

Many parents & carers experience mental ill-health e.g. eating disorders, depression, anxiety & psychotic illness & will provide a safe, secure and supportive family environment for children .

However, mental ill-health can sometimes blunt emotions, make a person unresponsive or behave in bizarre or violent ways.

Parents and carers may neglect their own & their children's physical, emotional & social needs & their children may become 'young carers'.

The associated stigma can prevent people from asking for support & children may feel responsible or secretive about their behaviour.

Other issues such as domestic abuse, drug or alcohol misuse and social isolation can increase the risks for children.

Consider the nature of the illness itself:

- Frequency & length of episodes of illness
- Emotional & practical impact of its severity
- If long term medication or the illness itself leads to cognitive and/or personality changes
- The symptoms & their likely impact
- The age, exposure and understanding of the child at the onset of the illness
- Are there periods of wellness with a good return of skills and abilities between episodes
- Is a care plan in place which take account of the needs of the child as well as the parent
- Are specialist services accessible for the family at key times of need

Settings should:

- Ensure they are educating all pupils about mental health with assemblies, PHSE etc.
- Work with the whole family wherever possible
- Share information with all involved agencies
- Consult all involved adult mental health professionals & invite to all relevant multi-agency meetings
- Jointly assess & plan with the family & involved services e.g. the Family Common Assessment Framework or Child In Need processes
- Ensure the child is appropriately supported as a 'young carer'

If you feel that the child is at risk of significant harm, refer your concerns immediately to the Sheffield Safeguarding Hub tel. 2734855.

Protective Factors

The child has:

- Support of family, friends, teachers others
- Good self-esteem, security, worth, confidence, developing age-appropriate independence
- Understanding of own strengths and limitations
- At least one secure relationship
- Positive education & community experiences
- Good attendance & achieves as expected
- Opportunity to read & play alone & with others
- Appropriate information about the parent or carers illness, related events & interventions
- Contact details for professionals & others in the event of a crisis
- Social skills, coping strategies, intelligence, problem solving abilities
- Regular medical and dental checks

The parent or carer has:

- Ill-health which is mild, short-lived, stable
- Another parent, carer, friend or family member who can help
- No other family difficulties
- Complied well with treatment & advice
- Modelled appropriate emotion and interaction
- Provided appropriate guidance & boundaries
- Supported the child's individuality, race, religion, gender, sexuality and disability
- Provided appropriate dress, hygiene, care
- Accepted support when needed from friends, family and services

The family home provides:

- Stability & attachment to the primary carers
- A positive daily routine for the child
- Satisfying, healthy relationships with wider family, friends & community
- A place for the child to invite friends to
- Sufficient income and good physical standards
- Supportive siblings, family members and friends



Indicators of increased risk

Children who are:

- A feature of parent or carers delusions, thoughts of harm, obsessive-compulsive behaviours, suicidal plans
- Targets of parent or carers aggression or rejection
- Profoundly neglected
- Un/new-born infants of mother with a severe mental illness or personality disorder
- Age-inappropriate young carers
- Witnessing harmful adult behaviours
- Having unsupervised contact with a mentally ill parent or carer
- Socially isolated
- Unable or unwilling to explain what is happening at home
- Feeling unloved & with poor attachments
- Feeling frightened, inhibited, anxious
- Bed wetting, self-harming or other emotional problems
- Thinks they will be mentally ill in later life
- Is embarrassed by the parent or carers behaviour or beliefs
- Going missing from home or education
- Becoming involved in criminal behaviour
- Misusing alcohol or drugs

Young people may seem more resilient but can be vulnerable in other ways e.g. online-safety issues.

Resources:

- [Sheffield Mental Health Guide](#)
- [Sheffield Young Carers](#)
- [Sheffield Young Carers Help for Families](#)
- [MindEd - e-learning to support healthy minds](#)
- [Time to Change: mental health resources for schools and parents](#)
- [NSPCC: Parental Mental Health](#)
- [Royal College of Psychiatrists: Parental mental illness: the impact on children and adolescents: for parents and carers](#)
- [Mentally Healthy Schools: Parent/Carer Engagement](#)

Indicators of increased risk

Is the parent or carer:

- Experiencing undiagnosed or untreated illness
- Unaware of the child's emotional needs
- Emotionally inappropriate or unavailable
- Behaving in a way that affects the child's development and understanding
- Violent, unpredictable or chaotic
- Expressing negative views & rejection about/to the child
- Over-protective or imposing unreasonable routines or expectations
- Unable to provide basic care for the child due to financial issues relating to their ill-health
- Experiencing or has a history of domestic abuse
- Non-compliant with services & treatment
- Misusing drugs, alcohol and/or medication
- Exhibiting severe eating disorders, self-harm &/or suicidal behaviour
- Demonstrating a lack of insight into their illness and the impact on the child
- Having compulsory admissions to hospital
- Experiencing relationship difficulties , social isolation, poor support
- Involved in criminal offending

Safeguarding Adults:

The Care Act 2014 places a legal requirement on all agencies to ensure that all adults (aged 18 & over) can live without the risk of, or actual, harm or abuse.

If you are concerned about an adult you should inform your Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy immediately.

The DSL/D can seek advice from:

- Adult Safeguarding tel. 0114 2736870
- Adult Access Team (2734908)
- South Yorkshire Police (101)
- Ring 999 in an emergency

A summary of agency responsibilities can be found here: [Adult Safeguarding, Sept 19](#) and at: [Sheffield Adult Safeguarding Partnership](#)