

## **NEEDS OF OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS**

Caring for someone with a mental illness can affect the dynamics of a family. Often the caring role drains the majority of the caregiver's time, energy and patience. Grief may be involved, as in the loss of the loved one's personality, achievements and contributions; and often also the loss in family lifestyle. This grief can lead to unconscious hostility and anger. Other family members may also start contributing towards caring and neglecting their own needs:

### **CHILDREN**

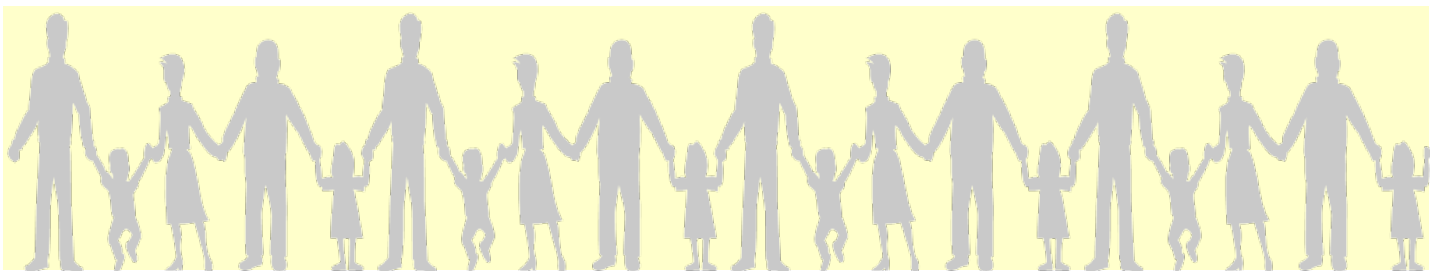
Children often do not fully comprehend what their relative is undergoing. They can often gauge the stress that the family is experiencing, but not actually ask what the matter is. They may withdraw, or pretend that the change in family dynamics does not exist. Alternatively, they may start contributing greatly towards the household. They may show signs of 'growing up too quickly'. Other children may demonstrate anger and irritability, and choose to spend more time away from the home and the family.

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

Personal relationships of your wife/husband/partner are also greatly affected by mental illness. This is especially true if the carer's partner is the person with the mental illness. The needs of the relationship change. The carer may also experience loneliness in terms of the lack of attention from his/her spouse and the dramatic increase in responsibilities. Caring for a child with mental health problems can also create friction in the carer's relationship with his/her partner. There are issues of lack of attention to the needs of the partner. Also there can be issues of blame between partners in terms of one being the reason for their child's mental illness.

Attending to the needs of other family members:

- Allocate time that you will spend with another family member and seek assistance or respite, if needed, to attend to your relative with mental illness.
- Organise family outing where everyone can participate eg. Picnics, bushwalking, family cricket matches.
- Encourage family members to see other positive qualities in your relative, not just his/her mental illness.
- If children are involved, pay attention to whether they are keeping in touch with their friends and continue to do things that other kids their age are doing eg. Bike riding, going to the movies etc.
- In your personal relationship as a wife/husband/partner, try to do some of the enjoyable things that you had done before your caring role began eg. Going out to dinner, going for walks with your partner.



Taken from '[Caring for Someone with a Mental Illness](#)'. Information used with permission from the NSW Mental Health Information Service **1300 794 991**