

Dual Diagnosis

Youth Info



What to do when someone you know has Dual Diagnosis

Growing up with a mum or dad who has mental health and drug or alcohol problems can be tough. It's good to get some information to help you cope better with everything that's going on.

What is dual diagnosis?

Dual diagnosis is when a person has mental health and drug or alcohol problems.

Some people have mental health problems and then use drugs and alcohol to try and feel better. Sometimes using drugs and alcohol can make people feel depressed or anxious or bring on a mental health problem like psychosis. Drugs and alcohol and mental health problems are not a good mix.

What's it like for my mum or dad?

Your mum or dad may have different symptoms depending on the type of mental health problems they have and the drugs or alcohol they use.

They may experience strange thoughts or act differently at times. They may feel depressed, scared or angry, or have mood swings or feel out of control. They may find it difficult to get organised, to do the housework and shopping and go to work.

Your feelings matter

Your life may seem like a rollercoaster ride – some days things are good but other days, there's loads of problems. It can be really hard to cope with.

It's normal to feel lots of conflicting emotions.

You may feel angry, sad or scared. You probably really love your mum or dad but sometimes you may feel like you hate them or wish they were different. And you could feel guilty about feeling this way.

Sometimes it may feel a bit like you are the only one who's going through this. But there are other young people out there who also have a parent with a dual diagnosis who often feel just like you.

No matter what, your feelings are real and it's important that you get some support.

Will it happen to me too?

Dual diagnosis can be caused by people's response to stressful events in their life, chemical imbalances in the brain, their lifestyle and their drug use. Just because your mum or dad has it, doesn't mean that you will get dual diagnosis.

If you have any concerns, the best thing you can do is to talk to a doctor, school counsellor or counsellor. Getting help early can go a long way to preventing mental health problems later in life.

What happens if mum or dad go to hospital?

It can be strange visiting mum or dad in hospital. You may be worried about how they will look or act or you may not know what to say to them. It's okay to have these feelings – lots of other young people feel the same.

Everyone's experience is different and every hospital is different. Psychiatric hospitals or wards specialise in treating people with different mental illnesses

such as depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. If your parent goes into treatment for drug or alcohol problems, they may also stay in a hospital or rehabilitation centre.

If you have any questions, talk to your caseworker, counsellor, youth worker, school counsellor, teacher or relative.

What happens if I can't stay at home?

If your mum or dad can't care for you and your brothers and sisters, you may have to go and stay with a grandparent, another relative, friend or a foster carer.

Foster carers look after children and young people who cannot live with their parents.

You can stay with a foster carer for one day to a few weeks or months or years, depending on your situation. Talk to your caseworker for more information about foster care.

What about my brothers and sisters?

If you have brothers or sisters, you may be the one left looking after them when your mum or dad is sick. That can be tough. You can get support from your caseworker, relatives or family friends so you don't have to carry the load.

Books like *The Blue Polar Bear* or *The Flying Dream* can be great for kids between 5 and 12 years to help them to understand what's going on. Check out the DoCS website www.community.nsw.gov.au for more information.



Number one priority: take care of yourself!

Is there anything I can do to help mum or dad?

You are not responsible for looking after mum or dad... even though it can seem that way sometimes. But there are things that you can do that may make it easier to cope:

- > Talk to mum and/or dad choose a good time when your parent is feeling well and if it feels like too much, don't do it.
- > Sometimes it's hard for mum or dad to 'cheer up' – when someone's feeling bad, it's tempting to tell them to just 'get over it'. The symptoms of dual diagnosis can sometimes last for a while and it may be difficult for them to 'cheer up'.
- > Remember that having a dual diagnosis is not the whole of your parent's life – not everything they say or do is related to their illness. With the right medication and support, people with dual diagnosis can get on with their lives again.
- > Work out a plan with your parents about what to do if you need more support or if there's an emergency. This could include stuff like how to look out for early warning signs that things aren't right, how to stay safe if things get out of control, who to contact or where you can stay if you need a place to go. It's also good to have a list of contact numbers with you or in your mobile phone in case you need them in a hurry.
- > If there is an emergency, call 000 and let the operator know what's happened to your mum or dad.

Take care of yourself

Even though things may be tough at home, it's important that you take care of yourself.

Get some support and talk to someone you trust – worrying about things and not telling anyone just makes it worse. Good people to talk to include your caseworker, a friend or relative, a youth worker, school counsellor, your doctor, a teacher or your parent's psychiatrist or counsellor.

You can also ring Kids Help Line on 1800 551 800 and talk to a counsellor or log onto www.kidshelp.com.au or www.reachout.com.au

Learn more about dual diagnosis – this can help you understand what your parent is going through ... and that can make it less scary!

Express your feelings – write them down in a journal, write a letter (but don't send it), listen to music you like, go for a run or a swim or do some cool artwork if that's what you are into. Punch a pillow, dance wildly, have a good cry or turn the music up so no one can hear you and have a good yell!

Eat, sleep, exercise...take some time to chill out and do things that you like – hang out with your friends, watch a DVD or go to a movie. Look after your own health by seeing a GP and getting a health check.

Avoid drugs and alcohol – although it may seem tempting, alcohol, drugs and things like energy drinks will only make you feel worse later.

Don't take it all on – sometimes people with dual diagnosis say or do things that are hurtful. They may not understand how it affects you. It's important to NOT take on their stuff – and don't blame yourself.

Don't listen to the 'strange' stuff – sometimes people with dual diagnosis get strange ideas and can't tell the difference between what's real and what's not. Try to stand by what you believe in. Don't argue, but remember that you don't have to agree with them either.

Get more help

Carers NSW

Telephone support and young carers' website includes questions and answers about caring for a family member, friend or relative, links, newsletters and young carers' club.

(02) 9280 4744 or 1800 242 636 (Free call)
www.youngcarersnsw.asn.au

Kids Help Line

24 hour telephone counselling service and web counselling for children and young people.
1800 551 800
www.kidshelponline.com.au

Lifeline

24 hour telephone counselling.
13 11 14

Log on to:

CHAMPS – Children of Parents with a Mental Illness.
www.champsworldwide.com

Reachout!

www.reachout.com.au

SANE Australia

For children and young people affected by a loved one's mental health problems.
www.itsallright.org

Somazone

Anonymous, quality-assured question and answer health website for young people. Covers relationships, mental and emotional health, self-harm, body image and drug issues.
www.somazone.com.au

Reading:

Dual Diagnosis: Mental Illness and Substance Abuse – Information and coping strategies for families ARAFMI Queensland Inc.
(07) 3254 1881

Something on My Mind. Comic book for young people about parental mental illness, including dual diagnosis.
Streetwise Communications
(02) 9319 0220
www.streetwize.com.au





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