



Preparing to Talk to Your Child about *Kids or Teens in Control*

Conversations with your child about your mental illness, or that of another family member, are important. These conversations can help you understand your child's experiences, and help your child understand your experiences and the family situation. This can help them make sense of what is happening. When your child does not understand the situation they can worry, feel alone, and misunderstand what is going on. They may feel personally responsible and be worried about your health and safety, or that of another family member.

Helping your child understand mental illness and what it means for your family will:

- help them know it is okay to talk about mental illness;
- encourage them to ask questions and get the correct information;
- help them feel comfortable coming you (or others) when they are worried or overwhelmed; and
- Build understanding to strengthen your relationship.

Other trusted adults can be helpful when explaining mental illness to your child. Our facilitators are experienced with children and are respectful of your wishes in regards to what you want to share with your child. We have found that group members are better prepared to participate and get the most out of our programs when parents or caregivers have started the conversation with them before they come to the program. Here are some tips for starting a conversation with your child.

You could start a conversation about your mental illness with:

- "You may have been worried about ... or noticed ... (thinking about symptoms or behaviors of mental illness in the home). I want you to know I (or another family member) have a mental illness. You have not caused this. It is not your fault."

You could invite your child to talk about what they have noticed or are worried about:

- "What have you noticed that worries you?"

You can then follow with:

- "I am here to talk to if you have any questions or are worried. If you feel you can't come to me, you can talk to"

Here is an example of how you could start the conversation:

- "You might have noticed I (or another family member) do not seem to have much energy and I am always tired. Being tired is a symptom of my/their mental illness. I want you to know you have not caused this and it is not your fault. I know it must be hard for you when you see me/another family member tired and sleeping a lot and you probably have questions about what is going on."

Tips for Introducing *Kids and Teens in Control*

- *Find a suitable time to speak privately to your child before the first group.* Youth often find it more comfortable to 'talk while doing'. For example, you might find it easier starting a discussion while you're in the car, going for a walk or kicking a ball around.
- Make sure the conversation happens when you are both ready and calm.
- Youth access and receive information from a number of different places such as friends, television and online sources including social media. This information may not always match your experience, listen to your child and then explain your experience.
- Offer the *Kids or Teens in Control* FAQ sheet and poster for your child to read through on their own time.
- Let them know that you feel having accurate information and support is going to be helpful for your communication and reduce any fears they may have. This is a time just for them – to talk, ask questions, and learn about self-care.
- All youth are nervous about coming to the groups at first. This is common and normal. This is a completely non-judgmental group of peers that is run by trained professionals and we offer games and activities to make the group fun and upbeat.
- Reassure your child that the group is confidential and they are never asked to participate if they do not want to.

Although discussions might be short, their meaning is important. Often the first discussion is the most daunting. Small conversations can build on your child's and your families shared understanding over time.

For most programs, your family will be invited to an initial meet-and-greet before the group starts. This is a time to meet the facilitators and come together to ask any questions. Your child is also welcome to contact the facilitator with any questions they may have prior to attending the group.

For more information or to register for upcoming online and in person groups and workshops contact:

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