

PATHWAYS FOR FAMILIES TO SEEK HELP

Family members involved in caring for a young person experiencing mental ill-health are at risk of a variety of negative outcomes. Family relationships, work and finances and friendships can all be points of strain. Family members need to be supported to identify any need for support. The focus of family support is often centred on parents, more attention is needed in developing and implementing support services for siblings and partners.

As a young person's mental health symptoms emerge family members may have to deal with challenging behaviours and increasing symptom severity. The demands of supporting a young person can result in family members needing support themselves.

Dedicated roles

Two complementary roles support family inclusive practice in clinical services (family workers) and lived experience support (family peer support worker). Service coordination of these roles will optimise the provision of support for families.

Peer support for siblings

While there is emerging recognition of the need to support the families of young people experiencing mental ill-health, this support is often focused on parents or caregivers. Approaches to engaging and supporting siblings requires more attention. Supporting sibling relationships provides a chance to enhance understanding and empathy, support sibling-parent relationships and provide opportunities for help-seeking by siblings.

STRENGTHENING OPPORTUNITIES TO INCLUDE FAMILIES

For many young people experiencing mental ill-health, family members are their primary support people and need to be equipped for their supporting role. Family members can be included in a young person's mental health treatment in different ways. Clinicians and family workers can support young people to identify how their families can be included. While families can often provide insights into their young person, they are sometimes frustrated by not being engaged. Placing families at the centre of care with a young person recognises the circle of support they can provide.

Shared decision-making

In youth mental health, shared decision-making allows clinicians to collaboratively involve young people in decisions about their healthcare. Families can also be constructively engaged in this process. Implementation of shared decision-making with young people and their families requires clinician training, supported involvement of young people and clear definitions for family member's participation. Practice guidelines for including family members in shared decision-making should be developed to support implementation at a service level.

Orygen recognises the significant role that friends can play in supporting young people. The focus of this policy project, however, was on the role for families. For the purposes of this project, the term 'family' includes parents, extended family members, adult support people, siblings and partners.

“Families told us that while they had peer support that there is no one to connect with siblings.”



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