

**BEHIND** EVERY  
**FACE,** THERE'S  
**A STORY...**  
**FOR** EVERY  
**PERSON,** THERE'S  
**A SOLUTION!**



# OLIVIA

Olivia has a brother who lives with a mental health problem. Throughout her teenage years and into early adulthood, she felt that everything revolved around her brother and that her role was to protect him by acting as a mediator. Today, she has found solutions that allow her to move on with her own life, to have a more balanced relationship with her brother and her parents, and to do so without feeling that she is responsible for his recovery.



How do I deal with the taboos and prejudices of the people around me?

How do I find my role and place in the family?

Why should I seek help when I'm not the one living with a mental health problem?



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**We are here to help you find solutions!**

A RÉSEAU AVANT DE CRAQUER INITIATIVE

**Contact us today!**

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## I have a sibling with a mental illness. What do I need to know?

Having a sibling living with a mental disorder causes great upheaval within the family unit and has particular repercussions on the sibling relationship. The sibling you knew suddenly becomes strange, unpredictable and unrecognizable. Some siblings may find themselves at an impasse, stripped of their past, and may have difficulty investing in their own futures. (1)

Siblings often have difficulty determining how they can support their loved one. Young siblings, who often witness the first signs of the illness and provide warning to their parents, are the most disconnected from their sibling's treatment team. However, they provide support for their sibling's social integration and play an important role in maintaining family ties. Therefore, they, too, deserve to be supported and recognized.

Older children end up taking on a parent-like role with respect to their suffering sibling. They inherit their parents' burden without having the tools to shoulder it. After having been excluded from the caregiving process for some time, they now find themselves not only included but often brutally so. They are especially good at breaking their sibling's isolation. (2)

When a sibling is in crisis, they may be mean, violent or unpleasant. When this happens, it is difficult for others to differentiate between the person and the mental illness. As a result, siblings can experience a lot of anger. Within minutes, they can hate their sibling. They may want them out of the house or their lives. Once the storm is over and they see their sibling's actions as a product of their illness, they will often feel guilty for having had these thoughts. However, it is normal to experience intense emotions like this. It is important to remember that you have a right to be angry. You simply have to learn how to manage this type of emotion. (3)

Seeing a sibling suffer may make a child afraid of developing the illness. They may also sense that their parents share the same anxiety. It is therefore very important to discuss this fear to break the taboo. It is essential for siblings to have access to information that is systematic and tailored to their needs.

Young people who live with a sibling with a mental disorder need to develop their ability to bounce back from stress. They must also find their balance within the family. Daily life is often lived in ambivalence with a certain degree of instability. For many of them, it will not always be easy to recognize the positive aspects of this experience because of all the suffering caused by the situation.

Exhausting yourself mentally and physically by taking on a sibling's problem is not a solution. That's why it's important to define your role as an assistant to your sibling and inform yourself so you better understand the problem and feel more in the loop. To maintain a healthy balance, it's essential to find tools to help you let go of any guilt and set boundaries. To find peace and establish a comfort zone in your relationship with your sibling, it is important to take care of yourself emotionally, socially, professionally and physically and develop communication mechanisms to express your own needs to your loved one with a mental illness.

For tips on balancing your personal life and your relationship with your sibling, check out the Sibling section of [Avantdecraquer.com](http://Avantdecraquer.com)

### Sources

1. DAVTIAN, Hélène, *Les frères et sœurs de malades psychiques*, UNAFAM, Paris, 2003, 36 p.
2. DAVTIAN, Hélène, *op. cit.*
3. LEGAULT, Caroline, *Avoir un frère ou une sœur atteint de schizophrénie*, 2007, [alpapbem.qc.ca](http://alpapbem.qc.ca)