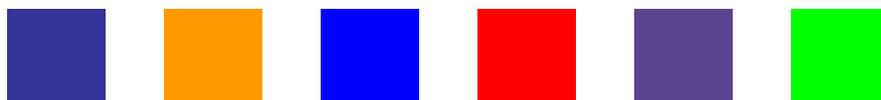




Guide Number 30
Keeping Children in Mind

Mental Health Services
January 2012



Keeping Children in Mind

This Guide Belongs To: _____

Clinical Therapist Name:

Contact Number: _____

Date Received: _____

Date Completed: _____

Key Support Person: _____

Doctor/Psychiatrist: _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These Guides are derived from the contributions of many health professionals, primarily the late Professor Ian Falloon.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

The System To Aid Recovery (STAR) provided by Mental Health Services is made up of a series of Guides. These Guides are designed to strengthen your skills and knowledge and to support your treatment plan. They will be of most benefit when you participate as fully as you can in the process. The Guides are designed for you and your family and provide information about how to manage mental disorders and their impact.



Reflective Questions

Questions designed to help you think about the information and begin applying it.



Summary

A small review of what was covered in the Guide.



Worksheets

Activities designed to help with your recovery.



Education

Information on mental disorders and strategies for recovery.



Notes

These pages are designed for you to write down any questions and to write notes that you find interesting or helpful.



The Goal of this Guide

To assist consumers, carers and supportive friends and family in planning for the needs of children when their carers are affected by mental illness.

INTRODUCTION

If you have a mental illness, you may find it hard to cope, particularly if you're a parent. Bringing up children is at times not easy, and all parents wonder if they are doing it well. If you have mental health problems, you may worry about how this will affect your children and how you'll manage.¹ This Guide is designed to assist you in thinking about ways to plan for your children if you become unwell.



This Guide is designed to work in conjunction with **Guide 29 - Information For Children**, which provides some child-friendly information on mental illness. It is aimed at helping a child develop their own ideas around making plans and receiving information and support.

This Guide covers the following areas: Key Messages for Children and Building Supports for Children.

Important : This Guide will take some time to work through. It is a good idea to take your time and work with your Clinical Therapist and your family and friends to get this planning done as effectively as possible. Engaging the children in this process can be critical to the success of this plan.

1. KEY MESSAGES FOR CHILDREN

Many children will grow up with a parent who, at some point, will have a mental illness. Most of these parents will have mild or short-lived illnesses. A few children live with a parent who has a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar affective disorder. Many more children live with a parent who has a long term problem, such as alcohol or drug dependence, personality disorder or long standing depression.

If someone in your family has a mental illness it is important that the children are included in some of the planning and conversations about the illness. Some of the key messages for children include;

- **It's not your fault:** No one can cause someone else to have a mental illness.
- **It's no joke:** People should, never make fun of mental illness.
- **Your feelings are okay:** Its okay to feel sad, lonely, angry or confused. Other kids have those feelings too.
- **It is your right to feel safe** all the time.
- **There is nothing so awful you cannot talk to someone about it:** Talk about your situation especially when your feelings/worries are getting bigger. Find someone you trust and know will listen, involve them in the back up plan for your family (consider a family member, family friend, neighbour, counselor, teacher, sports coach, friends parent or someone from your place of worship). Help lines are also available. The Kids helpline phone number is 1800 55 1800.

¹ Some of the material in this Guide are taken from the publications *Making Time To Talk: Advice for Parents with Mental Illness* and *It's About You A Guide For Children Who Have A Parent With A Mental Illness* and *Need To Know: A Guide For Young People Who Have a Parent With A Mental Illness*. Published by the National Schizophrenia Fellowship (NSF) in Scotland <http://www.nsfscot.org.uk/index.html>



How can
I relax
when
I have
children
needing
my
attention?



- **Learn to be strong and get stronger:** Focus on some positive things and build on them.
- **Take care of yourself:** Start a hobby, get involved in a group like Guides or Scouts and participate in sports, Express yourself, be creative paint, write, act, get out, have fun.
- **It can get better:** All illness changes people in some way. With mental illness the thinking part of the brain gets sick. With medicine, rest and support from trusted people in the community (family, friends, doctors and counselors) people with a mental illness may recover healthy ways of thinking.



- **Get informed:** ask your librarian, teacher, counselor and family doctor to help you find information on mental illness. Your parents Clinical Therapist may also help you with understanding what the illness means.

A few more messages for children:

**You did not
cause your parents
mental health
problem**

You are not alone

**Make sure you
have some fun**

Find out about your mum or dads illness

**Write out a list of the names and phone numbers of people who you can
ring if you need too**

What are the key messages you would like to give your children?



Include the children in the planning when they are old enough so that they can be reassured that everything possible is being done 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.

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.

Some ways of having breaks include:

- **Preschoolers** often enjoy a regular time at a childcare center or with a babysitter. (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 hobby club or spending time at a friend's home.
- **Adolescents** may prefer to just be with friends, having a pizza or going to a movie.²



² This activity has been adapted from the [Family Talk](#) booklet published by The Australian Infant, child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association Ltd. For the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. 2004.

2. BUILDING THE SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN

What do children need?

Children need all sorts of things.... a band aid on a grazed knee, a bedtime story, a hug, someone taking an interest in them. But you don't have to be the only one that provides these all the time. Friends, relatives and neighbours can help too.

The Shanks program is a support program for young people and kids aged 6-16 years that is run by Sage Hill. Contact 5561 5261 for more information.

Q. What do you do for your children and what do they get from other people?

You

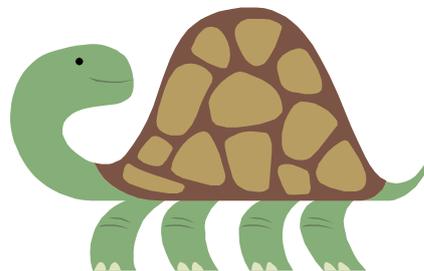
Others

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



Here is a list of the things that children need:

- **Clear rules and boundaries** so that they know what's allowed and what isn't. This makes them feel secure.
- **Attention and praise** so they know what they are doing well.
- **Warmth and love:** Children need this even more than adults.
- **The opportunity to express their feelings,** both pleasant and unpleasant.
- **To be taken seriously:** We all want to be taken seriously. This means really listening to your children so that you know what they need.
- **Patience:** Children have a lot to learn and they can't learn it all at once.



- **The opportunity to show what they can do:** All children must become independent. This only happens if they get the chance to do things for themselves.
- **Role models:** Children need people to admire. Parents, teachers, siblings or friends can all be role models. ⁴

Children often cope well when a parent is ill for a short time. It is easier for them if they can understand why their parent has become unwell. It is important that things are explained to them, rather than being secretive about the problem. Children do find it difficult to cope with the problem if it is more long term. For many children in this situation problems can arise if they are:

- Separated again and again from a parent who needs to go into hospital for treatment.
- Feel unsure of their relationships with the parent with a mental illness.
- Are not being looked after properly.
- Are being hit or mistreated.
- Are having to look after a sick parent, or are taking care of brothers and sisters.
- Are upset, frightened, worried by or ashamed of their parent's illness or behaviour.
- Are being teased or bullied by others.
- Hear unkind things being said about their sick parent.



Some children withdraw into themselves, become anxious and find it difficult to concentrate on their school work. They may find it very difficult to talk about their parent's illness or their problems at home, which may stop them from getting help. Children are often ashamed of their parents illness and worry about becoming ill themselves. ⁵

⁴ [Making Time To Talk: Advice for Parents with Mental Illness](http://www.nsfscot.org.uk/index.html) Published by the National Schizophrenia Fellowship (NSF) in Scotland <http://www.nsfscot.org.uk/index.html>

⁵ This information is taken from the Mental Health and Growing Up Fact sheet 2004 Published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists

Ten tips for parenting

When a parent is unwell it is important to have a plan in place which can be followed. This will assist the children in the family to remain as stable as possible and to follow routines that are usually part of their life. You may want to refer back to the Building Support Guide Number 3, which has a small segment about children.

Below are listed some tips for parenting that can help with developing the plan. There is a copy of a plan to fill in after these points. If you need more copies you can request this from your Clinical Therapist.

1. **Explain to your child what is wrong:** Your child will notice when something isn't right. It's better if you explain exactly what's wrong. You can initiate this or you can wait until your child asks. Some children don't want a sit down conversation. They feel more comfortable chatting while you do the washing up or when you tuck them in at night.



2. **Be honest:** Explain what's going on and ask your child if they understand, just to make sure. Your child might ask questions which you can't answer its okay to say, "I don't know but I will find out".

3. **Listen to your child:** Ask your child about their feelings and opinions and listen carefully to what they say.

4. **Observe your child:** Children's behaviour usually reflects how they are feeling. If they are not feeling as they usually do, this may mean that something is wrong. Wetting the bed or avoiding school are clear signals of distress but it's often not so obvious. This means you have to pay attention to your child and watch for subtle changes.

5. **Keep to usual routines:** Everyday routines help children feel secure and stay secure, even if there are problems at home. This includes doing their homework, playing sport or taking part in other activities at the usual times.

6. **Include other adults:** Don't try to cope with everything on your own. Friends, relatives, or teachers may all be able to help. Other sources of advice or help can be sought from your Clinical Therapist.

7. **Inform the school:** If you go into hospital tell the school and arrange to give them a copy of the plan you will develop later in this Guide. Tell your child that you have told the school.



My kids were much happier once we had a plan in place

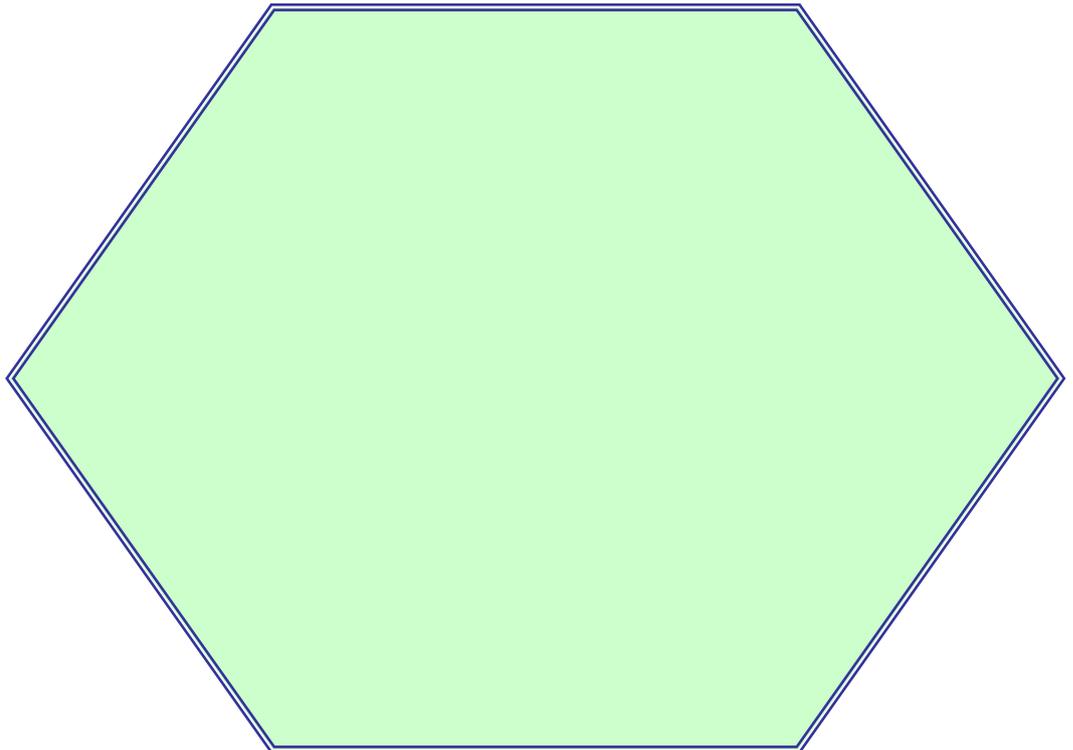


8. **Accept it if your child confides in someone else:** Don't be upset if your child confides in someone else. Many children like to talk to someone outside their immediate family because they don't want to worry you. It's not about leaving you out.
9. **Get professional help if necessary:** For some children the strain can become too much. They may not talk to anyone, or find that talking doesn't seem to help. If so, it's important for you to get professional help for them. You can talk this over with your Clinical Therapist.
10. **Remember to show your child that you love them:** What ever problems you have, your child needs to know that you love them. Everyone expresses this differently with words, a smile or a hug. If you can show your child that you love them every day. It is a new start. This helps more than anything else.



Reflective task

Identify your strengths as a parent:



On the following page you will find a plan you can develop for your children. You can use **Guide 29 - Information For Children** to help in this process, as involving children is pivotal.



Worksheet 30A - Children's Care Plan

Name of Children

(1) _____ Birth date: _____

(2) _____ Birth date: _____

(3) _____ Birth date: _____

(4) _____ Birth date: _____

Name of Parent: _____

If my parent goes into hospital I would like to stay with either of these people:

Person A

Name: _____

Phone: (1) _____ (2) _____

Address: _____

Their relationship to me: _____

Person B

Name: _____

Phone: (1) _____ (2) _____

Address: _____

Their relationship to me: _____

Please Tick this box to show that this has been discussed with them

I would like to be (Tick one)

- Picked up by the people I am staying with.
- Dropped off at their home by a Clinical Therapist.
- Other.

My parents will be cared for at: _____

I can phone them on: _____



Worksheet 30B - Children's Care Plan

The Children(s) School is: _____

People who can be informed that the children's home situation has temporarily changed:

Children(s) Doctors name is: _____

The Phone Number is: _____

Medicare Number is: _____

Health Insurance provider and number is: _____

Health Care Card the number is: _____

The Current Medicines: _____

Allergies to: _____

The special food I eat is: _____

When they stay with people its important that the children take with them:

Pocket money will be from: _____

The Pets are;

Name	Animal Type	Special plans for them
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

They will be cared for by: _____





Worksheet 30C - Additional Baby Plan

My baby is currently:

Breastfed. Details:

Bottled-fed. Details:

Taking solid foods. Details:

My baby likes the following foods/drinks. Details:

My baby dislikes the following foods/drinks Details:

My baby has an allergic reaction to. Details:

I've found the following useful in settling by baby (e.g. favorite toys, music nursery rhymes)

Sleeping Routine. My baby settles and sleeps best following this routine:

Information & resources for parents & carers:

www.copmi.net.au

www.raisingchildren.net.au

www.carersvic.org.au

www.lifeline.com.au

For children & young people:

www.champsworldwide.org

www.kidshelpline.com.au

www.reachout.com.au

www.headspace.org.au

www.itsallright.org/



We Value Your Feedback Date: ____/____/____

This evaluation is designed to provide feedback regarding the System to Aid Recovery (STAR). Please take a moment to fill in this form and return it to either your Clinical Therapist or to the reception desk. You may like to post it in by sending it to South West Healthcare Mental Health Services, Koroit Street, Warrnambool, Vic 3280.

If 1 is the worst it could possibly be and 5 is the best, rate the following statements about this STAR Guide and associated activities					
Was the Guide....	1	2	3	4	5
Easy to read					
Easy to understand					
Easy to follow					
Suited to your needs					
Were the activities in the Guide...	1	2	3	4	5
Useful					
Easy to follow					
Did they work					

1. Did you complete most of the activities in this Guide with your Clinical Therapist or did you complete them in your own time?

- Clinical Therapist Completed in own time
 Did not complete most of the activities

2. Were there any problems with this material?

- Yes No Unsure

3. What were they?

4. What recommendations do you have for improvements?

Thank You – This form is private and confidential

