



# WHEN YOUR PARENT HAS A MENTAL ILLNESS



## TIPS AND STORIES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE OF QUEBEC



This guide was initiated by young people whose parent has a mental illness in order to inform others experiencing the same situation.

**T**his guide is primarily intended for young people (around 12 to 25 years old) who have, or suspect they have, a parent with mental illness. The aim is to answer questions they might have.

In this guide you will find:

- Information to help you understand your parent and get help if you need it;
- Tips and stories from others your age who have a parent who experiences a mental illness and who helped develop this guide. Some stories are accompanied by photographs taken by these young people;
- Spaces to write down or draw your thoughts or feelings.

This guide was developed as part of a research project conducted by members of LaPProche.

**Principal researcher:** Aude Villatte, PhD., Professor, Department of Psychoeducation and Psychology

**Co-researcher:** Geneviève Piché Ph.D., psychoeducator, Professor, Department of Psychoeducation and Psychology

**Research coordinator:** Rima Habib, M.Sc.

In collaboration with several young people with a mentally ill parent and in partnership with the **Réseau Avant de Craquer**.

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*'Research and action laboratory for people with mental health problems and their loved ones.'*

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## What young people want to tell you above all, is that you are not alone\*

Many others are in the same situation as you. Although you may be facing several challenges, there's a lot you can do to overcome them and become a successful and healthy adult.

### In this guide, when we talk about...

... "your parent", we refer to your birth parent, stepfather or stepmother, grandparent, adoptive parent or another significant adult who lives with you or who raised you.

... "mental illness", we refer to a problem that affects a person's mental health and that significantly affects their functioning in many areas of life, such as work or social relationships. For example, a mental illness could include depression, an anxiety disorder, or a psychotic disorder.

**Don't hesitate to read on the topics that interest you first. You don't have to read everything to understand what these young people want to tell you.**

**You could also use this guide to talk to your parent or to others close to you about what you're experiencing.**

*\*In this guide, "they" is used as a generic third-person pronoun.*



You'll find this logo in different places in the guide. It indicates that the stories were taken via the Photovoice process, which uses photography and group discussions to identify problems and possible solutions related to a particular theme. These discussion groups are what inspired some young people to produce this guide as a way to share their experiences and photos.

To see all the photos taken by participants, visit [lapproche.uqo.ca/exposition](http://lapproche.uqo.ca/exposition) or Instagram at [lapp.uqo](https://www.instagram.com/lapp.uqo)



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# DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

"I'm ashamed of my parent sometimes."



"Sometimes I feel like my parent's parent."



"Why can't I just have a normal family?"



"Nobody understands what I'm going through."



"Will my parent ever get better?"



"I worry about my parent all the time."



"It's harsh!"



"I'm afraid of becoming like my parent."



"I feel lonely."



## overflowing



"It's a laundry bin. Which represents the whole jumble of emotions. Red is for anger. It made me **angry** not to understand what was going on ... anger towards myself, towards my mother, towards my family who didn't explain things to me. [...] **purple [...] is grief and fear**. Fear in the sense of not knowing what will happen ... what the future will be ... will I be able to have a relationship with my mother someday ... [...] mourning what we generally see as a more normal mother-daughter relationship.

**Blue is like depression.** My mother has a depressive disorder. [...] I wasn't diagnosed with depression, but ... I feel that I might have been at some point in my life.

**The yellow is betrayal** in the sense that you feel betrayed, betrayed by your family, by your parent. I felt betrayed that I didn't have a good relationship, that I wasn't like everyone else, that I wasn't told things. The laundry is all tangled up because sometimes it's hard to identify your emotions [...] they spill out of the bin, there's a whirlwind of emotions."

**Marianne\*, 21**

\*Some young people used their first names; others used a fictitious first name to preserve anonymity.

## It can be tough

If your parent has a mental illness, it's normal for you to experience many different emotions. Some say that it's like "riding an emotional rollercoaster."

For example, you might not understand why your parent is acting the way they are, find it hard to interact with them or not know how to help them.

In the face of all of this, you might feel stressed, angry or even discouraged... and lots of other things besides!

### You are not alone

Many young people are in a similar position to you, with a parent who has a mental illness. This guide was developed to answer questions you may have about your experience.

**Did you know**  
that in Quebec  
and elsewhere, about  
**1 in 5 young people**  
has a parent with  
mental illness?



# MENTAL ILLNESS AFFECTS EVERYONE

Mental illnesses are very common. It can happen to in anyone, at any age, and to people of any ethnicity. It can happen to your mother, your father, other people in your family (e.g., brother, sister, cousin, grandparent), your friends, your teachers or your employer, for example.

Mental illnesses affect the mind (or the brain) just as physical diseases affect the body. They make the affected person think, feel and act differently from a person who doesn't have a mental illness. These illnesses can often lead to physical symptoms, including fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea or dizziness.

## The difference between normal emotions and a mental illness

We all have times when we feel sad, lonely, depressed, stressed or afraid. We may feel discouraged that no one understands us or that things are too much to handle. These thoughts or emotions are a normal part of life.

When a person has a mental illness, their thoughts or emotions can become more intense and last longer than usual. They can be so intrusive that they prevent the affected person from functioning normally on a daily basis.

Adults who have a mental illness may find very hard to get up in the morning, cook or get their children to school. Their behaviors might seem strange or inappropriate. They may feel irritable, restless, anxious and even aggressive. Although they may realize something's wrong, the confusion caused by their mental illness and their inability to improve the situation can prevent them from behaving otherwise.

The good news is that different types of support are available for people who experience mental illness. They can be happy and live fulfilling lives.

→ See section *Will your parent get better?* p. 22

*"[...] I imagined a villain (the parent) in my head ... and I told myself [...] it doesn't mean anything ... let him be, don't take everything he says personally because he (the parent) probably doesn't mean what he's saying. It helped to know that it wasn't really HIM who was speaking at that moment."*

**Daniel, 23**



### Few facts

- Mental illnesses are not caused by one factor alone (e.g., genetics or a stressful experience). They are often the result of a combination of risk factors (see p. 12).
- Mental illnesses affect the thoughts, behaviors and emotions of the person.
- Mental illnesses cannot be "caught" from another person, like a cold. They are not contagious.
- You are not responsible for your parent's mental illness.
- Mental illness is not a sign of weakness.



# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE HAS A MENTAL ILLNESS?

**When a person has a physical health problem (e.g., a broken leg), something in their body isn't working well. This leads to changes in how they feel and behave (e.g., avoiding the grocery store). When a person has a mental illness, changes occur in their brain that influence how they think, feel and behave.**

The presence of one or more of these behaviors does not automatically indicate the development or presence (or absence) of a mental illness. In all cases, only a licensed medical professional, such as a doctor or psychologist, can diagnose a mental illness.

→ See *The most common types of mental illnesses*, p.16

## Like the body, the mind can be sick!

The brain controls the body and everything we do. Inside the brain, there are billions of cells called neurons that continuously exchange information, day and night without ever stopping. Chemicals in the brain allow these neurons to function well. However, sometimes the level of these special chemicals is too low or too high. When this happens, a person's behaviors, thoughts and emotions can change.

The person may not be "themselves" and may:

- speak or think incoherently
- feel tired and sleep a lot, or not sleep well and be up all night
- cry a lot or be unable to cry
- get angry for no reason
- be irritable
- be confused or have trouble finding their way in time and space
- see or hear things that aren't real
- be unable to distinguish between what is true or not true
- talk to themselves
- act in an odd or unusual way
- feel they're being watched
- make unusual purchases
- experience a high level of stress over a significant period of time
- lose interest in activities they usually enjoy

## How do mental illnesses develop?

It's not yet clear why some people develop a mental illness while others don't. There are many possible causes, and these vary from person to person. Mental illnesses are most often explained by a **combination** of factors related to a person's biological characteristics, family, environment, culture or lifestyle. Some factors can increase the risk of developing a mental illness (risk factors), and others can reduce it (protective factors).

Some examples of **risk factors** are:

- heredity, that is, whether other family members have or have had a mental illness,
- psychological factors, such as low self-esteem, difficulty adapting to different life situations, or extreme perfectionism,
- chronic illnesses or health issues (e.g., cancer, thyroid disease, cardiovascular disease).
- stress factors present in the person's life, which may be related to their family environment (e.g., the death of a loved one, domestic violence), their social environment (e.g., homelessness, isolation) and their professional or financial situation (e.g., job loss, low income),
- traumatic life events (e.g., childhood sexual abuse),
- addiction to alcohol, drugs and gambling.

*"At first I thought it was me, that it was my fault she was like that ... I was sure I had done something wrong. But eventually, I realized there are other things that caused it. For my mother, it was drugs among others. So I knew I couldn't stop what was happening. It was up to her to choose to help herself. My role is to show her that I'm there if she needs me. You can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped."*

**Marianne, 21**



Therefore, mental illness can not be caused by only **ONE** specific factor, and the affected person is not to blame.

On the other hand, some factors can reduce a person's risk of developing a mental illness. These are called **protective factors**. Protective factors can be linked to individual characteristics (e.g., good physical health, the ability to seek help and good communication skills), family situations (e.g., positive relationships, quality time) or social circumstances (e.g., support from friends and loved ones).

Finally, some risk and protective factors cannot be changed (e.g., heredity, past events), while others can (e.g., our thoughts and behaviors in certain situations).

**Even though the causes of mental illness aren't quite known, we do know that IT ISN'T YOUR FAULT! You are not the cause of your parent's mental illness, and you are not responsible for their recovery.**

## Could you develop the same problems as your parent?

Even though young people who have a parent with mental illness are at greater risk of developing mental health problems (compared with those whose parents never had a mental illness), many are resilient. Being resilient means recovering, adapting and developing positively when faced with a situation that represents significant stress or risk.

Scientific studies have identified several characteristics that allow young people to develop good mental health despite adversity (e.g., being active, connecting with one or more significant adults they can trust, and knowing their strengths and limitations). See *Maintaining good mental health*, p. 38

Therefore, having a parent with mental illness doesn't necessarily mean you'll develop the same issues as they have, even if you or others see similarities between you and your parent.

Everyone can feel sad at times, have trouble sleeping or feel stressed. It's part of life, so don't panic. The good news is that these emotions generally pass over time.

That being said, there are times when these emotions take hold and intensify. Specific thoughts (e.g., worries) or behaviors (e.g., substance use) can also intrude or take up a lot of space in your life. If you're experiencing something like this, it may be because you're facing a difficult situation and may need some help to cope with it. **We know from many young people that talking really helps.** You could talk to someone you know and trust or to a qualified professional or counselor (e.g., psychologist, social worker, psychoeducator, specialized educator or doctor).



→ See section *Free* and useful resources on p. 51 for more information about the resources available to you.

## Dealing with stigma

Mental illnesses are very common even though people don't talk about them much. "Stigma" is when people treat you differently or laugh at you because your parent is different, making you feel ashamed or alone. It happens when people are afraid, don't understand something or have the wrong information. Unfortunately, there are still many people in our society who have negative ideas about mental illnesses.

Sometimes you might feel that you're being treated differently at school, at work or in your group of friends. You may be intimidated and prefer spending time alone rather than going out with others. You may prefer to "hide" the "problem" or choose not to invite friends over to your house, for example. You may even feel

that your friends' parents treat you differently sometimes.

Try not to get too caught up in other people's ignorance and lack of understanding. They don't know as much as you do about what's going on. If they treat you poorly, don't hesitate to walk away and ask for help from one of your resource persons. If your friends don't understand you, you can tell them that mental illnesses are very common, that they are not a sign of personal weakness and that they can be treated. Remember that, in Canada, 1 in 5 people experiences a mental illness. By talking about your situation, you can help those around you understand and be more open-minded. We can all make a difference in our own way.

### Words



"This building is there for people who need help from various professionals. There are external resources available when help is needed to cope with challenges. Talking and opening up is important to live better and thrive. When I was about 16, I got professional help so I could feel better. It feels good to talk to health professionals."

**Claudia, 24**







# THE MOST COMMON MENTAL ILLNESSES

The next few pages offer a description of the main types of mental illness in the population. Beyond these general descriptions, it's essential to know that the way a mental illness manifests can vary from person to person. For example, someone with depression might lose their appetite or, conversely, feel like eating all the time. He or she may also have trouble sleeping or sleep more than usual.

A person can also have several mental disorders at once (e.g., depression and an anxiety disorder) or during their lifetime (e.g., an anxiety disorder, then a depressive disorder). It's also relatively common for a person with a mental illness to have substance abuse problems (e.g., alcohol or drugs) or for a person with a substance abuse problem to have a mental illness.

## Depressive disorder

Depression is different from feeling sad once in a while. People who experience a depressive disorder often feel hopeless, tired or exhausted for long periods of time. They usually have little energy to do what they need to do. Sometimes just getting out of bed or eating is difficult. They can sleep all day and lose interest in the things they used to love. They may also feel stressed, irritable or cry for no apparent reason. Mothers can sometimes feel depressed after having a child (i.e., postpartum depression) and may have trouble caring for their baby and other children.

*"My dad is pretty cool, but when he's depressed, he finds it hard to do anything. He doesn't talk much or have any energy. It's like he's kind of not there when he's having a bad day."*

**Ben, 13\***

## Bipolar disorder

People with bipolar disorder usually have extreme moods. At times, they may feel sad and lack energy, and at other times be very energetic, over-excited and unable to calm down. During these times, they may have trouble sleeping, cooking, or cleaning, or they may make expensive purchases or talk nonstop, for example. They may also feel stressed and have difficulty concentrating.



## Some false beliefs

- People living with depression lack willpower.
- People with an anxiety disorder are weak.
- People with bipolar disorder are hard to manage.
- People with a psychotic disorder have multiple personalities.

*"When Mum's not taking her medication correctly, she has ups and downs. Like she'll go on a manic high and be really dramatic, or she'll get depressed and tired. So it can be tough to try and talk with her. It gets really confusing because one day she will be fine, but the next day she will burst out crying."*

**James, 14\***

\*These narratives were taken from the guide: When your parent has a mental illness (AICAFMHA, 2014).

## Anxiety disorders

People with an anxiety disorder experience more intense and frequent worries and fears than people without the disorder. They may continually worry about things that seem unimportant to others. The anxiety they feel doesn't go away even when the situation causing the worry returns to normal. When fears become excessive, persistent and overwhelming, people tend to avoid potentially stressful situations and thus have difficulty carrying out usual daily activities. For example, someone with social phobia may avoid eating in public for fear of dropping food and looking ridiculous; if a person has a specific phobia about dogs, they may not go outdoors to avoid coming into contact with a dog.

*"My mother has always been afraid that something would happen: that my father would have an accident, that we wouldn't do well in school, or that we would get sick. She tries not to show it, but we can tell. She's always a bit defensive, often calls my dad at work to make sure he's ok and pressures us to get good grades. Even when we get A+'s, she still worries. It's a little discouraging sometimes."*

**Audrey, 17**

## Psychotic disorders

People with a psychotic disorder have difficulty thinking clearly and perceiving reality. When a person loses touch with reality, they may see or hear things that are not actually there (hallucinations) or have strange or false ideas that are not shared by others (delusions). For example, they may believe that someone is trying to hurt them or someone close. It can be terrifying for people who are unwell and their loved ones, especially if they don't know that it's a mental illness. Schizophrenia is a major type of psychotic disorder. People might have difficulty functioning daily because their thoughts, emotions and behaviors are affected by a loss of contact with reality.

*"My father heard voices, didn't wash, didn't go out, and sometimes talked to himself. He stopped working and often slept during the day, but stayed awake at night while having his delusions. He thought "agents" were watching him and listening to him. It was hard. He was hospitalized, and I had to move in with my mother."*

**Alexis, 17**

## Obsessive-compulsive disorder

People with obsessive-compulsive disorder are often overwhelmed by uncontrolled and repetitive thoughts that turn into obsessions (e.g., fear of forgetting to close the door, fear of contracting a disease). Even though they often know these obsessions are exaggerated, they can't stop thinking about them. They then feel compelled to repeat specific actions to drive the obsession away. These actions are called compulsions. Compulsions may be linked to the theme of the obsessions (e.g., wash their hands several times if they're obsessed with contamination) or not (e.g., turn the light on and off seven times in a row if they're afraid a loved one has cancer). People with obsessive-compulsive disorder might experience a great deal of psychological distress because their obsessions and compulsions take up so much time and interfere with their daily activities.

*"We are sometimes really late for school because Mum has to check the iron and all the electrical outlets before we can go anywhere. She gets pretty on edge and doesn't like going out much now, unless she has to."*

**Jennifer, 13\***

*"Dad isn't really himself and he is always on edge, like he is scared of something happening. He is pretty grouchy because he doesn't sleep much and he doesn't like doing anything outside these days. It is not his fault though and I keep reminding myself that."*

**Alex, 15\***

## Post-traumatic stress disorder

People with post-traumatic stress disorder often feel tired, scared or panicked, or react to things that may seem trivial to others. The disorder can develop in people who have experienced a traumatic event (e.g., a traffic accident, a natural disaster, a physical or sexual assault). The trauma experienced during these events is often relived through flashbacks and nightmares. These symptoms have a significant impact on their daily lives.

## Want to learn more?

For more information on the main types of mental illnesses, visit the websites of the Government of Quebec and the Douglas Mental Health University Institute:

→ <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/mental-health-mental-illness/>

→ [http://www.douglas.qc.ca/info\\_sante](http://www.douglas.qc.ca/info_sante)



*"My mother often pretends to eat pieces of her food, but she discreetly gives them to my little brother. She hates being asked if she's eaten. The thing is, she's already so skinny. She doesn't see herself as she is."*

**Kim, 12 ans\***

## Eating disorders

People with an eating disorder are often obsessed with thoughts related to food, weight or body image. These thoughts go well beyond simple dieting. Some may deliberately choose to limit their food intake (anorexia nervosa); others may eat a large amount of food over a short period and make themselves vomit, take laxatives or exercise a lot to compensate (bulimia); others may overeat, often without adopting compensatory behaviors (binge eating). They may go to great lengths to hide their disorder. They may always be on a diet, make excuses not to eat, avoid social situations that involve eating or over-exercise, for example. They may spend a lot of time worrying about their body image and feel depressed, anxious or irritable.

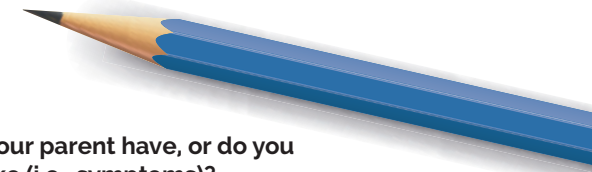
## Personality disorders

People with a personality disorder exhibit personality traits that could be described as "rigid". These traits may cause difficulties in functioning (especially on an interpersonal level), and cause suffering for the people concerned and those around them. There are different personality disorders (e.g., antisocial, schizoid, narcissistic, borderline), which are distinguished by the dominant personality traits. For example, people with borderline personality disorder often have trouble managing their emotions and maintaining meaningful relationships with others. They may experience dramatic mood changes and an intense fear of losing loved ones, and constantly seek reassurance. They may have sudden outbursts of anger, seek to harm themselves or fear they're losing control. Sometimes people say it's a bit like being on a roller coaster, but without the fun part. Their behaviors are often not understood and may stem from a strong sense of fear, loneliness and hopelessness.

*"My mom can be really sad and angry sometimes. I vividly remember days when I would come home from school and wonder how my mother would be. Some days we get along really well – like best friends. And other times, it's like I'm not doing anything right. She gets mad at me for any reason at all. At times like these, I know she can tend to drink and hurt herself."*

**Marie-Ève, 15\***

## Your space to write or draw



**What mental illness or illnesses does your parent have, or do you think they have? What does that look like (i.e., symptoms)?**

**What concerns or worries do you have about your parent's mental illness or illnesses?**

**What would you like to ask your parent about their symptoms or behaviors? Make a list of the questions you'd like to ask and the things you want to discuss with them when it's the right time to talk.**



## WILL YOUR PARENT GET BETTER?

People with mental illness can get better, but “getting better” can take different forms for different persons. Some people struggle for a while, then feel better, and their mental health problem never returns. Others experience chronic issues that last a long time, but have periods in between when they’re all right. Still, others will continue to show symptoms, but learn to live with their vulnerabilities, be happy and have fulfilling lives.

## What can help your parent feel better?

There are several ways that may help your parent feel better.

- Talking in a support group with other people who have been or are currently experiencing the same difficulties as they are;
- Getting support from a health or social services professional;
- Engaging in physical, recreational or relaxation activities;
- Taking the right medication to balance the level of chemicals in their brain (see p. 24 to learn more about medication);
- Hospitalization when necessary (see p. 25 to learn more about hospitalization).

All these strategies can help your parent feel like themselves again and regain the ability to lead a fulfilling life by reducing the symptoms related to their mental illness. However, the means they choose and the effectiveness of these means may vary depending on the person.

*“My mom ended up taking care of herself. We’re all grown up now. We all go to school, we work. She was the only one not working, and her three kids were working. For her, it was like, well, maybe I should do something with my life too. So it motivated her to see that we all continued and ... everyone motivated everyone. It ended well.”*

**Bianca, 22**

## Consent to care: what is it?

Did you know that patients usually have the right to accept or refuse medical care (e.g., examination, medical treatment, hospitalization)? Medical professionals must obtain their free and informed consent before giving care. Patients can change their mind at any time.

When suggesting treatment, medical professionals must evaluate whether their patients are able to make decisions. Having a mental illness or disability doesn’t automatically mean a person can’t make their own medical decisions.

When a patient is incapable of consenting to care, he can have legal or not legal representative. If you are over 18 years old, you could be designated your parent’s legal representative with authorization to consent in his place.

When a patient can’t consent on their own and doesn’t have a representative or clearly refuses care required for his health, the court must make medical decisions for him. A doctor must then show that the person is incapable of consenting to care and demonstrate that the advantages of the proposed treatment outweigh the disadvantages.

You don’t need court authorization to administer emergency or hygiene care if your parent refuses treatment..

→ To learn more, consult “The Law and Mental Health: What You Need to Know” at [educaloi.qc.ca](http://educaloi.qc.ca). The Éducaloi website provides information and short videos on various human rights topics.

## About medication

Medication is one of the treatments professionals can use to help your parent when they're not well. Medication works on chemicals in the brain. Usually, treatment involves taking one or more tablets every day for several months or years. Some medicines can also be given via injection by a health care professional.

Sometimes, it can take a while for the medication to start working. Doctors may need to adjust the dosage or change the type of medication to improve the treatment's effectiveness. Most medications have side effects (e.g., nausea, fatigue, insomnia or weight gain) that are particularly noticeable during the first weeks of treatment.

Some people have trouble remembering to take their medication every day. Others don't like taking it because of the side effects or because they think they function well without it. At the very start of treatment, a person may feel worse than before, but after their body has had time to get used to the medication, they generally feel better. This is why it's essential to take it exactly as the doctor prescribes.

Medication doesn't work for everyone, but other things can help your parent, such as seeing a mental health professional, being physically active, and meditation or relaxation exercises (see p. 23). These can help people feel better and manage their mental illness. Guillaume, now an adult and a father, talks about the challenges he faced as a teenager and young adult regarding his mother's medication:

"My mom had a lot of trouble taking her medication regularly for many reasons: side effects like tremors and weight gain. Sometimes, she found it ineffective and other times she thought she was better



and no longer needed medication, when in fact she was not going well at all. It was hard making sure she was taking her medications for 20 years, a period when she was hospitalized almost every year. However, after all that time, her doctors found the right medication and the correct dose, so she wasn't hospitalized for the next 19 years."



### Remember

- Some people will only need to take medication for a few months. Others will have to take it their whole lives.
- Because each person is different, they experience mental illness differently and react to treatment and medication differently.
- Never take someone else's medication. Medication that helps one person can be dangerous for another.

## Hospitalization

Sometimes, your parent might need to go to hospital to get help (even if they are against it) because they need more support. Stay safe, and/or not put others at risk.

It's always a difficult time, especially when you don't understand what's going on. It can also scare your parent. At the same time, it can be a relief as your parent will be given appropriate care and you will feel less alone. You can ask to accompany your parent in the process or help them obtain information. If your parent accepts, you can take the opportunity to ask questions to better understand the care being offered.

Your parent remains in charge of making the decisions that affect them. But don't hesitate to ask professionals about their rights and yours.

A team of professionals and mental health workers (e.g., nurses, social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists,

### An adult and a father, Guillaume recounts his experience regarding his mother's hospitalization and its impacts:

"The worst memories I have of my mother's mental illness were the days just before she was hospitalized. She was completely dysfunctional, often on the verge of being a danger to herself and others, and I had to convince her to go to the hospital. On several occasions, I had to call the paramedics because she was in crisis and then watch them leave the house without my mother because she refused to go with them. So when she was hospitalized, I always felt a sense of relief knowing she was safe and was being taken care of by health specialists. Of course, having to stay with my friends, grandparents or family friends for a few weeks was never easy, but it was better than living with my mother when she was in crisis. Likewise, when she came out of the hospital, resenting me for putting her there, I knew that a few weeks later, she would understand that it was for her own good."



## Facts

- People can be hospitalized when their symptoms get worse and they can no longer function in their daily lives or when they pose a danger to themselves or others.
- When people can function as before, they can go home.
- Sometimes, these patients will require home follow-up, that is, they can receive support once they return home.
- If you live with your parent, you may need or want to stay with someone like an uncle, aunt, friend or foster family until your parent can function effectively again.
- If you don't live with your parent, you are under no legal obligation to accommodate them after they leave a care establishment despite any pressure exerted by the establishment or your parent.

psychoeducators, etc.) will see your parent and perform a mental health assessment. Together with your parent, they will determine the best course of action to take. This can include medication, psychotherapy, stress management strategies and various other treatments or interventions. The time your parent spends in the hospital will vary depending on their needs.



Note that all information given by your parent to a professional or an employee of the health and social services network or community organization concerning their health is confidential. This applies to the notes contained in their file as well.

The members of a professional order (e.g., doctors, social workers, nurses, etc.) are bound by professional secrecy. They can only provide the information you request if your parent authorizes this, is unable to consent to care or is in a situation of immediate danger. Otherwise, they can help you by providing general information about the problem and/or refer you to a support resource.

## What if there's reason to believe your parent may harm themselves or someone else?

You don't have to solve the problem on your own. There are qualified people who can help. In an emergency (if you're worried your parent will harm themselves or someone else and you don't feel safe), always dial 9-1-1 and explain that it's an emergency related to a mental illness. Make sure to protect yourself and those nearby if necessary.

### Here are some causes for concern:

- Your parent's behavior scares you.
- Your parent is violent or does something dangerous.
- You don't know where your parent has been for several hours (unusual behavior).
- Your parent is injured.
- You can't wake your parent up.

In Quebec, a person suffering from a mental illness who presents a danger to themselves or others at a particular time may be subject to forced custody in to an institution under the Act Respecting the Protection of Persons Whose Mental State Presents a Danger to Themselves or to Others. This is an exceptional measure. The person is kept until the danger dissipates and/or their condition to be assessed, depending on the case. While confined, the person retains the right to communicate with their loved ones.

It can be stressful when emergency responders come to your house or when driving your parent to emergency services, so try to find someone to talk to right after this happens. If this is not possible, you can always contact **Info-Social 8-1-1**. Always turn to the people in your support network (see p. 46).

To learn more about the rights of persons with mental illness or find answers to your questions (e.g., consent, professional secrecy, access to medical files, protective supervision, etc.), consult the "Practical Guide to Mental Health Rights" developed by the Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux, which provides legal and practical information to relatives of persons with a mental disorder.

→ Link: <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/en/document-000836/>



## HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR PARENT?

Each family member has a role to play and specific responsibilities to ensure the family functions smoothly. Helping with meals, cleaning or laundry, for example, is important and brings several benefits. However, members must agree on how to divide these responsibilities, which must be assigned according to each person's age and ability. This attribution may also depend on the family's culture, values and rules.

During more difficult times, the family must adapt and be open to change in order to function properly. This may involve redistributing some responsibilities among family members or seeking outside help. For example, if your parent cannot perform daily chores because of their mental illness (e.g., cooking, cleaning, getting around, keeping appointments), it's good to take on some responsibilities, but not all!

According to the stories of parents who experience mental illness, some things you can do to help are:

- Learn about the mental illness to better understand what's going on,
- Keep busy with fun activities when your parent is not feeling well,
- Make time for yourself and engage in activities outside the home (e.g., playing sports or seeing your friends), even when your parent is not feeling well,
- Talk to someone (e.g., a friend, family member or teacher) when necessary and don't hesitate to tell your parent if this has been good for you.

**Other resources can also help (e.g., member associations of the Réseau Avant de Craquer, see p. 51).**

## Setting limits isn't always easy

In addition to your usual responsibilities, do you do any of the following?

- cooking or cleaning
- helping your parent with medication or medical appointments
- taking care of your younger siblings
- checking if your parent is ok, comforting them or being their confidant
- lending them money, paying the bills

These responsibilities can sometimes cause significant stress due to:

- A possible role reversal. You may feel you're becoming "your parent's parent", having to take on different tasks and making many decisions for your parent;
- The difficulty of meeting your own needs (e.g., concentrating on your studies, seeing your friends, relaxing, attending to your own feelings) because of the time devoted to supporting your parent;
- Unrealistic expectations (e.g., thinking you have no right to lose patience and be discouraged, or that you are responsible for your parent's well-being, or that your parent's failure to recover means you're not up to the task, etc.);
- Emotions of anger, sadness, guilt, mourning for the ideal parent, anxiety.
- The isolation and stigma surrounding mental health issues. Responsibilities may leave you little time to see your friends. Young people with a parent who have a mental illness may also find it difficult to seek support compared with those whose parents have a physical condition;

→ The financial responsibilities you take on (e.g., paying bills, buying groceries) to support your parent and/or your family, given your parent's situation.

It's important to recognize and accept your limits; no one is invincible, and stress is not a sign of weakness! What's important is to find your comfort zone when supporting your parent. Problems arise when the responsibility becomes too heavy.

It's essential to find a balance between helping your parent and living your own life. Taking a break and some time for yourself, knowing your parent is in good hands, is crucial for your health. If helping your parent becomes too much or if they're unwell, or if you find it difficult to recognize, accept or set limits with them, you may need to distance yourself or move, either alone or with another person (e.g., other parent, uncle, aunt, friend's family, shared apartment or alone). See p. 31.

**There are several terms for people who provide care or support to a loved one who has a mental illness, a physical disease, or another type of difficulty (e.g., psychosocial). They may be referred to as "caregivers", "caregiving persons", "carers" or "accompanying persons", for example.**



## Remember

- Each family member has a place within the family. Your parent's role is therefore not interchangeable with yours. You must set limits on your responsibilities and be able to discuss them with your parent.
- A parent with a mental illness often cannot meet their professional, family and social obligations. They may therefore be concerned about their child and their parental role.
- It's important to listen to your emotions and understand why you feel that way (e.g., the task you're given is too difficult).
- During more difficult times, turn to your resources and your support network. Asking for help is a sign of strength and helps promote the mental health of all family members.

## Offering comfort



"I took this photo to show the "parentified" child because they're comforting their mother when it's not necessarily their responsibility. It's happened to me in recent years, and even today, to have to comfort my mother in her sadness, her fears, to calm her anxiety and her anger ..."

Marie-Pier, 21



## The thread of a life



"Becoming an adult when you have a parent it is to have the role of parent and of children who mingle like a pile of wires. When my father became ill, the line between my parents and me became blurred. I alternated between the role of parent and child, and to a certain extent of husband, because I had to take over for my father who could no longer handle his duties."

Daniel, 23







## LIFE TRANSITIONS: PERIODS OF VULNERABILITY AND TURNING POINTS

Transitions (e.g., entering high school, CEGEP, university or, more generally, adulthood) are challenging periods. As young people gradually approach adulthood, they tend to gain more autonomy, separate from their parents and engage in more intimate friendships and romantic relationships. They also learn to manage their finances and care for themselves by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

The transition to adulthood usually occurs between 18 and 25 years of age, but it can also start around 16 and end after 30.

Young people transitioning to adulthood also face many choices in different areas, including:

- Studies (by choosing a field of study)
- Work (by defining a professional orientation)
- Romantic relationships (by specifying their sexual orientation, desired partner)

Life changes, such as changing schools (e.g., from high school to CEGEP), entering the job market, and moving out (e.g., moving into a shared apartment before settling in as a couple) requires effort to adapt to new living environments and achieve a work-school-social life balance.

All these challenges can put young people at risk of feeling anxious or depressed. The Canadian Community Health Survey (2012) reports that young Canadian adults are more likely than other groups to experience high levels of psychological distress. During these times of transition, it's particularly important to look after yourself by caring for your mental and physical health (see p. 38).

## Young people entering adulthood and who have a parent with mental illness

For these young people, the challenges specific to this time of life are another matter entirely. They explain that:

- Self-reliance can be "rushed" (e.g., when burdened with responsibilities that are too heavy for their age) or "limited" (e.g., when afraid to leave a parent who needs them).
- Building a sense of identity, central to this period of life, can be complicated by the multitude of roles that these young people may be called upon to play within their family (e.g., sometimes feeling the "parent of one's parent") of the fear of becoming like their parent and the lack of positive adult role models to identify with.
- Developing satisfying romantic relationships may be more of a problem because of difficulty trusting others, lower self-esteem and poorly developed social skills.
- Balancing school, work and family can also be difficult because of the time, money and energy that they offer their parents.

Gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status and other characteristics can alter the challenges these young people face. (Text continue on the following page →)



*"I had gotten to the point where I was no longer happy with my family, especially because of my father's condition. I had to think about my health and decided to leave the house. My life choices were not welcome, and I needed to figure out who I was."*

**Eli, 23**

*"Many times, I thought about leaving my parents' house because our relations were strained, and it was detrimental to my personal growth. But in my culture and my family, leaving home before getting married isn't approved of. When I reached a certain age, it became more and more difficult to find a balance between pleasing my parents, whose mental state wasn't always the best, meeting the demands of my culture, and finding myself. I felt guilty about leaving, and it was taboo to talk about it. So I decided to stay with my parents until I got married while respecting my limits and creating boundaries in my mind to protect myself and allow me to continue to enjoy living at home. My siblings and my boyfriend helped me a lot and so did talking to a psychologist."*

**Leila, 22**

Studies have found that young women may find it harder to become independent because they usually play a more supportive role within their families. Some young people from an immigrant background may also have to cope with family values that could limit their ability to explore. Young persons in a single parent or low-income family may also take more responsibilities, especially financial ones, to support their parent.

when I entered high school. I had behavioral difficulties all through high school (I was suspended twice, including once for the whole last semester), besides lacking interest in my studies and having problems with attendance. So I finished high school in adult education, where I was suspended for a year, again due to poor attendance and lack of interest. Anyway,

even though I didn't feel like all this affected me at the time, I now understand that it did. Subsequently, I did find a goal in school, and I was able to complete a DEC, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and nearly a second master's degree. So clearly, my problems in high school were not due to lack of ability."

For young people who have a parent with mental illness, the transition to adulthood may also be a turning point and a time for resilience. Developing new social and intimate ties (especially with a romantic partner), detaching from a difficult family environment, committing to post-secondary studies or a stimulating job or pursuing significant projects can all help them become more resilient. (See page 38 for additional strategies to promote good mental health.)

Guillaume, now 39, testifies to the benefit of having found a goal in school, despite the many challenges he faced during adolescence and early adulthood: "My mother's mental illness contributed to my parents' separation

*"It's not that I had to prepare for the transition, it's that when I was 18, I had to leave my mother's house because she decided she no longer wanted to be a mother. I had to leave, you know, I had to figure things out fast ..."*

**MC, 25**

## Growing small



*"Becoming an adult when you have a parent with mental illness can make you feel small and insecure because of the lack of positive adult role models. Maybe our parental role models are having a hard time getting through life themselves. So we don't feel ready to handle this vast world – and continue to imagine ourselves as small."*

**Victoria, 24**





*"Since I was little, my dream was to go to Université Laval. But for financial reasons and to take care of my mother, I decided to stay here rather than go to Quebec City."*

**Marie-Pier, 21**

Here are some suggestions to help you plan your departure successfully:

- Speak with someone who might understand your situation.
- Find the best places to live (e.g., someone's house, with a roommate, apartment, student residence) and explore the neighbourhood.
- Plan your budget (e.g., evaluate the resources needed to make ends meet, determine essential expenses, take your current debts and savings into account).
- Look into government loan and grant programs for your situation.
- Make a list of essential goods to have on hand.
- Plan future visits with your family/friends/neighbours as needed.
- Create and use your support network.

Of course, you can always keep in touch with your parent and visit them often. Moving is a big decision, and it can help to talk to someone who understands.

Regardless of your decision, taking care of yourself is critical. Taking a break from family life can be helpful at times to maintain good mental health.

## Stay or go? The big question during this time

Leaving can bring a sense of "freedom" and the feeling of carrying less weight on your shoulders. Still, it can also create a lot of guilt and doubt, depending on many factors (e.g., your current relationship with your parent, your values, your past experiences). For some young people, this choice isn't always possible. Circumstances may require them to stay with their parent (e.g., family and cultural

influences, limited resources, and/or autonomy). Either way, it's not an easy choice to make. Resources are available to help you consider the pros and cons of each situation and come to terms with whatever you decide.

For young people who decide to leave, it's normal to experience all kinds of emotions, but there's a way to prepare successfully for the transition.

## Together



*"What helps you feel better about the challenges of having a parent with mental illness is a support network. It allows us to confide in someone during difficult times, share our happiness, and dream together. My partner and some of my friends support me a lot in my daily life."*

**Victoria, 24**





## MAINTAINING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

The difficulties you have with your parent may affect your education, professional life, love life, well-being and other important aspects of your daily life. The good news is that there are ways to maintain good mental health despite challenges. This section includes examples of strategies you can apply to feel good or better. You'll see that taking time for yourself, talking to your parent and confiding in other people can help. By doing the self-assessment exercises at the end of this section, you can take stock of the means already at your disposal and those you can put in place.

## Take a break and some time for yourself

It's very important to take breaks from your family life. Wanting to feel good isn't selfish. Several young people say the following really helped:

- Visiting friends or meeting them for coffee
- Taking a walk outdoors or in nature
- Taking a bath
- Watching a movie or going to the cinema
- Playing music, dancing
- Writing in a journal
- Get active, running, hitting a punching bag, etc.
- Screaming into a blanket
- Taking a nap or practicing relaxation exercises
- Talking to your dog or cat (they can be attentive)
- Enjoying a hobby (e.g., drawing, photography)
- Volunteering
- Etc.

Young people with a parent who have a mental illness often say that joining a group of young people in a similar situation can also be a great help. There are resources that can help you and answer your needs (e.g., member associations of the Réseau Avant de Craquer, see p. 51).

**Taking time for yourself allows your body and mind to better cope with the challenges you meet with your parent and with life in general.**

*"When you go for a hike in nature, for example. You observe different views, it's so calming. When you have a parent with a mental illness, it's heavy, it's tiring, it is redundant, you worry about them all the time. When you get to places like that, it allows you to relax, to rest and say to yourself, 'Ok ... there are other things in life', it's bigger than just your mother with her problem."*

**Joany, 24**



## Communicating with your parent: it's important!

It's good to try to talk to your parent about what's going on. It might sound difficult, but you could simply start the conversation by sharing your worries. For example: "Dad, you look tired lately. I'm worried. What's going on?"

You might even want to share this guide with your parent as a starting point. Try to have a conversation when things are going pretty well at home, when no one is discouraged or angry. It might be a good idea to plan this conversation ahead of time so that everyone feels ready to have a serious discussion. For example: "Dad, do you think we could talk after dinner tonight?"

When talking, use the "I" technique, that is, express yourself by starting with "I feel ..." or "I am (name the emotion) ..." For example, instead of telling your parent that "You need to get some help", try saying: "I'm really worried about you, and I think it might help if you talk to someone about what you're going through."

Keep in mind that one conversation with your parent will not solve everything. It may take several, starting with smaller things and tackling more important topics with every discussion. You might be afraid to upset your parent by talking about this, but they'll probably feel better when they understand what you're experiencing.

### When communicating gets complicated

It may be more challenging to talk to your parent when their symptoms are too severe. They may be in a bad mood, or you may feel like they don't want to spend time with you. They might also want you to be their confidant and expect you to reassure and comfort them. When people aren't feeling well, it can be hard for them to have a real conversation with others. During these times, your parent may have difficulty listening to you or considering your point of view.

The truth is, your parent may not be aware or realize how they behave with you or others, or they may not have the energy to think about it. Keep in mind that the person living with mental illness is not limited to their symptoms; they retain their qualities and skills, but sometimes the symptoms overshadow these. When this happens, it's important to:

- Remember that it is not your fault and that you are not responsible for their recovery! Rather, it's the role of qualified professionals to support people with a mental illness in their recovery.
- Use your emotions as a barometer to set your limits. When you feel that the situation is too heavy or challenging to discuss with your parent, don't hesitate to say that it's not the right time to talk. Then focus on the means at your disposal to take care of yourself. Resume discussions when you both feel calmer or less sad.



**If you feel like you can't cope with your parent's situation, talk to someone you trust: a family member, your doctor, one of your teachers, etc. See *Free and Useful Resources*, p. 51**

## Closing



"This photo represents the relationship with my mother regarding her depression. The clock represents the passing of time [...]. The closing door indicates a distance in our relationship, in our conversations, making it difficult to offer support [...]. My mother conceals her difficulties to protect us. At the same time, I pull away since I feel helpless, and it hurts. The sunshine and the half-open door, however, represent times when she's confided in me, and I was able to listen."

**Victoria, 24**



## Water through my fingers



"This photo represents my mother 'running through my fingers'. I want to help her, but I can't because she keeps her distance. This is how I feel with her: she's very distant, and I can't get close. I feel her getting away like water running through my fingers."

**MC, 25**



## It really helps to talk with people you trust!

It's crucial to talk with your parent if you can, but it's also important to find someone you trust to confide in. It can help you feel less alone, and it doesn't mean that you're betraying your parent. Remember, others can't understand what you're going through if you don't tell them.

You can try to confide in:

- Your other parent
- Your brother or sister
- Other people in your family who you trust, e.g., an aunt or uncle
- A professor or teacher
- Friends

You can also participate in self-help and support groups. These groups allow you to exchange with other young people who are in situations similar to yours. You may also need to talk to a professional or a qualified counselor (psychologist, social worker, psychoeducator, special educator, doctor, etc.). In most schools, colleges, universities (and even some workplaces), counselors are available to talk privately with students having difficulties. There are also programs or support services for students. Don't hesitate to ask about the services available in the places you go often and seek help, even if you aren't sure you need it. Unfortunately, many young people wait until a crisis occurs before doing so.

**See p. 51 for a list of resources available in your region.**

*"You can step outside yourself for help. There are other people besides you, and sometimes you're not the best person to help yourself. Sometimes you need to look to others."*

**Marianne, 21**

## TALKING IS HEALTHY

**Remember that you aren't betraying your parent when you talk to others about how you feel. Sharing our feelings is a basic human need. Some signs indicating you should confide in a professional or counselor are:**

- You feel distressed.
- You feel that the comfort of your loved ones isn't enough.
- You start having problems carrying out your daily activities, e.g., studying, hobbies, working
- Your loved ones see that you need help and mention it to you.

**Professionals and counselors in various organizations (e.g., schools, CEGEPs, universities, CLSCs) are trained to help people experiencing different types of difficulties. The conversations you have with these professionals are confidential. They are there to listen without passing judgment. They will ask questions to guide you towards solutions to your challenges and suggest strategies that may help.**



## Free professional consultation services, available 24/7

If you want to speak with a counselor, the following resources are available for young people 20 years and under, any time of the day or night. Conversations are free and confidential, even from a cell phone. Texting and online chats are also possible. You will be helped by a qualified professional who knows how to support young people facing the same challenges as you. Services are available in French and English.

### TÉL-JEUNES

- Phone: 1-800-263-2266
- Text: 514-600-1002
- Live chat: [teljeunes.com/Tel-jeunes](http://teljeunes.com/Tel-jeunes)

### KIDS HELP PHONE

- Call: 1-800-668-6868
- Text: TEXTO at 686868
- Search "Find a youth program near you" online anywhere in Canada ([kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca))
- Chat app iOS or Android "Always There" or online at [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)

For young people aged 20+ years, Info-Social 8-1-1 is a free and confidential telephone consultation service.

It can be hard to know how to start a conversation or ask for help, especially when you feel overwhelmed or aren't used to sharing your thoughts or feelings.

The following sentences might help you start the conversation:

- If you talk to someone who doesn't know your parent's situation: "My dad has a mental illness, and I find it difficult sometimes. I was wondering if we could talk about it because I feel like I need some help."
- If you talk to someone who knows you and your family, you can start by describing what's happening or what's changed in your family life. For example, "I'm worried about my mother. When I get home from class, she's still sleeping. She doesn't even realize I'm there, and I often hear her crying. I don't know what to do."

# Ways to help maintain good mental health

There are many ways to maintain good mental health despite life's challenges. Keep in mind that it's not necessary to use all these strategies to ensure good mental health. Some are better than others depending on your situation, and it's important to respect yourself.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Use the following tool to identify what you're already doing and what you could be doing to help you feel good and achieve balance in different areas of your life, despite the challenges you face.

*I already do this.*    *I want to explore it.*    *I'm not interested or Not applicable.*

I ADOPT GOOD LIFESTYLE HABITS			
I take the time to eat well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I go to bed at a reasonable time to get enough sleep.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I exercise or play sports regularly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I monitor or reduce my intake of stimulants, e.g., coffee, tea, soft drinks, energy drinks, chocolate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I reduce or completely stop my use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other ways: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I MAINTAIN MY SOCIAL NETWORK			
I have positive relationships with family, friends, acquaintances or work colleagues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I regularly engage in leisure activities or fun outings with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get help from those around me when I need it and ask for it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am inspired by people who have had difficulties like mine and found ways to help themselves.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other ways: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I TAKE CARE OF MYSELF			
I direct my attention to the present moment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I apply strategies to help me calm down when I'm going through a stressful situation (e.g., taking deep breaths, meditating, reading, listening to music, practicing a sport)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I welcome my negative thoughts and let them go, reminding myself they're just thoughts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I deal with problems one step at a time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I keep a list or diary to organize my tasks.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I consult a support organization or mental health worker/professional as needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I learn to recognize the signs that tell me I need to take better care of myself (e.g., irritability, fatigue)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use encouraging words, pictures or inspirational phrases to focus on the positive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take the time to congratulate myself or reward myself for my successes, both large and small.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to stay hopeful during the most challenging times.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I avoid comparing myself too much to others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I express what I think and what I feel (e.g., using "I" sentences).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I set limits with my parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I communicate my needs to my parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I speak up when something isn't right for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other ways: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

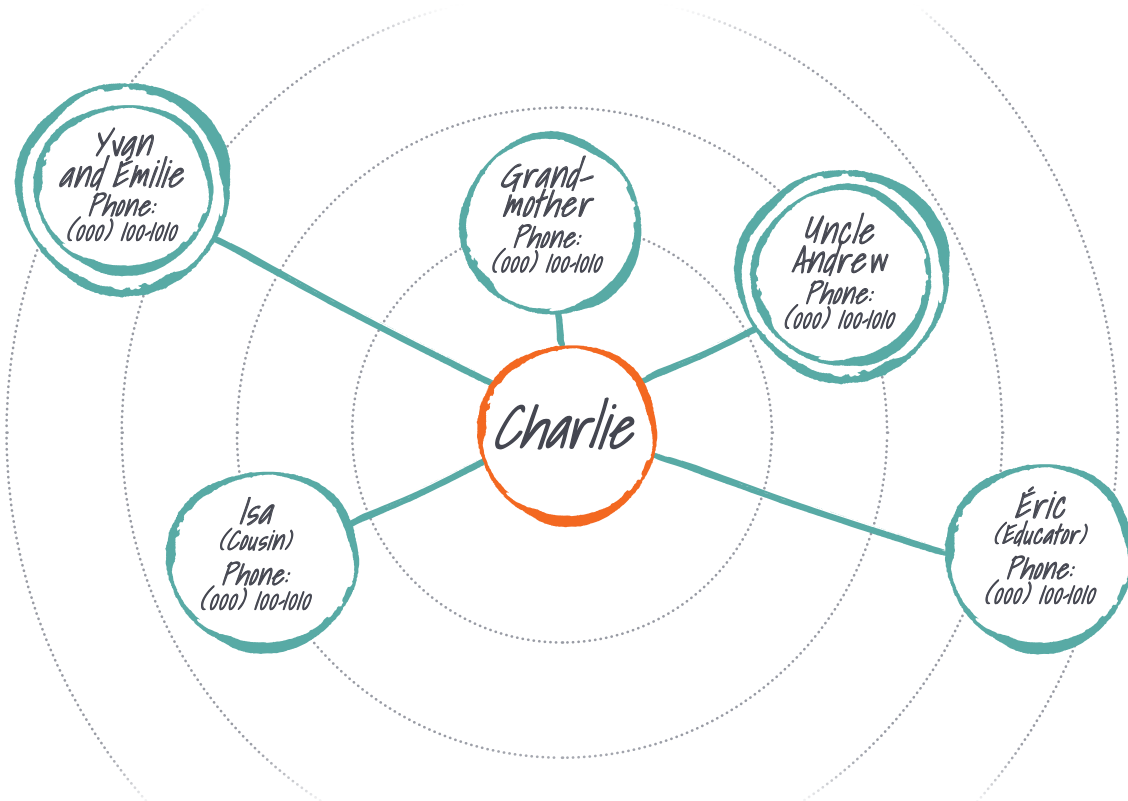
I GET INVOLVED			
I find projects that are meaningful to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I set realistic goals for myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I participate in activities that highlight my strengths.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I volunteer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I visit public places in my neighbourhood (e.g., library, coffee shops).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other ways: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## IDENTIFY YOUR CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

This section asks you to think about the people you can turn to in various situations: when you need to confide in someone, get advice or reassurance, take your mind off things and share some relaxation moments, get help with your daily activities (e.g., to drive you somewhere, help with your household chores, run errands) or for any other support (e.g., financial, if needed). Your circle could include family, friends, teachers, doctors, social workers or other people you know or are in contact with.

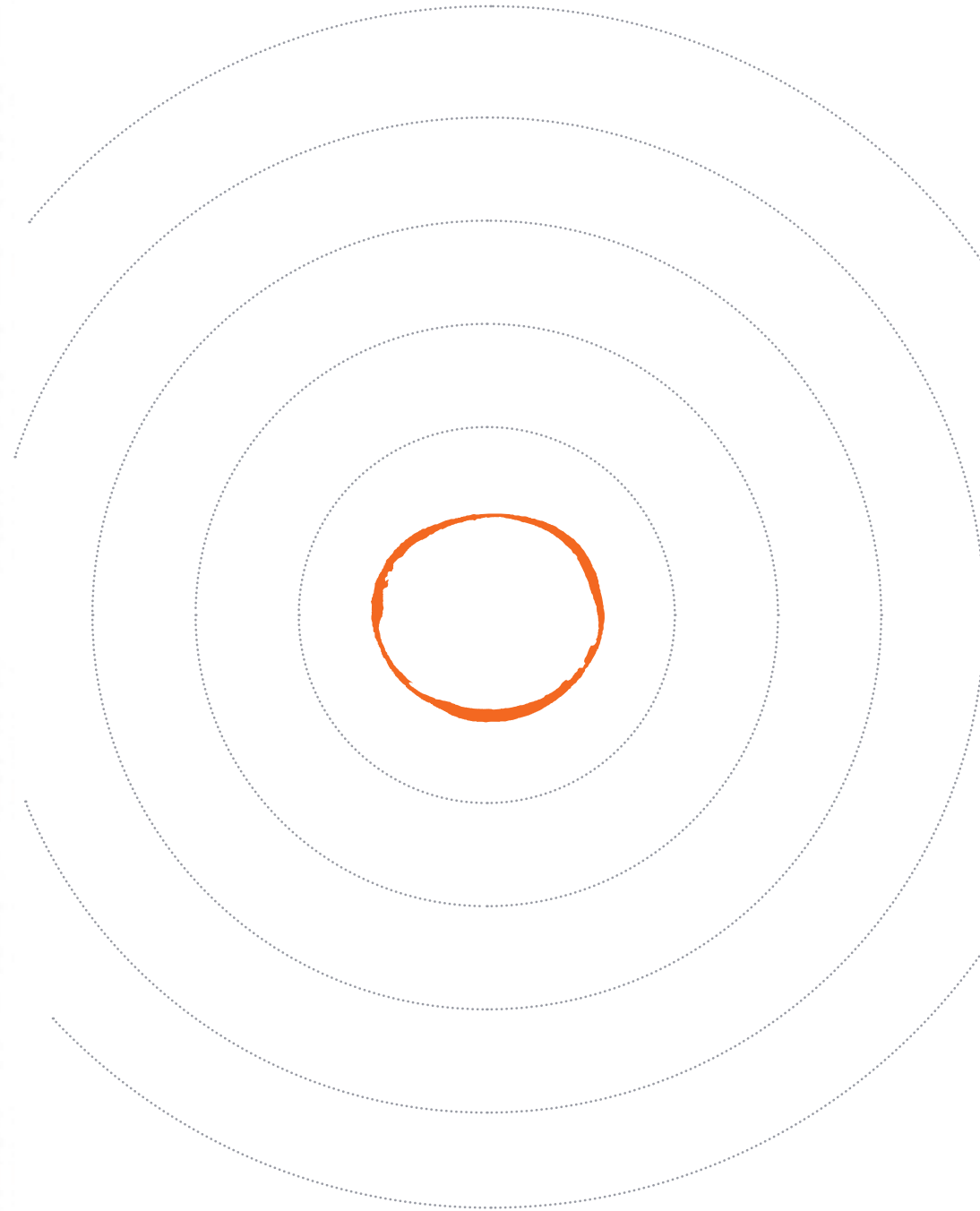
- **Write your name in the centre of the diagram on the next page.** Write the names of people you can count on in the other circles. Add their phone numbers or email addresses.

- **Place those closest to you near the centre circle** and those who aren't as close farther away.
- **Draw a double circle around those you can count on most in an emergency** (e.g., to look after your siblings or your children if your parent needs urgent hospital care).
- **Notify these people that you may call on them during an emergency.** Talking to them in advance, during a moment of calm rather than a time of crisis, can reassure you they'll be available when needed and help you feel more confident about asking for their support.



## YOUR DIAGRAM

It's your turn now! Write down the phone numbers of the people you identified and keep this list in your bag or wallet. You can also take a picture of this diagram to save on your phone.





# SOME FINAL TIPS

Remember... you're not alone! Many other young people have a parent with a mental illness. Those who helped develop this guide wanted to indicate what strategies worked for them and share them with you. Here's their advice:

*"Taking care of yourself can help your parent. It's probably one of the best things you can do."*

*"Don't hesitate to ask for help. I know you can do it on your own, but sometimes a little help feels good!"*

*"Remember, it's not your parent's fault, and it's not yours. Their behavior is the result of their mental illness."*

*"A good circle of friends is essential so you're not always thinking about what's wrong with your life and can experience a lot of other wonderful things."*

*"Try to always be kind to yourself, just as you'd be to your best friend!"*

*"I wish I had known it wasn't my fault because I often thought it was. The good news is that with time and effective treatment, people can get better. But it can take a while. To get through it, surround yourself with good friends and people you can talk to."*

*"It can be stressful at times ... but it can also make you stronger and more mature than others."*

*"I often found my family situation a burden, but I didn't want it to hinder my development or prevent me from accomplishing everything I wanted. So I tried to find the tools and resources to achieve my goals."*

*"Understanding my parent's issues better, having information helped me better deal with their mood swings."*

*"Be careful about the Internet. A lot of information is wrong. Yet, some websites are based on reliable data. You can find some examples of useful links on the last page of this guide."*

*"Remember to take time for yourself! It can really help."*

*"Understanding what you're up against is an excellent start to overcoming it."*

*"I wish I'd known sooner that there were other kids like me. But now that I know, I don't feel alone anymore, and I know I can get through it like others do."*

# FREE AND USEFUL RESOURCES

Some of the following resources offer emergency services, while others provide information on topics dealing with mental health. The majority are targeted to people of all ages unless otherwise noted (i.e., some are specifically targeted to adolescents and young adults). For additional resources, go the following website:  
<https://lapproche.uqo.ca/ressources/>



## Useful websites

### → [avantdecraquer.com](https://avantdecraquer.com)

Created in 1985, the Réseau Avant de Craquer includes 41 associations from across Quebec whose mission is to provide support to those living with a person who have a mental illness by offering a diversity of free services, such as individual meetings, information, training activities, support groups and respite care.

The Réseau Avant de Craquer is the only group in Quebec intended exclusively for family members, including young people like you who have a parent with mental illness. Each year, these associations offer support to more than 20,000 people living with a person who have a mental illness. Some associations provide activities specifically targeted to young people who have a parent with a mental illness.

A web platform was also developed specifically for young people aged 18-25 who have a loved one (parent, friend, brother or sister) with mental illness.

For more information, visit the Réseau's website ([avantdecraquer.com](https://avantdecraquer.com)), the web platform ([aidersansfiltre.com](https://aidersansfiltre.com)) or call 1-855-CRAQUER (272-7837) to join an association in your area.

### → [quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/mental-health-mental-illness](https://quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/mental-health-mental-illness)

This Government of Quebec website offers advice and information on mental health. You'll find a list of care resources and services as well as a practical guide on mental health designed for those close to someone with mental health issues.

### → [teljeunes.com/Tel-jeunes-en - Tél-Jeunes](https://teljeunes.com/Tel-jeunes-en-Tel-Jeunes)

You'll find on this website articles and testimonies on different subjects (e.g., love, sex, friends, family, drugs, school, etc.). If you like, you can also have a free, confidential chat with a psychosocial worker.

### → [iamstillyourchild.com](https://iamstillyourchild.com)

You'll find on this website a documentary film about the realities of young people who have a parent with a mental illness along with stories and resources you may find useful.

### → [qualaxia.org/dossier/intervenir-aupres-des-proches](https://qualaxia.org/dossier/intervenir-aupres-des-proches)

In this file of the Qualaxia Network you can find tools and publications on various themes related to the needs and realities of those close to a person with mental illness.

### → [ranq.qc.ca/en/](https://ranq.qc.ca/en/)

The RANQ (Regroupement des Aidants Naturels du Québec) brings together local and regional associations to provide support to caregivers. Their website contains articles, tools and publications related to caregivers' needs, rights and realities.

### → [lapproche.uqo.ca](https://lapproche.uqo.ca)

The website of the research and action laboratory for people with mental health problems and their loved ones (LaPProche)'s lists the projects the team has carried out with young people and families with a parent who have a mental illness. You will find articles on the subject and useful resources and tools for young people and families.



## Phone helplines

(Available at all times)

- **Emergency service**  
Dial **9-1-1** for an emergency.
- **Info-Santé 811**  
Dial **8-1-1** to speak with a nurse about a non-urgent health problem.
- **Info-Social 811**  
Dial **8-1-1** to speak with a professional about a psychosocial issue.
- **Tél-Jeunes**  
Dial **1-800-263-2266** or text **514-600-1002** to speak with a professional on any topic.
- **Kids Help Phone**  
Dial **1-800-668-6868** or txt **TEXTO** at **686868** to speak with a professional on any topic. iOS or Android chat app "Always There" also available.
- **Suicide prevention**  
Dial **1-866-277-3553** (1-866-APPELLE) for support related to suicide prevention

The research and action laboratory for people with mental health problems and their loved ones (LaPProche) is dedicated to fundamental and applied research on family issues associated with mental illness. It focuses, more specifically, on the situation of young people aged 0-25 who have a parent with mental illness.

**The members of the Laboratoire employ three main approaches:**

- **A participatory approach** consisting of research WITH young people rather than ON young people, recognizing their expertise as a complement to that of the professionals, students and researchers involved in the projects;
- **A partnership approach** aimed at bringing together researchers in Quebec, Canada and internationally with professionals and experts across different sectors of the mental health field;
- **A developmental approach** based on theoretical models that recognize the diversity of factors and the complexity of the mechanisms involved in psychosocial adaptation.

**To learn more: [lapproche.uqo.ca](http://lapproche.uqo.ca)  
Contact: [lapp@uqo.ca](mailto:lapp@uqo.ca)**

