

## 9. Taking care of yourself

### Coping Strategies

Caring about and supporting someone within the forensic mental health services can be very demanding on you emotionally, physically and perhaps financially. You are likely to have many unanswered questions and conflicting emotions.

### Why am I feeling like this?

After the initial shock of realising that someone close to you has a mental illness, and requires care and treatment from forensic mental health services, you may experience all sorts of emotions ranging from confusion, an overwhelming sadness, grief, or even anger to guilt and loss. All of these emotions are perfectly normal.

### How do I manage this?

Recognise and acknowledge what you are experiencing. You may be worried about what to tell family and friends – think about who you want to tell, and what you want to tell. Perhaps you only need to tell people that are close to you.

Provide them and yourself with accurate and up to date information about the illness and what has happened. Explore with them the best ways of being supportive towards one another and to the person you care about.

Make sure you all have the opportunity to talk about your worries or concerns. This can be very important to siblings and children of those experiencing mental illness, as they can worry about their own mental health and the risk of developing mental health problems, and the stigma associated with forensic mental health services.

You will of course have to be sensitive and take into account the wishes of the person who is experiencing the illness. However, it is vital that you acknowledge the illness (the person being cared for may not yet).

Make sure you talk to someone about how you are feeling. This can be a carer support worker, your GP or someone from your persons care team.

### How do I look after myself?

It may not always sound achievable, but you can help yourself, and the person you support, by looking after yourself in your everyday life and by trying to reduce your own stress levels. You must look after your own health.

### Physical Health

When caring or supporting someone, carers often ignore their own physical health so it is important to eat healthily, exercise and to visit your GP if you do feel unwell.

### Mental Health

Finding things that help you relax is important. Taking time out for yourself is essential to protect your own mental health. Seek help early if you know your stress levels are rising.

- Contact Support in Mind Scotland, Caring Connections or your persons care team, who will help you, and may be able to put you in contact with other carers who have been in similar situations to yours and can offer peer support.
- Talk to your GP and tell them how you feel.
- Find out about other carer support that may be available in your local area – this is not a luxury when you are feeling stressed and juggling your emotions along with you trying to live your own life.

### Practical steps

**Find out about the illness or condition:** Find out as much as you can about the suspected or diagnosed condition.

**Find out as much as you can about the proposed care plan and treatment:** bearing in mind any limits imposed by confidentiality and the issue of consent.

**Find out as much as you can about your rights:** Carers have rights but they are often not recognised.

**Find out as much as you can about the rights of the person you are caring for or supporting:** Sometimes people are unaware of their rights or are too unwell to realise their rights. Make sure they know Advocacy Services can support them with this.

**Find out about the mental health system:** Understanding how the system works and what you can do for yourself and the person you support, can help alleviate uncertainty and help you ask the right questions at the right time.

**Find out about local services and key people involved in your person's care and treatment:** Make sure you have appropriate contact details – keep a list of telephone contacts to hand.

**Find out about carer support services:** Get support for yourself as a carer. A carer's support worker will help you access appropriate services in your local area. They can provide information and support about how to deal with your thoughts and feelings.

### **Adult Carer Support Plans**

The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 was implemented in April 2018. Under this Act you have the right to ask for an Adult Carers Support Plan – this should outline what it is you require in order to sustain your caring role whilst having a life of your own. (See fact sheet 3).

### **Caring for a long time**

For some families, caring is a long term role and the situation and the caring role will change over the years and give rise to different needs. You may find it helpful to maintain contact with local services or with whoever it is you find provides you with support. Even those who don't need support all the time can find it useful so that they can access help and support quickly when they need to.

### **Further help and support**

**MIND** the mental health charity for England and Wales has produced a good booklet for people who are supporting a friend or relative and who want to look after their own mental health. It offers advice on how to look after yourself.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media/859562/how-to-cope-as-a-carer-2014-.pdf>

Tel number Mind Information 0300 123 3393

### **Caring Connections**

Caring Connections offers a Scotland wide independent and confidential support and information to families and friends of those receiving care and treatment from Forensic Mental Health Services.

<https://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk/help-for-families-and-carers>

Tel number 07951066234 or 0131 662 4359

Other sources of support can be found at the back of this pack.