## Caring For a Long Time

For some families, caring is a long-term role. With the role changing over the years and giving rise to different needs. You may find it helpful to maintain contact with local services or with whoever provides you with support. Even those who don't need support all the time can find it comforting knowing they can access help and support quickly when required.

## Further Help and Support

https://carers.org/our-work-in-scotland/our-work-in-scotland

https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/being-there-for-someone/as-a-carer

Forensic Network

# 1. 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 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 everyone can share any worries or concerns they have. 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 consider 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

It is important to make time for activities that help you relax and unwind. Taking time out for yourself is essential to protect your own mental health. Seek help early if you know your stress levels are rising.

- Talk to your GP and tell them how you feel.
- Find out about other carer support that may be available in your local area.
- Your persons care team, may be able to put you in contact with other carers who have been in similar situations to yours and can offer peer support

## 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 rights time.

**Find out about local services and key people involved in your persons 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 carers' 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 to sustain your caring role whilst having a life of your own.