

Working with Parents with Mental Health Issues

A parent who is mentally unwell may love his or her child as much as any other parent. However, mental illness may challenge a parent's ability to care for a child.

Mental illness can include conditions such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and others.

The type of mental illness a parent has, as well as its frequency and duration, can impact a child's stability. The age of the child and stage of his or her development also matters.

A parent who has co-existing mental health and substance use problems will need even more support.

One out of five adults in America experiences mental health issues in any given year, according to the National alliance on Mental Health.

To help parents with mental health issues keep their families intact, your organization can learn what support mechanisms the parent and child already have in place and build from there.

Other steps to take include:

- ▶ **Look for ways to enhance the protective factors that make a child resilient.**
- ▶ **Help parents learn about their rights and get legal information and assistance to maintain custody and contact with their children.**
- ▶ **Assist parents with developing their goals and plans to deepen parenting skills and manage their illness.**
- ▶ **Enable parent-child visitation during psychiatric hospitalization to protect their bond.**
- ▶ **Train caseworkers and child protective services workers to better understand parental mental illness.**
- ▶ **Educate the legal system about advances in the treatment of serious mental health problems.**
- ▶ **Support more mental health services for students.**

Addressing the needs of a parent who has mental health issues requires family-centered care. Strengthen families, by advocating for comprehensive programs and support for the whole family.



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1-800-552-7096 Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (language line available)

800-Children (800-244-5373) Parent Helpline