconnect:**
---
addresses needs of young people at risk of homelessness due to mental health issues in the family. Support, counselling, advocacy, groups, information

**Nepean Adolescent and Family Services:**
---

**NSW Young Carers:**
---
support, information and referral for young people under 26 caring for someone with long-term illness, disability, mental illness or drug and alcohol dependence
www.youngcarersnsw.asn.au

**Resources for Adolescents and Parents (RAPS):**
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service for teenagers and their families or carers when there are problems that could lead to family breakdown. All areas.

Carer Support

**ARAFMI:**
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(Association of Relatives And Friends of the Mentally Ill)
provide support groups and information.

7-day helpline:

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**Consumer Network:**
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Sydney West Area Health
advocacy and support for mental health consumers and recovery focused collaborations with service providers

**Uniting Care Mental Health / Parramatta Mission:**
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carer support program
Parenting Services

Sydney West Area Parenting Program: 4732 2388
parenting groups across western Sydney

Tresillian: 4734 2124
support and advice for parents of 0-3yr olds.
24-hour line: 1800 637 357

Charmian Clift Cottages: 9622 3066
medium-term accommodation, support and programs for women with mental health diagnosis’ and dependent children
Other Useful Resources

Helplines

Salvation Army Helpline: 9331 6000
24-hr emergency relief

Tresillian Helpline: 1800 637 357
24-hr parenting help

DOCS Helpline: 132 111
24-hr request assistance or report children at risk

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
24 hrs

Lifeline: 131 114
24hrs

Websites

Children of Parents With a Mental Illness  www.copmi.net.au

Young Carers NSW  www.youngcarersnsw.asn.au

VIC Champs  www.easternhealth.org.au/champs

SANE  www.sane.org

Its allright  www.itsallright.org

Headroom  www.headroom.net.au
With Thanks and Acknowledgement

The information in this folder would not have been possible without the information gained from the following leading documents in the COPMI field.

- vicchamps eastern health. www.easternhealth/champs
- School Letters produced in Consultation with Department of Education and Training Western Sydney.

Thank you to the projects artists for the wonderful graphics.
Thank you to Zea (6years), Kiki (4years), Nate (3years), Rose (4years), and Abbey(10years).