

# Caring for yourself.

Self-help for families and friends supporting people with mental health problems.



# Caring for Yourself contents

*Caring for Yourself* is a self-help workbook for family and friends supporting people with mental health problems.

It is in eight parts. Each covers a different topic:

**Booklet 1 Introduction**

**Booklet 2 Being a carer**

**Booklet 3 Information**

**Booklet 4 Communication skills**

**Booklet 5 Problem solving and goal achievement**

**Booklet 6 Relapse management and staying well**

**Booklet 7 Recovery and hope**

**Booklet 8 Taking care of yourself**

## Quick guide icons

Throughout *Caring for Yourself*, you will see these picture icons to illustrate different sections.



**Question /  
To think about**



**Stories /  
case studies**



**Exercise**



**Action /  
things to do**



**Information  
and resources**

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# Introduction to Caring for Yourself

Rethink Mental Illness and the Meriden Family Programme have created *Caring for Yourself* to help people with mental health problems and carers, family and friends. It is for you if you support someone with any mental health condition. You may have a relative struggling with anxiety, depression or bipolar disorder, a friend with psychosis, schizophrenia or a personality disorder. Whatever the diagnosis, *Caring for Yourself* can help you to develop skills and new ways to cope.

**You can use *Caring for Yourself* in two ways:**

- Use it yourself independently.
- Use it as part of other training programmes for carers such as the Rethink Mental Illness 'Caring and Coping Programme' or the Meriden Family Programme's 'Caring for Carers' training.

Whichever way is best for you, you can work through it at your own pace, in your own time. Start with Booklet 1, then plan how to use the other booklets and in which order you want to use them.

Everything in *Caring for Yourself* comes from the experiences of others who have cared for people with mental illness or from professionals. There are exercises and activities to help you develop skills to help you cope with your situation, whatever that is.

**You will find information about:**

- Being in a caring role.
- Taking care of yourself.
- Getting your own life back.
- Finding information about what your relative or friend is going through.
- Dealing with problems.
- Talking about what is going on.
- Supporting your relative or friend.

We hope the exercises and activities will help people who cannot attend training courses or support groups. If it helps you, please get in touch. We want to know how we can help more people who are supporting a relative or friend with a mental health problem.

**Gráinne Fadden**  
Director  
Meriden Family Programme

**Paul Jenkins**  
Chief Executive  
Rethink Mental Illness

Welcome!

It's good that you have found the time to pick up our workbook and hopefully you will find many things in it that will be of help to you. This first booklet will briefly describe *Caring for Yourself*, written as a series of eight booklets, and will help you think about how you would like to use it.

**This *Caring for Yourself* is designed for you. It will:**

- Help you in your caring role
- Support you in finding the information you need
- Provide skills and ways of dealing with things that will help you and the person you are caring for
- Outline ways of looking after yourself
- Help you to support the recovery of your relative or friend
- Make it more likely that you can get your own life back

## Why caring for yourself is important

Caring for someone who has a mental health problem can be challenging. When your relative or friend is unwell, it may be hard to think about your own needs. In these circumstances, what would make most difference is for them to be well, so your energy will go into doing everything you can to make things better for them. Many people in your situation will hold the view – 'If they're OK, we're OK.'

However, it is really important to put aside time to think about what you need for yourself. Examples might include: gathering more information about the mental health issue your relative or friend is experiencing, discovering some ideas about looking after yourself. Managing stress or finding advice on ways to communicate with the person who is unwell and the professionals involved in their care can be really helpful. Read on to find out more about what *Caring for Yourself* has to offer.

## What it's about

This workbook has been written to support you in managing your role as a relative, friend, family member or carer of someone who experiences mental health problems. You may not relate to the term 'carer' and probably see yourself in your role as mother, father, partner, spouse, son or daughter or close friend. In health and social care services, however, the term 'carer' is often used to describe someone who is supporting a family member, partner or friend who is having difficulties of some sort – physical or related to mental health. Carers come from all walks of life. Some find themselves in this situation suddenly and it can be a very confusing and stressful time. When one person in the family is unwell, it affects everyone, not just the person who is unwell.

*Caring for Yourself* focuses specifically on mental health or psychological problems. It is designed for you to use in your own time, at a time and pace that works for you. It covers a range of information and activities divided into different parts:

- **Booklet 2:** Being a carer
- **Booklet 3:** Finding information about the difficulties your relative or friend is experiencing
- **Booklet 4:** Communication skills
- **Booklet 5:** Problem solving skills
- **Booklet 6:** Planning to make relapse less likely and to help your relative to stay well
- **Booklet 7:** Recovery and hope
- **Booklet 8:** Taking care of yourself

Each booklet has a different topic. They include a mix of information, examples and stories relating to people in a similar position to yourself. You will find practical activities and things for you to think about.

## How to use the workbook

Our workbook is organised so that you can pick and choose what you would like to do and what is most relevant for you at a particular point in time. On page 7, you will find an exercise to help you to think about what is most important to you at the moment. Having done this, you can then decide which sections to read and in what order.

It is worth saying at this point that as your situation is probably quite complex. As a result, gaining understanding and bringing about change will not happen quickly. This workbook therefore is not a quick fix. The sections take time to work through. This may feel like hard work, but it will be well worth it. The positive thing is that you can choose what parts you want to work on and at what pace. Each booklet is divided into smaller sections so you can do small bits at a time, if that fits best for you.

If you choose to use *Caring for Yourself*, you might find it helpful to set aside a particular time of day or day of the week when you will do so. Many people find it useful to start to keep their own lists of useful information, addresses, and organisations so having

a notebook that you can write into alongside the workbook is a good idea. This will make it easier for you to find the information that is most relevant to you quickly. Just a point – you will find a lot of internet sites in the resources section but you do not need a computer to do the suggested activities.

*Caring for Yourself* is for your own personal use, and nobody will see the things you note down that you have thought about or written in the various exercises unless you choose to share it with them.

### Other things to think about

- Where will you keep your workbook?
- Does your family know you're using this?
- Are you comfortable sharing it with other family members and friends?
- Would you like to go through it with someone else, maybe someone from a carers' programme if you are attending one, a family member, friend or carer support worker?
- Where will you read it? Do you need to find some space where you are not disturbed and can think about what you are reading?
- There is no right or wrong way of using the workbook. It's just what feels comfortable and helpful for you.

#### Important note

**Maybe you're feeling stressed at the moment. Perhaps your relative or friend is very unwell or there are other distractions. Even if this is the case there are probably things in this workbook that will help. However, you may feel that going through *Caring for Yourself* and learning new skills is a bit much at the moment.**

**If you believe you need immediate support and do not feel you can go through the workbook to find that support, you might want to talk to someone who can help you and guide you to where you can get appropriate help. Examples are your GP, a professional involved in your relative or friend's care, a close friend, another family member or a carer worker. There are also resources listed at the end of this section.**

### Where to start

One way of deciding where to start is to think about how things have been recently. If it has been an especially difficult time for you, list what has been particularly worrying or concerning for you. Putting your worries in some kind of order may make it easier for you to think about which sections to look at first.



### 1. Look through the list below and think about what has been concerning you. You can tick those that are of particular concern at the moment.

#### Information

- Not understanding how my relative or friend came to develop mental health problems – what caused this?
- Not knowing where to turn for information.
- Not knowing what questions to ask mental health professionals.
- Not knowing how to communicate with or respond to professionals.
- Not knowing what the outcome will be.

#### Being a carer

- Finding it difficult to make sense of what has happened over recent months and years.
- Being alone and isolated and maybe experiencing prejudice from others.
- Feeling a range of difficult emotions – guilt, worry, anxiety, feelings of not coping well, feeling overwhelmed.
- Feeling as if nothing good has happened since my relative or friend developed a mental illness.

#### Family

- Members of the family being upset.
- Finding it difficult to say positive things to each other.
- Finding it difficult to ask things of each other.
- Not having any good time together.
- Having more arguments than usual.
- Overall communication being more difficult.
- Managing problems and crises.
- Finding it difficult to sort problems out.
- Finding it hard to achieve things you want to do or enjoy doing.
- Not knowing what to do if my friend or relative becomes unwell.

#### Concerns about the future

- Worrying about what will happen for my friend or relative in the future.
- Worrying about my own future.
- Not knowing how to help my relative or friend get better.
- Finding it difficult to get on with my own life.



**Personal**

- Feeling everything is getting on top of me.
- Feeling physically or emotionally unwell.

**Other**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

This is an example of what Jane identified as being relevant in her situation:

**Jane**

Jane had many concerns. One of her main worries was about not understanding her husband, John's, difficulties including what might happen in the future. So for her, gaining some understanding about what was wrong with John was the most important thing. She also found it very hard to handle the increasing number of difficulties they faced in a number of areas including financial and childcare, and found crises a particular challenge.

**Jane's list**

1. Information.
2. Concerns about the future.
3. Managing problems and crises.
4. Family members finding it harder to talk to each other.

2. Now that you have seen Jane's example, think about the things that are the most important for you. It may be that there are several main issues. Try to put them in order.

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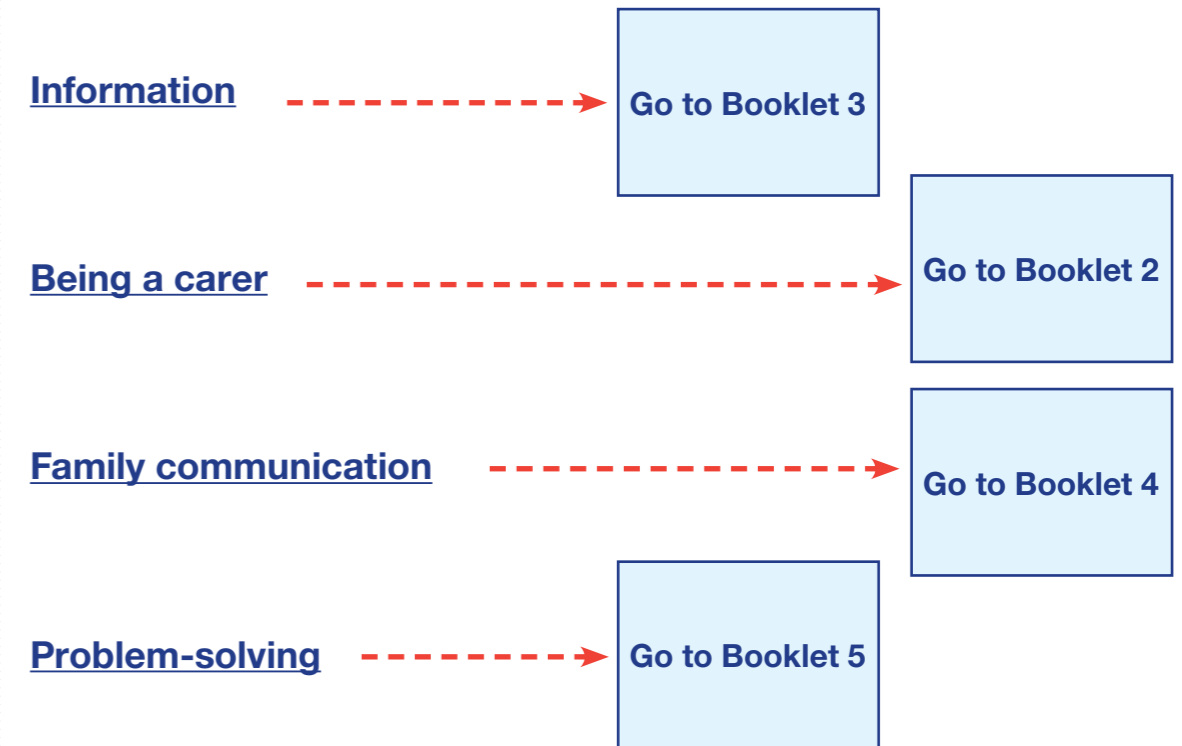
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This is how Jane ordered hers:



4. Now that you have a list of what is most important for you, look at the booklet headings, and think about which are most relevant for the areas that are a concern for you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_





5. Now that you have worked out what is most important for you, and the different parts that link to them, list the sections you intend to look at first.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_



Jane's final list looked like this:

- |                                 |                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Information                  | Booklet 3       |
| 2. Managing problems and crises | Booklet 5 and 6 |
| 3. Concerns about the future    | Booklet 7       |

So, now you have a list of the sections that are likely to be most relevant to you. *Caring for Yourself* will help you to work out what you need and give you new skills to help you meet those needs. Maybe you had other concerns that you listed under 'Other'. Don't worry if this is the case – you will learn about several other sources of help and support.

## Why practice?

It was mentioned earlier that the workbook contains a number of worksheets and activities, and you may be wondering why this is the case.

Think back to when you learnt something – at school or work perhaps – a language or using a computer. You may have read or heard about it from your teacher or colleague: information about the language or how a computer works. But the only way to speak French or use the internet is to actually do what was suggested. In the same way, *Caring for Yourself* will give you information and get you thinking about how to do something new or different. This requires practice.

## Pros and cons of doing activities

Pros	Cons
It makes information easier to understand.	Seeing things on paper makes them real and I might feel more anxious.
It's like rehearsing for anything – a play, a driving test or penalty shoot-outs etc.	I might worry about getting it wrong.
It will help my confidence.	I don't like paperwork
Practising something will help me see where I'm doing well.	It reminds me of work or school.
Practising something and reviewing it will help me see where I need to practise some more.	I might not be able to do it.
It will help me to test out whether different ideas work for me.	I might try to tackle something before I'm ready.
	I might try to do too many things at once.

So, there are plenty of reasons to practise, but it may feel like there are plenty of reasons not to as well. The following table will help you to think about finding ways around some of the concerns listed above.

# Sources of support

## Practise overcoming obstacles

Concerns	How to challenge them
Seeing things on paper makes them real and I feel more anxious.	Yes, it may make them seem more real, and this may feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, by listing them, you can tackle them one at a time which makes them more manageable.  Think about whether there is someone you can do this with.
I might get it wrong.	There is no right or wrong way of doing things. We are just looking at trying to do things differently and trying out different ways of doing things.
I don't like paperwork.	Try using other ways of recording the practice you are doing – taping, drawing or practicing with a friend or someone from the course.
It reminds me of work or school.	What was the worst thing about school? Having to do it? Teachers who might pass or fail you? How is this situation the same? How is it different?  List the ways you've learnt something practical outside school, for example at work, in an evening class, by trial and error with DIY or a hobby.
I might not be able to do it.	Can you test this out and see? You may be surprised to find you can.
I might try to tackle something before I'm ready.	Try thinking in small steps. The tasks in <i>Caring for Yourself</i> are broken into small chunks that build on each other. Take things slowly and do things in your own time.
I might try to do too many things at once.	Think about doing one thing at a time.

So, there are some ways of addressing the barriers to practising the skills and ways of doing things outlined in this workbook. Take a break if you need to at this point – thinking about all of this can be tiring, and you can only do so much at a time.

When you're ready, look back at the list you have written of what the most important areas are for you. If it feels like these are still your priorities, go to the first booklet on the list. If you need to re-organise things having thought about it a bit more, please do so, and then go to the booklet that feels most important to you, and make a start. Remember, there are many more people in the same situation as yourself as you will see from the examples in the sections.

Good luck!



## Caring

All local authorities have a statutory duty to provide support to carers. Your local authority will have a carers helpline. Most localities also have a carers centre. They will advise you on your entitlements, including your right to a Carer's Assessment which is an assessment of your needs in your caring role.

### NHS National Carers Helpline

Information, advice and support for carers from the NHS.

☎ 0808 8020202

🖱 [www.nhs.uk/carers](http://www.nhs.uk/carers)

### Carers UK

Provides information and advice about caring alongside practical and emotional support for carers. Carers UK also campaigns for carers and influences policy makers, employers and service providers, to help them improve carers' lives.

☎ 0207 378 4999

🖱 [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

### The Carers Trust

Carers Trust is a new charity which was formed by the merger of The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Care in April 2012.

Carers Trust works to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

🖱 [www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org)

## Mental health

### Rethink Mental Illness

Rethink Mental Illness is a charity that believes a better life is possible for millions of people affected by mental illness.

☎ 0300 5000 927

✉ [info@rethink.org](mailto:info@rethink.org)

🖱 [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

# Thank you to . . .

## Samaritans

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support 24/7 to those experiencing despair, distress or suicidal feelings.

☎ 08457 909090

✉ jo@samaritans.org

🌐 www.samaritans.org

## Guideposts

Guideposts Trust provides services in the community for people with or recovering from mental health issues, Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, learning disabilities and for children with special needs.

☎ 01993 772886

🌐 www.guidepoststrust.org.uk

## Mind

Mind provides advice and support to empower those experiencing a mental health problem as well as campaigning to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

☎ 0208 5192122

✉ contact@mind.org.uk

🌐 www.mind.org.uk

## Making Space

Making Space has been working with people affected by mental health conditions, and with their carers, to help them shape their lives based on their own personal aspirations and circumstances.

☎ 01925 571680

✉ enquiries@makingspace.co.uk

🌐 www.makingspace.co.uk



Producing a resource such as this relies on the support and contribution of a wide range of people. We consulted widely at the various stages of the development of the material in terms of content, layout and presentation, and would like to thank all of those who gave so generously of their time and ideas.

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One of the biggest tasks was reading through the earlier versions of the different sections which was a really time-consuming activity. We wanted to ensure that the material is meaningful, helpful and presented in a way that is easily accessible to carers and family members, so we enlisted the help of family members recruited through Rethink Mental Illness and the Meriden Family Programme. We are so grateful to those helped with this task – June Cooley, George Gladden, Michele Gladden, Edward Haslam, Christine Lewis, Philippa Lewis, Philippa Lowe, Maggie Morgans, Jeanette Partridge and Peter Woodhams. A number of other carers who equally spent hours reading through drafts and providing feedback did not wish to be named in person, so our heartfelt thanks to those 'anonymous' family members for all their time, commitment and valuable comments.

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**Leading the way to a better  
quality of life for everyone  
affected by severe mental illness.**

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