



# COULD MY SIBLING HAVE A MENTAL ILLNESS?



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is made possible in part by



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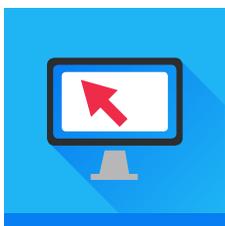
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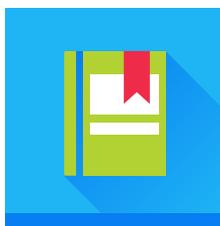
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## WHERE?



**Online**

TeenMentalHealth.org



**In Print**

Amazon.com

# INTRO

Finding out that your brother or sister has a mental illness can bring up many different emotions. Some people feel upset and worry that their lives will fall apart. Other people feel relieved to know what's going on with their loved one. Some people worry that they might also develop a mental illness or that they might be treated differently because of their brother or sister's mental illness. Some people have all of these thoughts and feelings, and many others as well. This can happen whether or not you live with your sibling and see him or her everyday, or if you are living apart and see each other occasionally.

With all of this happening, it's normal to feel confused. This book was designed to help you understand more about your sibling's illness and provide you with answers to some of the questions you may have. It may seem obvious but it's important to remember that even though your brother or sister has a mental illness, he or she is still your sibling. Your brother or sister isn't a totally different person, even if he or she might act differently sometimes. Most mental illnesses are very treatable, and with time, effort, and effective treatment, things will get better.

# WHAT IS A MENTAL ILLNESS?

A mental illness or mental disorder is a medical illness that is based in the brain. Mental illnesses affect the way people think, feel, and act. The problems caused by a mental illness may make it more difficult for people to be as successful at school, at home, at work, or with friends as they would like to be. Things that used to be easy may feel very difficult. Just like a physical illness, your brother or sister can't just "snap out of" a mental illness. Mental illnesses can be effectively treated but they require professional help from a doctor, psychologist, nurse or counsellor.

# A MENTAL ILLNESS IS DIFFERENT THAN A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM OR MENTAL DISTRESS:

1

A **mental health problem** usually happens following a highly stressful event in someone's life, such as a breakup, job loss, or the death of a loved one. When someone is experiencing a mental health problem, he or she might have a hard time coping with strong emotions or have trouble thinking or acting the way he or she used to. Although upsetting for the people experiencing them, mental health problems will usually be resolved with healthy coping strategies and time. Mental health problems do not usually require medical attention, although often talking to a counsellor can help.

2

**Mental distress** is something that everyone experiences. For example: being frustrated because we're stuck in traffic, worried we didn't study enough for an exam, or thinking someone has treated us unfairly. Although unpleasant, mental distress does not need professional help. It passes relatively quickly with the use of healthy coping strategies and it's actually good for us! Experiencing a little bit of stress helps us practice effective ways to cope, so that we're better prepared when we encounter more significant stressors.



# COMMON MENTAL ILLNESSES

There are many different types of mental illnesses and it's possible for someone to have more than one. Understanding more about how a mental illness affects the person who has it can make it easier for you to cope with the challenges of having a brother or sister with a mental illness.

# 1

## Depressive Disorders

Feeling down or sad when something negative happens is a normal reaction. Most of the time, these depressive feelings go away on their own or disappear when something positive happens. Depressive Disorders (often called Depression or Clinical Depression) are different. Depression is a mental disorder that occurs when these feelings of sadness and hopelessness, difficulty concentrating, loss of interest or enjoyment, and other symptoms don't go away. Instead, they interfere with every part of your brother or sister's life – at school, at home, with friends, and with you. Depression affects people's thoughts, feelings, actions, and even

their physical activities. It becomes the filter through which the depressed person sees the world. There are different kinds of Depressive Disorders; some that are more intense and tend to occur in short bursts (e.g., Major Depressive Disorder) and others that are less intense but more long-lasting and pervasive (e.g., Persistent Depressive Disorder). Depressive Disorders often run in families, which means that if someone in your immediate family has a Depressive Disorder, you are also more likely to develop a Depressive Disorder (more about that on page 22). Effective treatment of Depressive Disorders includes psychotherapy and medication.

For more information on Depression, check out *TeenMentalHealth Speaks.. Depression Magazine* at [teenmentalhealth.org](http://teenmentalhealth.org), [youtu.be/i8EPzKxAiVw](https://youtu.be/i8EPzKxAiVw) and [teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/depression](http://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/depression)

# 2

## Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is when your brother or sister has frequent thoughts or mental images (i.e., obsessions) that cause him or her considerable anxiety, which he or she tries to eliminate using repetitive behaviours (i.e., compulsions). For example, your brother or sister might have obsessive thoughts about germs, which make him or her feel extremely anxious. Your brother or sister then washes his or her hands excessively (the compulsion) to try to reduce the anxiety. Compulsions are

excessive (i.e., way more intense than is necessary, even if the obsessive thoughts were true) and are not always clearly linked to the obsession they are trying to neutralize. Common compulsions include hand washing, checking, and ordering. People with OCD can spend a large part of their day fixating on obsessions and performing compulsions, which makes it hard for them to study, work, or socialize. OCD is most effectively treated with psychotherapy and medication.

For more information on OCD, check out *TeenMentalHealth Speaks.. OCD* at [teenmentalhealth.org](http://teenmentalhealth.org), [youtu.be/ua9zr16jC1M](https://youtu.be/ua9zr16jC1M) and [teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd](http://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd)

# 3

## Anxiety Disorders

It's normal to feel anxious or worried on occasion. For some people it might be the night before a big exam or job interview, or right before a first date. This is different than the anxiety experienced by someone with an Anxiety Disorder. Someone with an Anxiety Disorder experiences inappropriate, excessive, or unreasonable worry about a situation or object. These feelings are overwhelming, making it difficult for your brother or sister to do certain things or be in certain situations, even if it's never been a problem before. Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental illnesses and there are many different types:

### a

#### Social Anxiety Disorder

Social Anxiety Disorder, which is also called Social Phobia, is when someone fears social situations where he or she might be judged, such as a performance or a presentation. **For more information on Social Anxiety Disorder, check out: TeenMentalHealth Speaks.. Social Anxiety Disorder Magazine at [teenmentalhealth.org](http://teenmentalhealth.org) and [youtu.be/kithQUWrA7s](https://youtu.be/kithQUWrA7s)**

### b

#### Panic Disorder

Panic Disorder is when someone has repeated unexpected panic attacks that significantly and negatively impact their life. Panic attacks are sudden and overwhelming surges of fear and anxiety that are accompanied by frightening physical sensations (e.g., racing heart, difficulty breathing, nausea, chest pain, sweating, etc.). Someone having a panic attack often believes he or she is dying. In addition to constantly fearing that they will have another panic attack, many people with Panic Disorder also develop Agoraphobia. **For more information on Panic Disorder, check out TeenMentalHealth Speaks.. Panic Disorder Magazine at [teenmentalhealth.org](http://teenmentalhealth.org) [youtu.be/R3S\\_XYaEPUs](https://youtu.be/R3S_XYaEPUs) and [teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/panic-disorder](http://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/panic-disorder)**

### c

#### Separation Anxiety Disorder

Separation Anxiety Disorder is when someone is afraid of being separated from someone important in his or her life (usually a parent). This kind of anxiety is not considered a disorder when it occurs in very young children because it's fairly common. It is only considered a mental illness if the separation anxiety is developmentally inappropriate – like it would be in an older child, a teenager, or an adult. **For more information on Separation Anxiety Disorder, check out: [youtube.com/watch?v=jEkFp0Ux4OQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=jEkFp0Ux4OQ)**

### d

#### Agoraphobia

Agoraphobia is when someone is afraid of being in situations from which he or she cannot easily escape, such as a bus, the movie theatre, or a crowd. Often people with Panic Disorder develop Agoraphobia because they are afraid of having a panic attack in a situation where it might be embarrassing or where they might not be able to find help.

**e**

## Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is when someone is excessively and inappropriately afraid of or worried about many events or activities. He or she worries about everything and this worry prevents him or her from living a fully enjoyable life. **For more information on Generalized Anxiety Disorder, check out: [teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/generalized-anxiety-disorder](https://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/generalized-anxiety-disorder)**

**f**

## Specific Phobia

Specific Phobia is when someone is afraid of a specific situation or object. Common phobias include flying, heights, animals, and blood.

The fear experienced by someone with an Anxiety Disorder is debilitating, long-lasting, and persists even if the person realizes that he or she shouldn't be afraid. Anxiety Disorders frequently run in families (more on that on page 22) and are most effectively treated by psychotherapy and if necessary, by medication.



# 4

## Eating Disorder

If your brother or sister has an Eating Disorder (Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder, or Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified), he or she likely eats far too much or far too little and uses dangerous methods to lose weight. The self-esteem of someone with an Eating Disorder can be derived largely

from the way he or she looks or the amount he or she weighs. Although Eating Disorders are more common in women (especially teenage girls), they can also occur in men. Eating Disorders have serious physical, social, and emotional consequences and can be life-threatening. They are best treated using psychotherapy.

For more information on Eating Disorders, check out: [keltyeatingdisorders.ca](http://keltyeatingdisorders.ca)

# 5

## Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder

It's normal to feel distracted, restless, or hyperactive on occasion. This usually happens when something unusual is happening in your life. You might be distracted at work or school because something is going on with your family or friends. You might also be restless because you're bored and there's nothing to do. You might be really excited or hyperactive because you're going to a big concert or party tonight. ADHD is much more than just sometimes feeling distracted, restless, or hyperactive. Someone with ADHD usually also has trouble remembering details, organizing, planning, keeping quiet, waiting his or her turn, or sitting still. For someone with ADHD, these feelings are not related to any specific

event and he or she feels this way in multiple different situations (e.g., at school, at home, with friends). These symptoms are excessive and there all the time – not just when something stressful or exciting is going on. For someone with ADHD, it's not that he or she doesn't want to be attentive or focused; it's that it's really hard for him or her to do so. This is because of differences in the way the brain works, not because your brother or sister is intentionally being rude or disrespectful. ADHD frequently has a genetic component and is most effectively treated with medication. Psychotherapy can also be helpful to work on social skills, and help with learning and school work is also often needed.

For more information on ADHD, check out *TeenMentalHealth Speaks.. ADHD Magazine* at [teenmentalhealth.org](http://teenmentalhealth.org), [youtu.be/rIKMo8VuC\\_c](https://youtu.be/rIKMo8VuC_c), [youtu.be/rLghxG3mGMM](https://youtu.be/rLghxG3mGMM) and [teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/adhd-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder](http://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/adhd-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder)



it's important to remember that even though your sibling has a mental illness, he or she is still your brother or sister.

# 6

## Bipolar Disorders

Bipolar Disorders are mood disorders where someone's mood changes suddenly from extremely low (Depression) to high (Hypomania) or extremely high (Mania). These shifts in mood can happen over hours, days, weeks, or even longer. The way people think and act also changes when they are in a Manic, Hypomanic, or Depressive episode. People experiencing Mania feel like they can do anything, regardless of reality. Their thoughts race, as does their speech; they don't feel the need to sleep; they're easily distracted;

and they often do things that are really risky and could cause them serious harm (e.g., unprotected sex, risky business investments, shopping sprees, dangerous physical activities), without acknowledging the risks and consequences. Bipolar Disorders have a significant genetic component, which means that if someone in your immediate family has Bipolar Disorder, you are more likely to also develop Bipolar Disorder (more about that on page 22). Bipolar Disorders are most effectively treated by medication and psychotherapy.

For more information on Bipolar Disorders, check out [TeenMentalHealth Speaks.. Bipolar Disorder Magazine at teenmentalhealth.org](#) and [teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/bipolar](#)

# 7

## Autism Spectrum Disorder

People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have trouble understanding what to say or do when they're interacting with other people. Often, they also have very specific interests (e.g., motors, a specific sport, occupation, or animal) on which they are intensely focused. Many people with ASD have trouble adjusting to changes in their routine and like things to happen in a specific order every time. People with ASD often have unusual reactions to different sensations, including sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and sights. ASD is

usually diagnosed when someone is in preschool years, but it sometimes isn't discovered until later, especially if your brother or sister's symptoms are not severe. The most effective treatment for ASD is a type of intensive behaviour therapy called Applied Behaviour Analysis. The earlier someone with ASD receives proper treatment, the more effective that treatment is likely to be. Research does not support the use of a special diet in the treatment of ASD. ASD is not caused by vaccinations or poor parenting.

For more information on Autism Spectrum Disorders, check out the [Geneva Centre for Autism: autism.net](#)

## 8

## Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people following a severely traumatic event (e.g., war, natural disaster, rape, assault, witnessing a murder). Someone with PTSD continues to re-live the event, through flashbacks and/or nightmares, and often experiences intense anxiety and physical distress in reaction to

things that remind him or her of the traumatic event. This anxiety is so distressing that the person may avoid places and situations that remind him or her of the event. Most people exposed to a traumatic event will not develop PTSD. PTSD is most effectively treated with psychotherapy and if necessary, medication.

For more information on PTSD, check out: [nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml)

## 9

## Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is diagnosed when someone experiences the following:

a

**Delusions.** The unwavering belief in something that is not true, even when there is proof;

b

**Hallucinations.** Believing you can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch something that does not actually exist;

c

**Disorganized thinking.** Poorly organized, poorly communicated, and difficult to understand thoughts and speech;

d

**Grossly disorganized or abnormal motor behaviour.** Behaviour that is unpredictable, inappropriate for the situation, or completely non-reactive to the environment (i.e., the person is like a statue);

e

**Negative symptoms.** decreased emotional expression, purposeful behaviour, speech, social interest, and pleasure or enjoyment.

Schizophrenia has a genetic component, meaning that if someone in your immediate family has Schizophrenia, you are at higher risk for also developing the disorder. If you are at risk for Schizophrenia, marijuana use may increase your chances of developing the disorder. Schizophrenia is most effectively treated with medication and social therapies.

For more information on Schizophrenia, check out: [teenmentalhealth.org/families-and-teens/schizophrenia](https://www.teenmentalhealth.org/families-and-teens/schizophrenia) and [vimeo.com/74929622](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74929622)

# Substance Use Disorders

Substance Use Disorders (a.k.a. addictions) are diagnosed when someone uses a substance (e.g., alcohol or drugs) excessively or inappropriately, causing harm to themselves or others. This harm can be internal (e.g., physical consequences, mental health problems) or it can be external (e.g., driving while impaired, job loss, violence against others). These harmful effects occur because addiction affects the way the brain works and interferes with the brain's ability to accurately understand the world. When people get "addicted", their brains crave the substance, causing them to use a substance excessively. This excessive use causes their brains get used to the substance (i.e., tolerance), which means they'll need more and more of the substance to feel the same "high". This means that they'll spend a considerable amount of time using or trying to obtain the substance, their brains will have difficulty functioning without the substance (i.e., withdrawal), and they'll experience lots of negative physical and emotional sensations when they're not using the substance. All of these factors make it very difficult for someone to quit a substance if he or she is addicted.

People can start drinking alcohol or using drugs for many reasons – peer pressure, to cope with negative emotions, to control symptoms of another mental illness, necessity

(e.g., using prescription pain killers after an injury), or because they enjoy the feelings the substance provides. Few people believe that they will become addicted when they start drinking or taking drugs but the truth is, addiction has very little to do with will power. Excessive alcohol and drug use affects the way the brain works and it becomes much more complicated than just making the decision to quit. Although certain substances are more addictive than others, not all people who drink alcohol or use drugs will become addicted. There is also a genetic component to addiction; meaning that if someone else in your immediate family has a substance use problem, it may have contributed to why your brother or sister was more susceptible to becoming addicted. This means that you also are at higher risk for addiction.



# KNOW THE SIGNS OF ALCOHOL POISONING & DRUG OVERDOSE



## Signs of alcohol poisoning

- a** Loss of consciousness
- b** Slow or irregular heart beat
- c** Vomiting
- d** Seizure
- e** Low body temperature
- f** Pale or bluish skin



## Signs of drug overdose

- a** Loss of consciousness
- b** Chest pain
- c** Racing or irregular heartbeat
- d** Delusions/hallucinations
- e** Seizures or uncontrollable twitching
- f** Faster breathing
- g** Fever
- h** Heavy sweating
- i** Cold or pale skin



## Call 911 immediately!

Someone with alcohol poisoning or a drug overdose may get brain damage or die. It is essential that you call for help immediately if you notice any of the signs listed above.

For more information on Substance Use Disorders, check out the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse ([ccsa.ca](http://ccsa.ca))

# OTHER CONCERNS



## Suicide

Although your brother or sister has a mental illness, he or she is not necessarily suicidal. Many people with mental illnesses do not have suicidal thoughts and most people with a mental illness will not attempt suicide. However, certain mental illnesses do increase the risk for suicide, especially if your brother or sister has multiple mental health problems, so you should be aware of the warning signs, just in case:

**a** Intense hopelessness or sadness

**d** Withdrawal from family and friends

**b** Preoccupation with death

**e** Talking about what it will be like when they're gone

**c** Loss of interest in regular activities

**f** Giving away valued possessions

### WHAT CAN I DO?

It's okay to ask your sibling if he or she is suicidal and tell him or her that you are concerned. Asking about suicide will not put the idea in his or her head. If you suspect your sibling is suicidal, tell your parents, bring your brother or sister to the hospital, and/or call 911. Never agree to keep suicidal thoughts a secret. Suicide risk is serious and you cannot handle this on your own.

Knowing your sibling is suicidal may cause you to feel extremely anxious, sad, angry, or guilty. Talking to a counsellor about what you are going through can be really helpful. See page 41 for help in getting support.

# WHY WOULD SOMEONE WANT TO DIE BY SUICIDE? THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY SOMEONE MIGHT ATTEMPT SUICIDE, INCLUDING:

- a** To escape from problems that may seem overwhelming
- b** To end painful feelings of sadness, rejection, or loss
- c** To stop feelings of shame and guilt
- d** Because they believe that others would be better off without them
- e** Because alcohol or drugs have altered their thinking and mood
- f** Because they feel that life isn't worth living
- g** Because they feel worthless and hopeless about the future

People who die by suicide usually believe that it is the only way out. Their thinking is clouded and they are not able to realize how their actions will affect the people who care about them. Suicide is strongly associated with untreated mental illness. The best way to decrease suicide risk is to effectively treat the underlying mental illness.

## 2

### Self-harm

Self-harm (or self-injury) is when people intentionally hurt themselves by cutting, biting, hitting, burning, pulling out hair, etc. Many people think that people who self-harm are suicidal (i.e., they assume that by cutting, the individual is trying to die) but that isn't true. Self-harm is not the same thing as suicide. Often, self-harm has nothing to do with death and instead, is used to cope with strong emotions.

If your brother or sister self-harms, it can be hard for him or her to stop – either because he or she doesn't want to or doesn't know how to. If self-harm is how your brother or sister copes with

intense emotions, it's important for him or her to develop healthier coping strategies before he or she tries to stop self-harming. He or she needs to have healthy tools in place to handle difficult emotions. This will take time and patience. A counsellor, therapist, or psychologist can help your sibling build up a toolbox of positive coping strategies and understand more about where his or her difficult emotions come from. When your brother or sister has more positive coping strategies to choose from, it makes it much easier for him or her to stop.

For more information on self-injury, visit [sioutreach.org](http://sioutreach.org)

# MYTH BUSTING

**M** = MYTH

**F** = FACT



### People who have mental illnesses are violent and dangerous.

People who have mental illnesses are no more violent and dangerous than anyone else. People with mental illness are actually more likely to be the victim of a crime than to commit it. Unfortunately, the media often stigmatizes people with mental illness, making them look like dangerous and irrational criminals. A small number of people with delusions and hallucinations may commit unusually violent acts but most violence is committed by people who are not mentally ill.



### People who have mental illnesses are weak and lazy.

Mental illness is not about will power or laziness. People can't just "snap out of it." Mental illness changes the way someone's brain works and requires professional treatment.



### Mental illnesses are very rare.

Mental illnesses are more common than most people think. Approximately one in five people will experience a mental illness at some point in their life.



### People who have mental illnesses can't lead normal lives.

With early intervention and proper treatment, along with supportive family and friends, people with mental illnesses often can live the same kind of life as anyone else, and sometimes even recover from the mental illness altogether.



### Kids and teenagers can't develop mental illnesses.

Anyone can develop a mental illness – and most adults with mental illnesses had mental health problems that started in their teenage years. Mental illness and mental health problems in children and teenagers are very real.



### Mental illnesses are all in someone's mind.

Mental illnesses are as real as any other medical condition. They are disorders of the brain, just like diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas.

# STIGMA

Stigma is a “polite” word for discrimination. It’s a negative attitude people have about something they don’t understand that can result in physical, mental, and emotional harm to others or themselves. Most often, people make hurtful and judgmental comments and assumptions about people suffering from mental illness because they don’t understand that mental disorders are just another kind of medical disorder. You wouldn’t expect someone in a wheelchair to be able to climb stairs just because someone said “snap out of it!” This is just as true for mental illnesses. Often, stigma can be extended to family members as well. Just like your brother or sister, you may also experience stigma. The best way to fight stigma is to help people better understand mental disorders. Of course, it’s up to you to decide if every stigma experience is worth your fight. As important as it is to try to increase people’s understanding of mental illness, not everyone is willing to listen. Pick and choose your battles. There’s no shame in ignoring someone if it doesn’t seem worth your while.

# Q **COMMON** QUESTIONS

1

## What causes mental illness?

Although we don't know exactly what causes most mental disorders, we do know that they rarely have one specific cause and instead, are likely the result of many different factors, including:

a

### Genetics

Many mental illnesses are more common in the biological relatives of people with mental illnesses.

b

### Environment

Certain aspects of the environment, including where you live; where you go to school; where you work; who you live with and spend time with; your personal financial and emotional stability; and your family's financial and emotional stability can increase the risk that you will develop a mental illness.

c

### Life Events

Certain traumatic events (e.g., war, assault, death of a close loved one, serious financial or personal loss) can trigger the onset of mental illness in people who are already at risk for the disorder. Most people who experience these events will not develop a mental illness.

Mental illnesses are not caused by race, religion, nationality, gender, culture, or age. Mental illnesses are not caused by the usual stresses and strains of everyday life.

2

## Did I do something to cause my sibling's mental illness?

You had nothing to do with the fact that your brother or sister developed a mental illness. Mental illnesses are caused by multiple factors; disagreements with siblings, typical sibling teasing, or not spending much time together do not cause mental illness.

3

## Does my brother or sister even like me?

Sometimes people with mental illness don't have the ability to put themselves in another person's shoes and realize how their words and actions affect other people. Mental illness skews your brother or sister's judgment and can make it hard for him or her to understand how something he or she says or does might make you feel. Although it can be really tough, try not to take what your brother or sister says personally. If conversations become very negative, do what you can to remove yourself from the situation.

4

## Will I develop a mental illness too?

Mental illnesses are not contagious but many of them do run in families. That means that because your brother or sister has a mental illness, you may be at higher risk for also developing a mental illness. This may be due to genetics (sharing the same biological parents) or it may be due to environment (growing up in the same family) – but either way, having a brother or sister with a mental illness does not mean that you will develop a mental illness. Mental

illnesses are the result of multiple factors and most people who have a brother or sister with a mental illness never go on to develop a mental illness themselves. Regardless, there are things you can do to help reduce your risk, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy, avoiding drugs and alcohol, developing a positive and supportive social network, and learning how to use healthy coping strategies to deal with stress.

5

## Will my brother or sister get better?

With appropriate and effective treatment, many people with mental illnesses can lead happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives. Treatment can include psychotherapy (i.e., talk therapy), medication, learning specific skills, or changes in your brother or sister's environment to better suit his or her needs. The treatment that will work best

for your brother or sister will depend on his or her individual characteristics (e.g., biology, personality, activity, home life) and the type of mental illness he or she has. Your brother or sister may need to be in treatment for a long time to stay healthy, although the type, frequency, and amount of treatment may change over time.

# 6

## What things increase the chance of getting well from a mental illness?

a

### Positive attitudes

People with positive or optimistic attitudes tend to use healthier coping strategies, which contribute to better quality of life, even when living with mental illness.

b

### Early effective treatment

Like early identification, the sooner your sibling receives treatment with interventions that are supported by the best scientific evidence, the more likely he or she is to improve. It's important for someone with a mental illness to receive the most effective treatment available. **To find out more, check out:**

[teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/evidence-based-medicine](https://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/evidence-based-medicine)

c

### Avoiding drugs and alcohol

Some people use drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with or escape from the symptoms of mental illness. Unfortunately, all this does is mask symptoms temporarily and in the long-term, often makes problems much worse. Additionally, for certain people who are at risk, using drugs and alcohol may trigger the onset of mental illness. In particular, marijuana has been found to trigger Schizophrenia.

d

### Early identification

The sooner we realize someone has a mental illness, the sooner we can treat that illness. In addition, identifying mental illness early often means that the problems associated with having a mental illness don't have time to get really bad. The best way to improve early identification is to understand what mental illness is and how to spot it.

e

### Healthy lifestyle

Eating a balanced diet (lots of fruit and vegetables, avoiding junk food), getting regular vigorous exercise (30 minutes per day, five days per week), and getting enough sleep (7 to 9 hours per night) are all essential components of a healthy lifestyle. Although a healthy lifestyle won't cure mental illness on its own, it does make it easier for your sibling to stay healthy once they've received effective treatment and sets the stage for evidence-based treatment to work.

f

### Taking medications as prescribed

This may seem pretty obvious, but some people with mental illness stop taking medication altogether when they start to feel better, thinking they no longer need it. Often, the person feels better because of the medication, and his or her symptoms will come back when he or she stops taking it. Any changes to medication use should be discussed with a family doctor or psychiatrist before acting.

**g**

## Using healthy coping strategies

Learning how to deal with stress in healthy and effective ways is important for good mental health. See page 29 for some healthy coping strategies.

**h**

## Good support network

Having people you can talk to and count on is important for anyone but especially for people who are coping with mental illness. Whether your support network includes family, friends, professionals (e.g., doctors, therapists, teachers), or a mix of each, cultivating a strong support network is essential.

Keep in mind that it can take months for someone with a mental illness to make noticeable improvements. Many of the changes that occur happen inside the person before they become visible to the outside world. Treatment requires time and effort – both to improve symptoms and to figure out which treatment will work best. Your brother or sister's doctor may need to try him or her on many different medications or therapies in order to find the one that works best. Treatment is complicated and unfortunately, there is no magic pill that works overnight.

**7**

## What can I do to help?

If your brother or sister has a mental illness, the best and most important thing you can do is support them. In order to support someone else, you also need to look after yourself. Here are a few pointers:



**a**

## Educate yourself

Understanding more about your brother or sister's mental illness and how it affects him or her will help you to be less frustrated and more supportive.

For more information, check out [TeenMentalHealth.org](http://TeenMentalHealth.org)

**b**

## Encourage your sibling to seek help

Having someone he or she can trust, like you, is so important. But someone trying to cope with a mental illness also needs treatment. Encourage your brother or sister to see a doctor or psychologist to get the help he or she needs. Even if the problems don't seem that bad yet, seeking help early can prevent problems from getting worse. **You can encourage your sibling to use Kid-help-phone, even if they are not a kid! Their number is 1-800-668-6868**

**c**

## Listen

When you listen to and acknowledge your brother or sister's feelings, it sends the message that you care. Knowing that you have people who care about you is an important part of recovering from a mental illness.

**d**

## Don't blame yourself

It is not your fault that your brother or sister has a mental illness. Many different factors are involved. No one can "make" another person develop a mental illness.

**e**

## Be positive

Positive moods can be contagious! It's really easy for someone with a mental illness to focus only on the negative aspects of his or her life. Sharing your positive mood may help your brother or sister see things from a different perspective.

**f**

## Be realistic

Part of supporting your brother or sister is understanding how mental illness affects him or her at various points in time. Having realistic expectations for how he or she will behave and what he or she is capable of in certain situations will make things easier for both of you.

**g**

## Put yourself first

On an airplane, they tell you that in an emergency, you should always put on your oxygen mask first before you assist someone else. You'll be no help to anyone if you're passed out. The same goes for helping your brother or sister. If you burn yourself out by always putting him or her first, you won't be able to help anyone. It's absolutely okay (and so important) to take time away to take care of yourself.

h

## Don't try to change your brother or sister

You don't have to solve all of your sibling's problems or turn him or her into a different kind of person. Just be present and supportive.

i

## Have fun together

Your brother or sister needs someone who can have fun, relax, and laugh with him or her. These are all important parts of his or her mental health (and yours!).

j

## Be patient

Sometimes it can be frustrating when your brother or sister doesn't seem to want to be around you or do anything he or she used to like to do. Take a deep breath and remember that the mental illness is making him or her feel this way. He or she can't just "snap out of it." Getting impatient will only make the situation worse. Stay positive and be patient and encouraging.

k

## Be aware of suicide risk

If your brother or sister talks about death or suicide, don't ignore it or keep it a secret. Bring your sibling to the hospital and/or call 911. Let your sibling know that you care about him or her and his or her life. If your brother or sister is talking about suicide, you must take it seriously.

8

## Will my brother or sister ever be the same?

It's very common for people's symptoms to change as they get older. Sometimes those symptoms improve and sometimes they get worse. It can feel like you've lost the brother or sister you once knew. Your family may function differently than it used to, either because people have changed or because it needs to function differently to support your brother or sister. Your brother or sister may need to look after him or herself differently in order to get healthy and stay healthy – your family may need to do the same. It's okay to grieve the loss of what your family used to be, but try to keep in mind that all families change over time and change is not always bad. There may be some very great things about how your family now works and the way your brother or sister now relates to you. It will take some time to adjust but keep an eye out for the positive changes instead of focusing only on the negative.

# TAKING CARE OF YOU

Having a brother or sister with a mental illness can be stressful and overwhelming at times. It's important to know your limits and know when to say no and take some time for yourself.

# COMMON SIGNS OF TOO MUCH STRESS

1

## Physical symptoms

Headache; neck ache; indigestion; stomach ache; sweaty palms; racing heart; difficulty sleeping.

2

## Emotional symptoms

Crying; anger; loneliness; forgetfulness; diminished sense of humour; irritability; hopelessness; unhappiness; indecisiveness; sensitivity; anxiety; difficulty concentrating.

3

## Behavioural symptoms

Drinking, smoking or using drugs; withdrawal or avoidance; acting aggressively; feeling restless; grinding teeth; eating poorly; having nightmares.



# YOU NEED TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF FIRST AND FOREMOST. USING HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH STRESS IS ESSENTIAL. TRY THESE:

**a**

## Exercise

Daily physical activity improves your health and mood, and helps you get rid of stress. Even something as simple as going for a walk can help, but try to get at least 30 minutes of vigorous exercise each day.

**b**

## Eat healthy

Eating a balanced diet gives your body the fuel it needs to help combat stress. Try not to skip meals, eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, and go easy on the junk food.

**c**

## Go outside

Staying inside all the time can be really draining. Getting outside and enjoying the sun and fresh air can improve your mood and remind you that things are not as bleak as they sometimes appear. Try to link this with exercise if you can; even a brisk walk outdoors may help.

**d**

## Breathe deeply

Take a minute and try the box breathing exercise below. Taking deep breaths slows your heart rate and helps you calm down.

**e**

## Stay away from alcohol and drugs

Although you may feel better in the short-term, alcohol and drugs don't resolve stress. Instead, they give you a false sense of confidence and often make your problems worse in the long run. This includes cigarettes!

**f**

## Build healthy relationships

It's important to have a good support network of people you trust. When your family is wrapped up in looking after your brother and sister, it's also important to have people you trust outside of your family. Having friends outside of your family gives you a place to get away from it all, clear your head, and relax.

**g**

## Limit caffeine

Caffeine can make your heart race, which can make you feel worse.

**h**

## Daily relaxation time

Take time each day to relax. Read a book, watch a movie, listen to music, hang out with friends – whatever helps you relax.

**i**

## Spend time alone with your parents

If your brother or sister requires a lot of attention from your parents, it can feel sometimes like you're being overlooked – even if you no longer live at home. You are every bit as important as your brother or sister. Asking to spend time with one or both of your parents away from your sibling gives you both time to relax and helps strengthen your relationship.

**j**

## Acknowledge your feelings

It's okay to feel angry or upset once in a while. You're human, and bottling up your feelings isn't healthy. Try talking to the people in your support network about your emotions. Sharing your feelings with someone else can feel like a weight is lifted off your chest.

**k**

## Be realistic

Mental illness can make your brother or sister interpret things as more negative than they actually are. Remind yourself that the mental illness may be skewing your sibling's perspective and things actually may not be as bad he or she believes them to be.

**l**

## Manage your time

Learn how to schedule and prioritize your projects and other responsibilities – it will help you feel more in control, more productive, and less overwhelmed. Use a timetable organizer and check it every morning to help you plan your day.

**m**

## Accept what you can't change

Not being able to change your sibling's behaviour or to make them well can be really frustrating. It's important to remember that the only thing you can control is your own behaviour. Try not to dwell on the things you can't change and focus on the things you can (e.g., your reactions to other people's behaviour).

## n

### Box breathing

If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

a

Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.

b

Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.

c

Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.

d

Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing in again.

## o

### Sleep

Getting 8-9 hours of sleep each night will help you feel better the next day. If you have trouble sleeping, try these tips:

a

Go to sleep and wake up within 30 minutes of the same time every day.

b

Follow a regular nightly routine before you go to bed. A series of steps that you follow every night cues your body that it's time to fall asleep.

c

Don't read, do work, or use your computer or phone from your bed. This teaches your body that when you're in bed, you should be sleeping.

d

Avoid electronic screens (TV, computer, phone, tablet, etc.) for at least one hour before bed, and try not to bring them into your bedroom.

**Check out [Healthy Sleeping on: teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/healthy-sleeping](https://teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/healthy-sleeping)**



SOMETIMES  
I FEEL...

1

## Guilty when I'm having a good time

It's not your fault that your brother or sister has a mental illness. You can't stop living your life because he or she isn't healthy. Do your best to be there for your brother or sister but remember that you have a life to live as well. There's no point in both of you being unhappy, upset, or worried. It's perfectly okay (and SO important) to look after yourself and have fun.

2

## Ashamed that I don't want to be around my brother or sister

Having a brother or sister with a mental illness can be really stressful. It's not unusual to not want to spend time with your brother or sister in order to avoid that stress. You shouldn't have to feel guilty for needing time to yourself. It isn't selfish – it's essential.

3

## Alone, like no one understands what I'm going through

It can feel pretty isolating when you have a sibling with mental illness. Talking to other people who have similar experiences can really help. Talk to your doctor or your sibling's doctor to see if there are family support groups in your area.

If not, there are resources online that you might find helpful, including: [rethink.org/carers-family-friends/brothers-and-sisters-siblings-network](http://rethink.org/carers-family-friends/brothers-and-sisters-siblings-network) and [siblingsupport.org](http://siblingsupport.org)

4

## Overwhelmed because people expect me to look after my brother or sister

It can be a lot of responsibility to look out for another person and it can seem unfair when you're not that person's parent or guardian. Talk to your family if you're feeling overwhelmed. Chances are – other members of your family might be feeling the same way. Try to share the load with each other and make sure that you take time to look after yourself.

5

## Overwhelmed because people expect me to look after my brother or sister

It can be a lot of responsibility to look out for another person and it can seem unfair when you're not that person's parent or guardian. Talk to your family if you're feeling overwhelmed. Chances are – other members of your family might be feeling the same way. Try to share the load with each other and make sure that you take time to look after yourself.

## 6

### Pressure to be perfect

Having a sibling with a mental illness can be stressful for the whole family. Many siblings feel pressure to be perfect, almost as if by being perfect, they can make up for problems caused by their brother or sister's mental illness. Sometimes this pressure to be perfect comes from parents who are too exhausted to deal with another set of problems, but sometimes the pressure comes from within the sibling themselves. When you see your parents stressed out about issues with your brother or sister, it's only natural to want to do what you can to help reduce their

stress – but pressuring yourself to be perfect is not the answer. You're human and you will make mistakes. It's part of life – an important part of life. Making mistakes helps you learn about yourself and figure out who you are. If it is your parents or other family members who are putting pressure on you, tell them. They want you to be healthy and happy, and may not even realize that they've been pressuring you. Communicating with your parents and sharing how you feel will be better for both of you in the long run.

## 7

### Worried about the future

Although none of us know what the future holds, the future can feel especially daunting for someone with a mental illness. You may worry how your brother or sister will function as an adult – if he or she will be able to have a job, be in a relationship, or live on his or her own. That's totally normal when you care about someone. Whether or not your brother or sister will be able to do these things depends on the type

of mental illness he or she has, the severity of his or her illness, how quickly he or she receives effective treatment, the type of treatment received, and how well he or she adheres to the treatment plan. Many people with mental illness are able to live happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives, provided they receive effective treatment early and have a strong support network of friends and family – including you.

## 8

### Embarrassed by my brother or sister's behaviour

Sometimes people with mental illness have difficulty understanding how their actions will affect other people. Or, they may understand the impact of their actions but feel unable to act any differently. Unfortunately, that means that sometimes your brother or sister may do something that you find embarrassing, even if he or she isn't trying to embarrass you. As tough as

it may be, remember that the mental illness is making your brother or sister act this way and try to be patient with him or her. Your brother or sister may be just as embarrassed as you are. Having a support system of people who are patient and understanding is an important part of your brother or sister getting well.

# DEALING WITH YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER

It may seem obvious but it's important to remember that even though your sibling has a mental illness, he or she is still your brother or sister. It's important to look after your relationship and try to spend time together. After all – no one understands you or your family quite like your brother or sister. Make sure that you put your own mental health first and don't allow yourself to become overwhelmed with your sibling's problems, but make an effort to spend time with him or her when you can. Knowing that he or she has someone like you who cares will make it easier for your brother or sister to get well.

Talking to any sibling can be aggravating at times, but when your brother or sister has a mental illness, it can sometimes make effective communication difficult. The following list contains tips for improving communication with your brother or sister.



**a**

## Be respectful and polite

This can be a challenge if your brother or sister is feeling especially negative or has let you down. Try taking a deep breath and remember that mental illness might explain why he or she is acting this way and you don't have to join the negativity.

**b**

## Talk normally

Think of your brother or sister as a person and talk to him or her the way you would want someone to talk to you. It can be easy to forget that our siblings are unique people with their own personalities, interests, and worries – they're more than just their mental illness or their relationship to us. Think about how you would want someone to talk to you and try speaking to your sibling that way. It may take a bit of work at first but you might be pleasantly surprised by how your brother or sister reacts.

**c**

## Avoid blaming

Even if your brother or sister was at fault, blaming him or her for whatever has happened will only make your sibling defensive and less likely to listen to what you have to say. Use "I" statements whenever you can. They communicate your message without causing the other person to feel as defensive. For example, instead of saying "You blew off our plans!", say "I was disappointed and hurt when you didn't show up." This puts the emphasis on how it made you feel, instead of what your brother or sister did wrong.

**d**

## Express your feelings

Even though your brother or sister has a mental illness, he or she is still your sibling. Your feelings matter just as much as his or her feelings. If you think it will help, tell your brother or sister when you're upset, stressed out, scared, and even happy. Expressing those feelings will help improve your mood and seeing how you deal with your emotions may help your brother or sister learn different ways to deal with his or her own emotions.

**e**

## Choose a suitable time and place to talk if the topic is sensitive

Even though your brother or sister has a mental illness, he or she is still your sibling. Your feelings matter just as much as his or her feelings. If you think it will help, tell your brother or sister when you're upset, stressed out, scared, and even happy. Expressing those feelings will help improve your mood and seeing how you deal with your emotions may help your brother or sister learn different ways to deal with his or her own emotions.

**f**

## If you are not comfortable talking, write a letter

If you are not comfortable speaking to your brother or sister face-to-face, writing a letter can be a good alternative. A letter allows you to express how you feel without your emotions confusing you. It also gives your sibling the opportunity to read it on his or her own time. Giving your brother or sister some time to process what you needed to say allows him or her to be less defensive than he or she may be if confronted in person. A good idea when writing a letter is to put it away for a day when you've finished, and then read it again to make sure you've said what you really want to say.

# DEALING WITH YOUR PARENTS

Many siblings of people with mental illness feel overlooked, forgotten, or neglected by their parents; overwhelmed with the pressure to be perfect; or weighed down by responsibility of looking after their sibling. This is totally normal, but that doesn't make it okay. If you're experiencing any of these feelings, it's really important that you talk to your parents about how you feel. Ask to speak to your parents in private. Stay calm. Be honest. And tell them what you need. Keep in mind that they're probably feeling pretty overwhelmed as well. They may not be able to accommodate exactly what you ask for but knowing how you feel and what they can do to help will likely improve your relationship with your parents and contribute to you feeling better in the long run. If you have trouble getting your parents to understand where you're coming from, many of the communication tools listed above work as well for communicating with parents as siblings.

Sometimes families may need some extra help when faced with the mental illness of a family member. It's a sign of strength to ask for help. If you think your family could use extra help speak with your parents and ask your family doctor or the health professional looking after your sibling to arrange a family meeting.



# WHERE

## TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

There are places you can find more information about mental health/mental disorders and get help on the next page:

1

## Family doctor

Talk to your family doctor about your concerns. Your doctor can answer questions you may have and may be able to connect you with a good psychologist, counsellor, and/or support group.

2

## School counsellor or nurse

Your school counsellor or nurse, or university counselling/health centre may have helpful resources for you, including books, pamphlets, and contacts in the community.

3

## Library

Check your local community or school library for books to help you understand more about mental illness.

4

## Internet

The internet has loads of information about mental illness; just know that not all of it is accurate. In fact, the information on some websites is more wrong than right. Check out page 43 for a list of helpful websites that can be trusted.

5

## Kids help phone

The Kids Help Phone has counsellors who answer phone calls and online questions 24/7 from young people (ages 12-20). **You can reach them at 1-800-668-6868 or at [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)**

6

## Health boards

Many communities have a health board with information on different support groups and other resources. They are often located in community centres, malls, and grocery stores.

7

## Phonebook

The yellow pages have lists of local support groups, counsellors, and youth health centres, some of which may be helpful for you.

8

## Emergency

If you or your sibling are feeling suicidal or are in crisis, go to your local hospital's emergency room immediately and/or call 911.

# GETTING HELP

Remember that because your brother or sister has a mental illness, you may also be at risk for a mental illness. Look after yourself by getting enough sleep, eating healthy, exercising regularly, avoiding alcohol and drugs, developing a strong support network, and using healthy coping strategies to deal with stress. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you are struggling. Realizing you need more help and looking for it is a sign of strength, not weakness.

## A COUNSELLOR OR DOCTOR CAN HELP YOU

- a** Understand more about your sibling's mental illness
- b** Understand and express your emotions in a positive way
- c** Learn to cope in healthy ways
- d** Make positive changes in your own life
- e** Build healthy relationships
- f** Set limits and protect yourself

Talk to your family doctor or a counsellor to learn more about whether or not you are at risk for mental illness.

# HELPFUL WEBSITES

## ALL MENTAL HEALTH

**a**

TeenMentalHealth.org [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)

**b**

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca)

**c**

National Institute of Mental Health [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**d**

Canadian Mental Health Association [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

## DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, & BIPOLAR DISORDERS

**a**

Mood Disorders Society of Canada [www.mooddisorderscanada.ca](http://www.mooddisorderscanada.ca)

**b**

Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des Troubles Anxieux [www.anxietycanada.ca](http://www.anxietycanada.ca)

**c**

Anxiety Disorders Association of America [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

## EATING DISORDERS

**a** Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association [www.bana.ca](http://www.bana.ca)

**b** National Eating Disorders Association [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

**c** The National Eating Disorder Information Centre [www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca)

## SCHIZOPHRENIA

**a** Schizophrenia Society of Canada [www.schizophrenia.ca](http://www.schizophrenia.ca)

**b** Schizophrenia and Substance Use  
[www.schizophreniaandsubstanceuse.ca](http://www.schizophreniaandsubstanceuse.ca)

**c** Because Your Mind Matters [www.becauseyourmindmatters.ca](http://www.becauseyourmindmatters.ca)

## ADDICTION

**a** Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse [www.ccsa.ca](http://www.ccsa.ca)

**b** National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

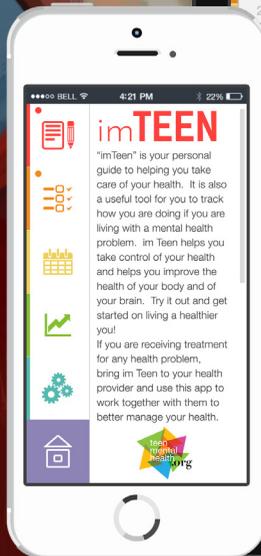
**c** Alcoholics Anonymous Family Groups [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)

# imTEEN

Taking charge of your health



- ASSESSMENT
- CHECKLIST
- CALENDAR
- VISUAL REPORTS



# TRANSITIONS



amazon.com

Available on the  
App Store

Available on the  
iBookstore

Available on Amazon.com and the Apple iBookStore. The App is free for download at the Apple App Store & online: [teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/transitions](http://teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/transitions)





# FAMILY PACK

better mental health for you & your family

Support yourself and your family members in better understanding mental disorders and how to deal with them. If you have a mental disorder, are supporting a family member with one or are interested in how you can support a friend and their family, the Family Pack can help.