



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

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)
- Chat app iOS or Android "Always There" or online at 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.			
I go to bed at a reasonable time to get enough sleep.			
I exercise or play sports regularly.			
I monitor or reduce my intake of stimulants, e.g., coffee, tea, soft drinks, energy drinks, chocolate.			
I reduce or completely stop my use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco.			
Other ways: _____			
I MAINTAIN MY SOCIAL NETWORK			
I have positive relationships with family, friends, acquaintances or work colleagues.			
I regularly engage in leisure activities or fun outings with others.			
I get help from those around me when I need it and ask for it.			
I am inspired by people who have had difficulties like mine and found ways to help themselves.			
Other ways: _____			

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

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



Bravo for this work of reflection and introspection! Did you enjoy it? Did using the tool make you aware of certain things? Do not hesitate to send us your comments and to write to us at the following address: lapp@uqo.ca

Please note! This tool is here to help you see things more clearly, but it does not replace a coaching job done by a professional psycho-social intervener. If you feel this tool is insufficient or would like to talk to someone about what you are seeing while using it, feel free to visit our resources page. For immediate help, call Info-Social at 8-1-1

<http://lapproche.uqo.ca/guide-jeunes>



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