

A Selection of Books for Children and Youth that have a theme of Parental Mental Illness

(Publisher's notes and/or brief descriptions included)

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Children's Fiction and Picture Books:

Picture books can be used individually with children, with parents, family members, and children, in groups, and often with adolescents who can be enlisted to give their opinion about the value of the book for younger readers.

How to be a Real Person in Just One Day by Sally Warner. Knopf, 2001. 12 year old Kara lives with her mother, who has a mental illness with severe mood swings. Her father takes a job a few hours away from their home, and Kara becomes her mother's caregiver. Kate's mother has a relapse because she stops taking her medicine. Kate is determined to not let anyone, even her best friend, know how serious her mother's illness has become. However, eventually the situation is resolved in a positive and realistic manner. This is a well written story, written with honesty and humour. The main character, Kara, finds that the book Island of the Blue Dolphins is very meaningful for her.

Anna and the Cat Lady by Barbara M. Josse. HarperCollins, 1992. When nine-year-old Anna rescues a stray kitten, it leads her into friendship with Mrs. Sarafiny, an eccentric old woman with many cats and a paranoid conviction that the Martians are after her.

Can I Catch It Like a Cold? A Story to Help Children Understand a Parent's Depression by Gretchen Kelbaugh & Coral Nault. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, Ontario, 2002. This book tells the story of Alex and his struggle to understand his father's depression. It gives the child knowledge to open up discussion about depression.

Eclipse by Kristine L. Franklin . Candlewick, 1998. The summer after sixth grade holds promise for Trina as she anticipates junior high and the new arrival of a baby sister or brother, but then her father sinks into a debilitating depression.

Edward, the Crazy Man by Marie Day. Annick Press. This book is a story of triumph over misunderstanding. It is a touching and funny, humane, and dynamic tale of one boy's efforts to help one man and to change perceptions about homelessness and schizophrenia.

Helicopter Man by Elizabeth Fensham. London – Bloomsbury Childrens Books, 2005. Pete has a close and loving relationship with his father, who has schizophrenia with paranoid features. His life is turbulent as his father becomes progressively more delusional, and has to go to hospital. Pete goes into an

excellent foster home, where he begins to experience a normal life, eventually understanding and accepting that his father has a mental illness. This book is set in Australia, and is in the form of short letters and journal entries. The author states that she has attempted to both entertain and inform children who have a family member with schizophrenia in this very readable story.

Mama One, Mama Two by Patricia MacLachlan. HarperCollins, 1982. This book tells a simple story about a young child who has been placed in foster care because her mother has slipped into a deep depression. This story may give hope for children who have had similar experiences, or who are being placed in foster care. *

Meeting Miss 405 by Lois Peterson. Orca Book Publishers, Victoria, B.C. ,2008. This story is about a child named Tansy whose mother has to go away to a treatment program for depression, her father has to work, and she is cared for by an old, eccentric babysitter with beautiful wrinkles named Miss Stella (or Miss 405). Tansy deals with bullies at school, issues with friends, missing her mom, and learns that depression is a treatable illness, not something to be ashamed of.

Our Gracie Aunt by Jacquelin Woodson, Illustrated by Jon J. Muth. Hyperion Paperbacks for Children, New York, 2002. This story describes two children whose mother has a mental illness, and has left them alone. A social worker arranges for them to go to live with their aunt Gracie. They visit their mother in the hospital, and she explains that “even when a mama loves you, she can’t always take care of you.” This story is beautifully illustrated, and written by an award winning writer.

Please Don't Cry, Mom by Helen Denboer. Carolrhoda Books, 1994. This is an illustrated book, written for elementary school aged children. However, its description of recurrent major depression is excellent and could be valuable for adolescents and some adults. It describes a boy's feelings about his mother's depression and her resistance to treatment. Her husband sets limits, and she does accept treatment and begin to improve. The book describes the importance of family participation in the mother's treatment and the importance of taking one's medication regularly. Ultimately, the boy is able to gain knowledge and a sense of mastery. The book ends with a tender moment between the boy and his mom.

Sad Days, Glad Days by DeWitt Hamilton. Albert Whitman and Co., 1995. This story tells about the feelings of Amanda, an elementary school-aged girl as she experiences her mother's unpredictable episodes of recurrent depression. The mother also clearly experiences anguish when she sometimes cannot respond to her child's needs. Her mother and father both help Amanda understand that her mother loves her and that the mother's depressive episodes are not Amanda's fault. Amanda conceptualizes her mother's moods as colors.

The illustrations sensitively follow this metaphor to catch the moods and experiences of the mother and the household. Amanda and her mother learn that despite recurrent depression, the mother can still find ways to show her love for Amanda.

Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry by Bebe Moore Campbell. Puffin, 2005. This beautifully illustrated picture book tells of an African American girl living with her mother who has a mental illness. The mother has unpredictable and severe mood swings, causing her to be both angry and depressed. Annie has a plan to cope with her mother's illness, which includes calling her grandmother, making her own snack, putting herself to bed, and getting herself ready in the morning. She is helped by her loyal friends, her Grandma, her teacher, and her community. Annie's mother is shown lovingly braiding Annie's hair in the last picture. This book won the National Association for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)'s prize for distinguished literature. It is honest and will prompt meaningful discussion with children. There is an introductory note to adults, explaining that bipolar disorder is an illness, that children must be reassured that they are not to blame, and that it takes a "village" to support a child in this situation.

Tell Me a Story, Paint Me the Sun by Roberta Chaplan. Magination Press, New York, 1991. This is an illustrated book, appropriate for elementary school children and younger adolescents. It describes a girl whose father loses his job and becomes depressed. Children may relate to the chapter about the child's disappointment when her father missed her school play. Although he does not seek treatment or improve, she spends some time with her teacher making art, and gains insight into her own special qualities. This book is useful for the child who must learn to cope with a chronic parental mental illness.

The Bipolar Bear Family: When a Parent Has Bipolar Disorder by Angela Holloway. AuthorHouse, 2006. This picture book is about a young cub who struggles to understand his mother's behaviour and her subsequent diagnosis of bipolar disorder. The author is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and has 4 children with her husband, who has bipolar disorder.

Psychoeducational Resources:

I'm Not Alone: A Teen's Guide to Living With a Parent Who Has a Mental Illness. Sherman, M. & Sherman, D. Beavers Pond Press, Edina MD (2006). This excellent book provides readable, accurate information for adolescents, and also includes an experiential component that helps them process their own experience while they develop and improve their coping strategies. Even the cover, with its lovely design of outstretched hands in a ring, helps to lesson the isolation these young people often experience. This book could be worked through with an individual young person, or used as a curriculum for a youth group.

Kids Speak Up: Shining Light on Mental Illness. Part of the Lasting Impression Series, Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta South Central Region, Calgary Alberta. The three booklets in this set are well written and useful with children and parents. The child's book, Kids Speak Up, is excellent for generating discussion with children.

Someone in My Family Has a Mental Illness by Lyne Brindamour, MSW. North Shore Family Services, 2000. This workbook may be out of print. A free electronic copy is available on the resource link at www.parentalmentalillness.org.

Why Are You So Sad? A Child's Book About Parental Depression by Beth Andrews, Magination Press, 2002. This is a well written, colourfully illustrated book that clearly explains parental depression to children. It includes a note to parents. It has many ideas to help children understand and cope.

Why Is Mommy Sad? A Child's Guide to Parental Depression by Paul D. Chan. Current Clinical Strategies Publishing, 2005. This story was written by an M.D. to help parents explain their depression to their children. It is short, simple, and has attractive, bright illustrations and thoughtful information which promotes a helpful discussion between adults and children.

Wishing Wellness: A Workbook for Children of Parents with Mental Illness by Lisa Anne Clarke. Magination Press. (2006). An excellent workbook with activities and explanations of mental illness for both parents and children. There are many exercises designed to increase self esteem, help children deal with common problems, and help parents, teachers, or counselors find the language to explain mental illness. The activities are well suited to being done by the parent and child together. It is also a good basis for a 6 – 8 week group.

Adolescent and Young Adult Novels

Young adult novels are controversial as a therapy tool. Unlike picture books, they are often read by the young person when they are alone, and the material in the book may be disturbing, inaccurate, or trigger memories of trauma for the reader. These books should always be critically read by the therapist before recommending them to a client. If recommended, there should be a follow up discussion with the client.. Some novels which are well written and have excellent descriptions of adolescents living with parental mental illness, have been left off this list because of descriptions of sexual abuse, drug use, and suicide. Other YA novels may not directly address parental mental illness, but may be useful to discuss therapeutically with clients because of the strategies the character learns to use as they grow and change within the novel structure.

A Blue So Dark by Holly Schindler. Woodbury, Minn., Flux, 2010.

As 15 year old Aura struggles alone to cope with the increasingly severe symptoms of her mother's schizophrenia, she begins to fear that her own artistic ability and genes will one day result in insanity. However, Aura discovers that art, love, and the family are profoundly linked – and together may offer an escape from her fears. This is a well written book about an interesting, resilient teen.

A Dance for Three by Louise Plummer. Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2000. This is a dramatic, teen pregnancy novel that includes the characters of a mother and daughter who are both treated for mental illness.

The Flying Troutmans by Miriam Toews. Knopf, 2008.

A Canadian novel about a woman who takes her sister's children on a road trip to find their father, after her sister is hospitalized with psychosis. The writing and characterization are excellent., and it is a positive story.

Homecoming by Cynthia Voight. Fawcett Press, 1987 .

The Tillerman kids' mentally ill mother left them one day in a car in a mall parking lot. Their father, too, had left them a long time ago. Thirteen-year-old Dicey, the eldest of four, takes care of her family, and eventually leads them on a long journey to find the grandmother they hardly know. It is a difficult, but successful reunion, and Dicey and her siblings must begin to learn to accept their grandmother's care.

Dicey's Song by Cynthia Voight. Fawcett Press, 1987. Dicey's Song continues the story of Dicey and the Tillerman children. This book was awarded a Newbery Medal for Children's Literature.

Just a Story by Steven Keewatin Sanderson, Sean Muir. The Healthy Aboriginal Network, 2009. This graphic novel (comic book size) is about a brother and sister who develop symptoms of anxiety and depression as they cope with alcoholic parents. They receive help from their teacher and school counselor. This publisher has a website with many therapeutic graphic novel resources, and more are developed each year.

Pictures in the Dark by Patricia McCord. Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, 2004. This novel is set in 1950s Seattle. Twelve-year-old Sarah and her older sister, Carlie, know that their lives are different from those of their peers. Their mother clearly suffers from a serious mental illness, but their father does not seem to recognize the difficulties his daughters are having. This story describes family dynamics when one parent is suffering from a mental illness and the other fails to recognize the problem. The bond between the sisters grows and is strengthened through adversity. Though there is no clear resolution, the book has a strong message of hope, love, and forgiveness.

Wild Roses by Deb Caletti. Simon and Shuster Children's Publishing ,2005.

This novel is about 17 year old Cassie Morgan, who lives with her stepfather, a brilliant, world renowned violinist and composer. He develops a serious mental illness, and Cassie tries to hide his behaviour from the outside world, while she falls in love with his gifted student.

The Keeper by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. Atheneum, 1986. Grade eight student Nick must face the fact that his father has developed a serious mental illness. The author has won many awards for her writing for young people.

The Road to god knows... by Von Allan. Von Allan Studio, 2009. This self published graphic novel is available from the author's website, and on Amazon & other online booksellers. It features the story of Marie, a teenage girl who lives with a mother who has schizophrenia. The book has excellent reviews, a website, and a You-tube video.

What I Call Life by Jill Wolfson. Henry Holt & Co., Macmillan, 2005. This story tells about 11 year old Cal Lavender, who must go to a foster home when her mother, who has always been eccentric, is taken to a mental hospital. Cal is cared for by an elderly lady who teaches her, and the other 4 girls in the home, how to knit, and in the process they share their stories. Cal is happily reunited with her mother in the end.

Children's books which portray resiliency, independence, loving relationships, and strong social connections.

Biographies of authors, artists, sports heroes, and others who have been affected by mental illness. This could include newspaper and magazine articles, which can be put together as a scrap-book by the parent or therapist.

Examples could include:

Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren;

The Secret Garden, by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Anne of Green Gables by Lucy Maud Montgomery

Nim's Island by Wendy Orr

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Newbery and Caldecott award winning books

Lives of the Writers: Comedies, Tragedies, (and What the Neighbours Thought). By Kathleen Krull and Kathryn Hewitt.

Adult Stories that describe Reconciliation between an Adult Child of a Person who has a mental illness, and the parent:

The Memory Palace: A Memoir. By Mira Bartok.

Outside the Line By Amy Hatvany

Lullabies for Little Criminals. By Heather McNeil

Searching for Mercy Street, my Journey Back to My Mother Anne Sexton. By Linda Gray Sexton.

Never Have Your Dog Stuffed: and Other Things I've Learned. By Alan Alda.

Websites:

www.parentalmentalillness.org This is the website of the B.C. Provincial Supporting Families with Parental Mental Illness Committee. The site describes the work of the committee and has many resources and useful links, including a pdf of the entire manual used to organize forums around the province, a guide to Best Practice, and a number of tip sheets such as how to set up a Ulysses Agreement. The site includes links to most of the resources described on this page.

www.camh.net

Centre for Addictions and mental health (University of Toronto)
Brochures for children and resources for professionals include downloadable brochures such as: When a Parent is Depressed, What Kids Want to Know; and When a Parent Has Psychosis, What Kids Want to Know.

www.here to help.b.c. An excellent website by B.C. Partners for Mental Health and Addiction Information. Toolkits, educational materials, and a link to the Visions Journal.

www.depression.org Information about depression and treatment.

www.anxiety.bc.com Information about anxiety including CBT treatment for children and youth.

www.bcss.org B.C. Schizophrenia Association website. This site includes pdf versions of several educational brochures for children who have parents with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and depression. It also has good information about Ulysses Agreements. <http://www.bcss.org/documents/Psychosisgeneralchildren'sbooklet.pdf>

www.keltymentalhealth.ca Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre website. This site offers a wealth of information to parents, school personnel, and professionals about childhood mental illness. The centre a provincial resource centre located at BC Children's Hospital, working to link children, youth and their families with appropriate resources in all areas of mental health and addictions.

www.teenmentalhealth.org This site is a project of the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health, a partnership between Sun Life Financial, Dalhousie University, and IWK Health Centre. Dr. Stan Kutcher is the chair. The site features an animated model of a teenage brain, educational resources for young people and professionals, blogs, and links.

<http://www.bckidsmentalhealth.org> The Force Society For Kids Mental Health Society. Support, information, and advocacy for families with children with mental health concerns.

www.mindcheck.ca B.C. Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) website that helps young people identify signs of conditions such as depression, anxiety, stress, psychosis and problem substance use through self assessment quizzes, and then points them in the direction of help, resources, and support. There are videos and information materials on the site.

www.copmi.net.au . Children of Parents With Mental Illness, Australia. This comprehensive website has many resources and links, such as Principles and Actions for Services and People working with Children with Parents with a Mental Illness (2004) Australian Government Dept. of Health and Aging, which provides a framework for the very progressive work they are doing in Australia to support children and families. The resources for children and youth are excellent, and include a model for helping children make plans for how they will cope if their parent has a relapse.

www.itsallright.org This Australian website for Child and Youth Mental Health has some excellent illustrated educational “blogs” for children with parents with mental illness.

www.nami.org National Alliance on Mental Illness - information about mental illness and family support.

<http://www.resilienceproject.org/> Website of the Resiliency Research Centre, principal investigator Dr. Michael Ungar.