

# family self-care and recovery

## from mental illness





# acknowledgements

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This resource is dedicated to families for their bravery and courage in dealing with mental illness.

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# introduction

This resource is intended for families of people dealing with a mental illness. The focus is on helping families to be informed caregivers, particularly around the necessity to care for themselves and other family members, whose needs are as important as those of the ill relative.

Education about mental illness will help families to better understand what their ill relative needs and what they can do to both support the relative and maintain their own health. We believe it is essential that you remain well if you are to be able to support your relative effectively.

There are a vast number of resources available that will enable family members to learn more about mental illness and how it is managed both medically and through rehabilitation. There is great value in these resources and we recommend you learn as much as you can about mental illness and how it is managed, bearing in mind it is often best to pace yourself when taking in new information.

A list of helpful resources and organizations offering support education is included in the Appendix D. There are many resources available that will help to provide a solid foundation for how to recognize signs of mental illness, where to get help, and how it is managed through our health care system.

This resource is intended to supplement available information and turn the focus to two main areas where information is lacking:

Self-care; and

Transitioning from caregiving to *supporting* a relative towards recovery.

Self-care is vital as family caregivers are at risk of becoming overwhelmed, both physically and mentally, from the challenges of dealing with an ill relative.

Focusing on recovery and gradually moving toward a more supportive role in which you maintain your own interests and lead your own life can prevent you from becoming engulfed in your relative's illness or from being perceived as intrusive in their life. Focusing on recovery will enable you to deal more effectively with the challenges of mental illness in the long run.

## how this resource was created

This resource began with the idea that families provide the best care for their ill relative when they themselves are strong and healthy.

We wanted to have a resource for families of people dealing with a mental illness which would assist them to:

- Engage in self-care activities to preserve their own mental/physical health;

- Maintain strong relationships with non-ill family members;

- Promote the independence of their ill relative; and

- Work through their own journey of recovery.

We started reviewing the literature to see what resources were available or possibly could be adapted for use in this resource. We discovered that there were few resources in the mental health field that directly addressed family self-care and preservation while dealing with mental illness.

We found an abundance of materials available through the internet and library on mental illness and how families can help their ill relative. Most of these mention the need for self-care, but we did not discover any that go into enough depth or provide practical, helpful tools for caregivers. We also discovered that many of the caregiver resources were geared toward families dealing with an elderly relative (for example, with dementia) and because of this did not focus on assisting a relative with a long-term mental illness towards illness management and independence.

Realizing the scarcity of resources to draw upon, we conducted three focus groups with family members dealing with a relative with mental illness to gain their expertise around our two main areas of interest— self-care, and the support of an ill relative towards independence. We have incorporated the information gained from these family groups into this resource.

In addition, we held a focus group comprised of adults with mental illness to gain their perspective on how families could assist people with mental illness. Seven adults discussed 11 questions relating to how families, and they themselves, could best enhance their recovery and promote independence. This information is also incorporated into this resource.

Thirdly, we recruited a group of family members (comprising parents, spouses, and siblings) to be our project advisory group. Ten members met periodically throughout the initial development of this resource to provide valuable input into each topic and share their own experiences.

We feel it is important to acknowledge all of the participants who helped create this resource. We are extremely grateful for their valuable time and input.

# organization

This resource covers six important areas of self-care and recovery:

Mental illness recovery for the individual and the family;

Caregiving planning;

Caring for the caregiver;

Past and future: Maintaining hope amidst ambiguous loss;

Enhancing relationships within the family; and

Transitioning away from mental illness.

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