

MENTAL ILLNESS EDUCATION



It is important for the facilitator of this activity to have a thorough knowledge of and experience working in the area of mental illness.

Purpose:

- Knowing about mental illness can help children understand why the person they care about acts and feels the way they do.
- Understanding what is going on makes life more predictable and less confusing for children.
- Education and accurate information is the key to understanding, coping more effectively and feeling better about themselves.



Requirements:

- *"Handle with Care" A Workbook About Mental Illness For 8-12 Year Olds* or *"A Booklet For Young People About Mental Illness"* (for 13-16 year olds)- refer to 'Resources'. Each child to be provided with their own copy to use during the program and to take with them as a resource to refer to at any time.
- A copy of each worksheet (mental illness, schizophrenia, depression, bipolar, treatments) for each child.
- 'Enhancing Mental Health' handout for each child.

Format:

- Intersperse the educational components between the other activities (as per the suggested daily plan).
- Generally it is only necessary to focus on the disorders that their family members have, however you may chose to educate them about each of the disorders.
- Split the group into two even groups, hand out the 'mental illness worksheet' and ask the group to discuss the questions between them, recording their answers (same format for each worksheet).

This allows the children an opportunity to start talking about mental illness – whether or not their answers are correct in this initial discussion is not important. The correct answers will be clarified as you work through the workbook with them.

- Resume as a group to discuss their answers and then go to the appropriate section in the workbook. Have the children take turns at reading the information out loud for the group (let them volunteer to read. Not everyone has to do this if they don't feel comfortable).



- Write the main points about each illness on flip chart paper (**do in advance if possible**) and blue tac to the walls so the children may refer back to the information.
- Follow instructions as indicated in the workbook, for 8-12yr olds.
- Flexibility will most likely be required as some areas may require more discussion than others.
- It is suggested that a revision of the education takes place in the morning on day three. One option to consider - put blank flip chart paper on the walls with headings only (eg. Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia).

Included with the electronic version of this package (download from www.copmi.net.au – **COPMI Services and Programs Listing – NSW – SMILES Program**) are separate sheets of paper each with one symptom of these illnesses typed in the middle.

Ask the children to place (with blue tac) the symptoms on the blank flip chart paper for the illness they think the symptom relates to.

Once all the symptoms have been placed on the flip charts, review them with the children and refer to the educational material for the correct information.

NB: some of the symptoms can be related to more than one of the illnesses, so discuss this with the children.



There are now a vast range of books and materials about mental illness available for children and young people. You may chose to use other resource materials for educating the children. It is important to note – a story book or comic story may be written in such a way that the children relate to the story but may not clearly describe the factual information about each illness (as the above recommended resources do). If you use such material, it will be important to ensure factual information is also taught.

To access information about other resources, refer to: Children of Parents with a Mental Illness National Resource Centre – Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association Ltd (aicafmha)- www.copmi.net.au