



Looking after your own mental health

This information sheet is for young siblings (14-25s)

Produced by the Rethink Mental Illness Siblings Network



There are many things that you can do to look after your own mental health and emotional wellbeing, whether or not you have a mental health problem. This information sheet suggests some of the things that young people who may be supporting a brother, sister or other family member with mental health problems – might find helpful.

It's especially important to look after yourself if you are feeling stressed or anxious – all too often, it's easy to forget the basics like eating properly or getting enough sleep. It's also important to find ways to cope that work for you – everyone is different, and situations can change over time, so it's often a matter of trying different things out.

Talk to your friends

It's very easy to become isolated if you are caught up with looking after someone else who is experiencing mental health problems, or you are worried about how your brother or sister is behaving and how other people might react.

Talking to someone you trust – who could be a family member, a friend or perhaps a teacher or tutor at college – can help you 'share the load'.

Continuing to take part in your favourite hobbies or pastimes, or joining a local group can help you not to become isolated – or can be a way of finding new friends and building up a social life.

Spending time with your parents

When your brother or sister is very unwell, it can sometimes feel like your parents do not have enough time to talk with you, as they might spend a lot of time looking after the needs of your sibling. If you feel that you are not getting enough time with your parents, you could try talking to them about this and ask if you could set aside some time to do something you enjoy together.

Share your feelings

Letting people know how you feel, including what you might be worried about, is often really helpful in reducing the feeling that ‘you are on your own’.

You might like to talk about how you are feeling with your friends, family (including relatives and extended family), school or college counsellor, or on safe online networks such as the sibling section of Rethink Mental Illness’ online forum: www.rethink.org/talk or The Site’s online bulletin: <http://vbulletin.thesite.org/>

Mental health difficulties are more common than people sometimes think, and often talking about mental health can open the door to other people sharing experiences. It can also help you to stop feeling that you have to cover the situation up which can sometimes lead to feelings that you are alone in how you are feeling. The more you talk about it, the easier it becomes to express and people will be able to understand better when they know what you are worried about.

Many young people report that being listened to and sharing their dilemmas helps them to come up with new ideas for solving a problem

or difficulty that they are facing. It can also boost confidence, self-esteem and make you feel more in control of the situation.

Exercise and activities

As well as being good for your physical wellbeing, taking part in exercise and activities can be another way of meeting new people and making friends. Some people find that exercise helps their concentration and that they sleep better; others find that exercise which helps you to relax (e.g. yoga) can be very useful in making them feeling less anxious, tense and stressed. Local libraries are often a good source of information about what activities are available in your local area.

Taking time for your interests

Many young people find doing the things they enjoy like watching TV, going to the cinema or listening to music, can help them to relax and to think through the things that may be bothering them... so if these activities appeal to you, then planning some regular times for them is very important.

A number of research studies also suggest that young people can find creative activities like painting, photography, acting and dancing can be good ways of expressing feelings, as well as a way of perhaps channelling energy in a positive way – and of course, they can also help people to meet others with similar interests.

Taking regular breaks to do these things – especially if it seems like everything is getting on top of you – is a recognised way of tackling stress.

Knowing when and where to get help

It can be reassuring to know what's available in your local area if you begin to feel that you need some extra help or support for yourself or for your brother or sister – and the internet or your local library is often a good source of information about what's available, while it is also helpful to talk to your parents, a teacher or a school counsellor about your concerns.

If the difficult feelings or emotions that you, or your brother or sister, are experiencing get to the point that they are having a big impact on your everyday life, or they last for longer than a few days, then you should consider talking to someone. This could be your parents, your GP, or if you are already in contact with mental health services, the professional working with you or your family.

For more info:



Many national mental health charities provide information about mental health services on the websites and you can often download free booklets and information sheets; some also offer telephone advice lines.

Some suggestions of places to try include:

Rethink Mental Illness (www.rethink.org) provides an extensive range of information resources for people of all ages affected by mental health problems. The website has a dedicated section for young people which includes tips on how you can look after your own mental health at www.rethink.org/youngpeople

Siblings Network (www.rethink.org/siblings) is an information and support network for anyone who has a brother or sister affected by

mental illness and has a special section for young siblings aged 14-25. They have an online forum where you can talk to other siblings.

Mind (www.mind.org.uk) produces factsheets, rights guides and short booklets on different mental health disorders and recommended treatment options.

Young Minds (www.youngminds.org.uk) particularly focuses on information for children, young people and families and carers affected by mental health problems. YoungMinds runs a Parents Information Service, a free confidential helpline.

Youth in Mind www.youthinmind.co.uk information for young people, parents and professionals working with young people (e.g. teachers in schools and colleges)

**For information and advice about mental illness,
contact our advice team.**

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 10am to 1pm

Email advice@rethink.org

www.rethink.org

Our Siblings Network provides information, advice, and a space to share stories and get support for anyone who has a brother or sister affected by mental illness.

Find out more at www.rethink.org/siblings

We hope this information was helpful to you and we welcome your feedback and comments. If you would like to send us feedback about this factsheet you can:

Email siblings@rethink.org

Telephone 020 7840 3128

Write to:

Siblings Network
Rethink Mental Illness
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TP



**Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.**

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0300 5000 927
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