

MINDFUL MOMENTS

JUNE: PARENTING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

Introduction

Many people worry that it will be difficult to cope with parenting if they have a mental health problem. It's natural to be concerned about the impact this will have on you and your children. However, with the right support and resources, it's possible to be a good parent while managing a mental health problem, and to care for and support your children in a positive way.

Remember that all parents have difficult times and there is no such thing as a perfect parent.



How does mental health impact me and my work?

It's important to note that all parents face challenges but coping with a mental health problem may lead to additional concerns or difficulties.

For example, if you suffer with anxiety it may make you feel more worried, while depression can leave you feeling low in energy. You may also worry and overthink about how this will impact your children, if they may experience the same as you, or that helping you might impact their schoolwork or free time with friends.

Other people's assumptions or judgement can also be detrimental or leave you feeling afraid to ask for help. You might worry that people will see you less capable as a parent – but everyone needs help with parenting, there is no book on how to parent well!

Feelings of stress, worry and guilt are common. Remind yourself that you know the basics for how to be a good parent, regardless of any mental health issue and just focus on one day at a time, doing the best you can.

How can I help myself?

Though easier said than done, it is important not to put too much pressure on yourself or give yourself a hard time.

Depending on their age, honest communication with your child is helpful – explain how you feel and why you're feeling that way. It's also a good idea to keep track of your child's wellbeing. Ask them how they feel and keep communication open.

Try to spend some time with your child doing something you both enjoy, which can benefit your mental health.

Support available

It's hard to do but admitting you're struggling and asking for help is important.

- Speak to your **GP, health visitor or midwife**.
- **Advocacy** - Seek an independent advocate whose role is to listen to your needs and support your choices: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/
- **Mental Health or Social Care Services** – visit the NHS Choices website: www.nhs.uk
- **In a crisis** – Call 999 or go to A&E.

Tips to help you when parenting with a mental health problem

1. **Seek help when you need** – this can sometimes bring fears about having children taken away, but organisations have dealt with all this before and will be experienced in how to best help you.
2. **Look after yourself** – take some 'me time' at least for 10 minutes a day.
3. **Find exercise you enjoy** – going on a walk or doing a fitness class at home will also reduce stress levels and boost your mental health. What's more spending time outside can give you a rejuvenating boost.
4. **Build a support network** – let people know if you are finding it hard to cope or need support. Ask for practical help from your child's school such as keeping an eye on your child so there's less to worry about. You could also discuss working hours with your employer to help you cope.
5. **Be organised** – stick to regular routine tasks mealtime and bedtimes.