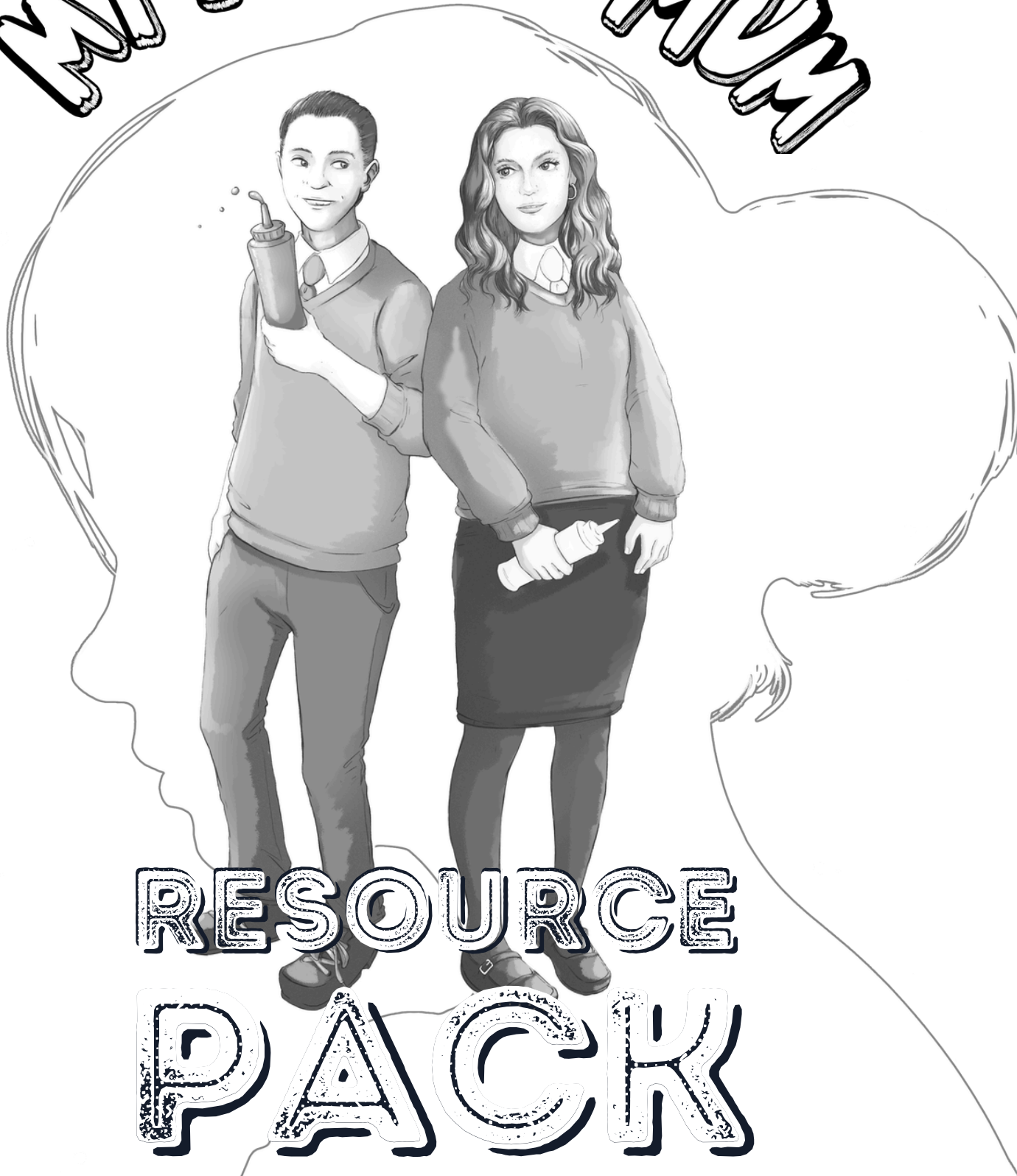


MY MAD MUM



RESOURCE PACK

Contents

About Our Time Charity and Next Door But One	2
Character investigations	3
Symptoms quiz	4
Symptoms quiz answer sheet	7
Protecting mental health	8
Be more Millie activity.....	10
Writing a letter to Harper.....	12
Writing a letter to Andy.....	13
Scripterwriter activity.....	14
Make a playlist.....	19
Carry on the song exercise.....	21
Dance routines exercise	22
Mythbusting worksheet.....	24
Mythbusting answer sheet.....	25
Carer's resource (for children and young people)	28
Teacher's resource.....	30

About Our Time Charity and Next Door But One

As the only UK charity dedicated to the issue, **Our Time Charity** is dedicated to supporting and transforming the lives of the estimated **4 million children and young people** across the UK who have a parent with a mental illness (sometimes called CoPMI). Despite the widespread prevalence of this issue, it remains under-supported, despite its profound impact on children's mental health, education, and life outcomes.

The impact of parental mental illness on children can be profound and long-lasting. These children are at a higher risk of experiencing emotional, behavioural, and academic difficulties. Without adequate support, they may struggle with isolation, anxiety, and a lack of understanding about their parent's condition. Our Time addresses these challenges head-on by providing targeted support that fosters resilience, understanding, and a sense of belonging. By intervening early and offering sustained support at school and in the community, Our Time helps to break the cycle of disadvantage and empower young people to achieve their full potential.

Next Door But One are a multi award-winning LGBTQ+ and disability-led theatre company based in York, promoting creative skills and encouraging community cohesion, particularly with those who face barriers to accessing theatre. Their established programme focuses on workshops and performances for and with cohorts of the community with disabilities, mental ill health, those experiencing bereavement, those who are carers and individuals from the LGBTQ+ community. Their activity ranges from workshops to touring performances, training programmes and professional development opportunities.

If you would like to know more about either Our Time Charity or Next Door But One, please contact:

Our Time Charity:

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Next Door But One:

hello.ndb1@gmail.com

Character investigations

Using what you have learned from the play, let's investigate the story's **two main characters**.

Harper

What emotions does Harper have throughout the play?

What challenges does Harper face?

What helps Harper?



Andy

How do you think Andy feels at the beginning of the play?

What changes for Andy throughout the play?

What do you think is important to Andy?



Symptoms quiz

While they sound similar, mental health and mental illness are different things.

Mental health is something we *all* have. Depending how we are feeling it may be described as good or bad. Stresses and worries can negatively affect our mental health making us feel sad, irritable or quiet while activities we enjoy may make us feel relaxed and content.

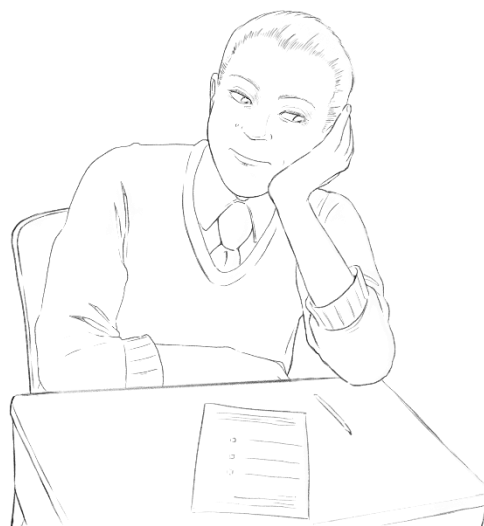
Mental health tends to vary in life depending on what's going on around us and does not mean we are have a mental illness. Having a bad day and feeling sad isn't unusual, just as having an enjoyable day will likely make us feel happy.

When someone has a **mental illness** though they may struggle to control their mood, thoughts and behaviour regardless of what's going on around them. Examples may include them being angry, sad or tired for a long time without an obvious reason.

Keeping this in mind, please read each of the described character situations below and write whether you think that mental illness or a less severe issue affecting their mental health is responsible for their behaviour. Also, try to explain *why* you think this is the case.

Andy

Andy has seemed fatigued and unfocused at school. He's fallen asleep in class and been irritable. When asked by a teacher what's wrong he mentioned that he's been losing sleep caring for his mum at home while she's been unwell.



Andy's Mum

Andy's mum was happy and talkative last week, cooking meals for him, taking care of housework and doing shopping. They had a nice weekend as well but this week she's spent every day in bed crying and has been walking the streets at night without saying where she's going.



Harper

Harper has been struggling to fit in at her new school and often sits alone in classes, struggling to find a partner for group activities. A teacher interrupts an argument between her and Dean that seems to be about Andy's mum. Later that day Harper is seen crying.



Millie

Millie recently had an argument with Andy and then with Dean. The next day they lost a league match after Millie missed a kick in a penalty shoot-out. The following week she missed a day of school and since then has seemed very quiet and unenthused in classes.



NOTE FOR TEACHERS: Keep the following page separate from the main worksheets until students have given their answers.

Symptoms quiz answer sheet

Andy does not have a mental illness. However, his mental health is clearly suffering due to a loss of sleep and general worries about his mother.

Andy's Mum has a mental illness. While this was made clear in the play, out of context this behaviour would still strongly support the idea as there is no clear cause for her becoming upset and the behaviour in question is lasting a whole week rather than hours or a few days.

Harper does not have a mental illness. She is struggling to fit in at a new school which is not uncommon. Additionally, the worries about her mum and the fact that Andy (in a similar situation) is being treated badly by people like Dean probably has her very worried about her own family being criticised in the same way.

Millie does not have a mental illness. While her low mood has extended across much of the week it's worth keeping in mind she had several upsetting things happen the previous week and that while she is sad she is still largely able to function in school.

IMPORTANT: Please remember, you should *always* be mindful about sensitivity and avoid rushing to conclusions about whether someone has a mental illness or a mental health problem. The above examples are not definitive; someone with a mental illness may not necessarily display obvious symptoms while someone with low mental health may have more severe symptoms than expected under certain circumstances.

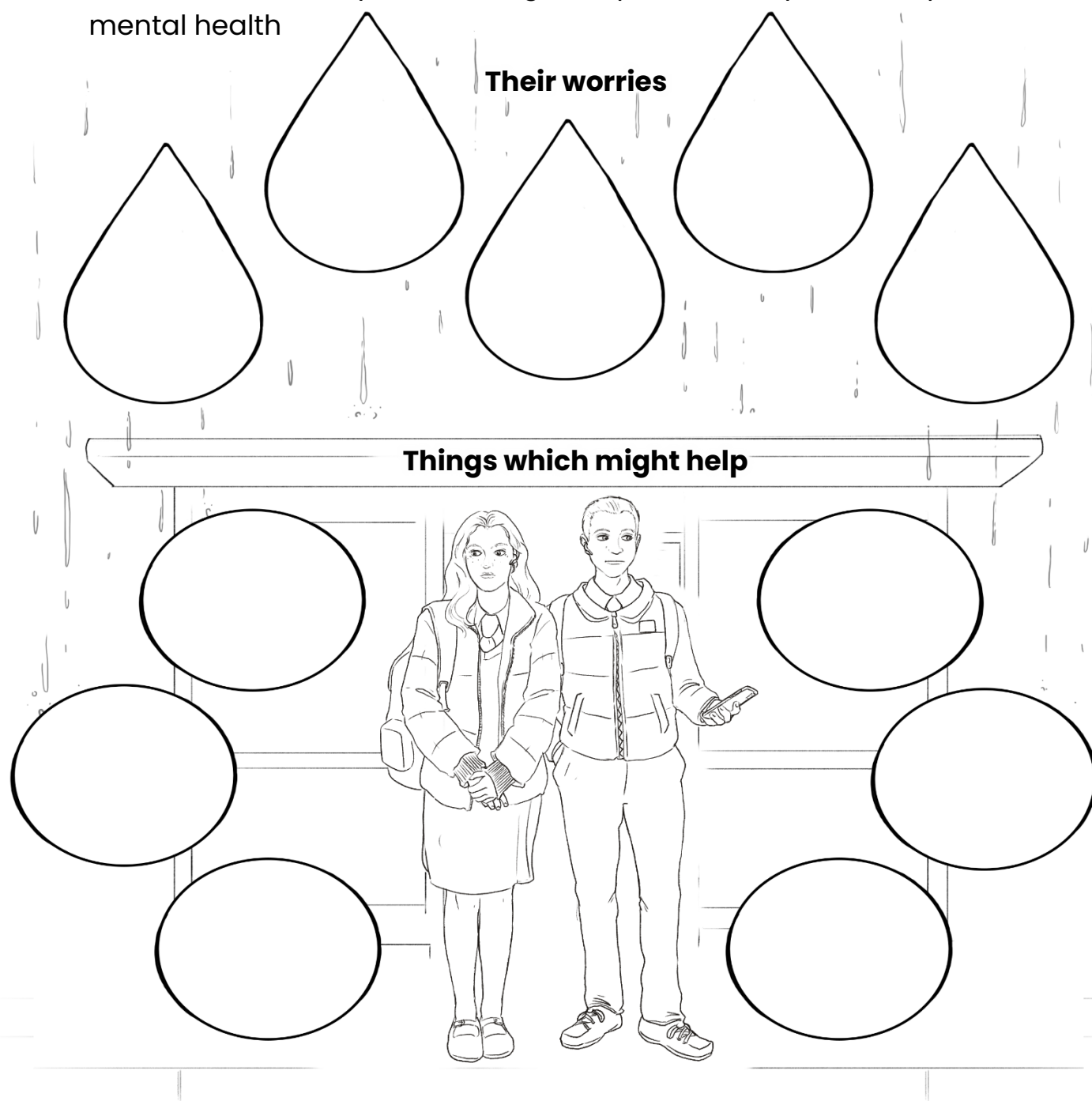
Protecting mental health

We all have **mental health**. It can become *better* when we relax and enjoy things while it can become *worse* when we worry lots or are unhappy.

Protecting Harper and Andy's mental health

Andy and Harper both have lots of worries about their parents and school life. Considering the story of the play, try the following below:

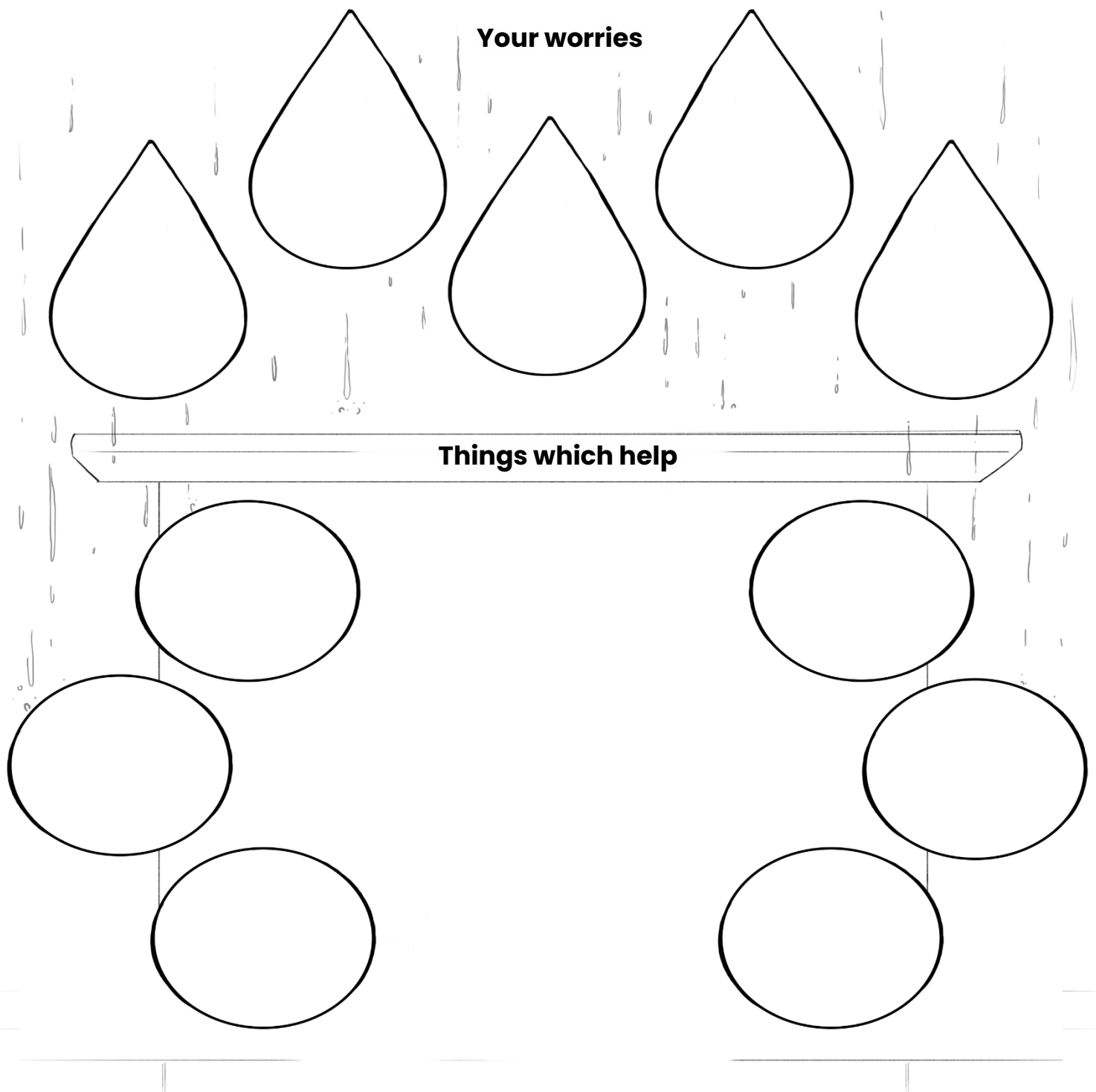
- Inside the falling **raindrops**, write in summary or draw some things that you think Harper and Andy **worry about**
- Then; **beneath the bus shelter** write or draw some thoughts and activities in the circles which you think might help them worry less and protect their mental health



Protecting your own mental health

Now, try the same thing again with the empty image of the bus shelter below. However, this time write some of your **own worries** inside of the raindrops and write things which **help you worry less** beneath in the circles.

Things which might help can be fun activities, thoughts or even talking to someone you trust. You could even **draw yourself** and your friends under the shelter if you like.



Be more Millie activity

In the play when **Millie talks with Dean** she makes a point of pushing back on some of the unfair things Dean says about Andy and the exaggerations made about his mum.

This highlights that myths and damaging rumours about mental illness aren't just spread by people we dislike, they can be perpetuated by friends or team mates just as easily. It can actually be *more* difficult to argue or tell them they are wrong when this is the case, but it is important not to spread these falsehoods further.

Calmly but firmly challenging a rumour when you have serious doubts about its basis in facts could be the first step to stopping its spread and changing opinions that may cause harm to someone in the future.



Challenging rumours

Imagine **you are in Millie's shoes** in the story and that you are being confronted with the following things said about Andy and his mum or Harper.

Write beneath how you would question each of these, giving particular thought to why it doesn't sound plausible or how personal bias may be influencing what the person is saying beyond the facts:

- 1. Dean goes paintballing for his birthday with friends** but **Andy** doesn't show up for the game after being invited and saying he would be there. The team loses badly and Dean becomes visibly angry. He says that Andy's mum has been eating cats and should be reported to the RSPCA.

2. You overhear a group of girls from Harper’s class chatting at lunch.

They are talking about her being a new arrival in school and how she only seems to spend time talking with **Andy**. One of them mentions seeing them in the park together at which point another says Harper may have caught mental illness from him and is now “acting crazy”, citing a TikTok video she saw where “a health expert” explained how this can happen.



3. Dean mentions that he is planning to ask Harper out on a date but comes back looking irritable. He tells you that Harper turned him down because she’s seeing Andy later. He goes on to say that Harper “seemed normal” when he first met her and that spending time with Andy has made “the mental rub off on her”. He tells you that Harper should be convinced to stay away from Andy or she’ll be “damaged” and that Andy will end up “just like his mad mum” because a doctor friend told him it’s hereditary.

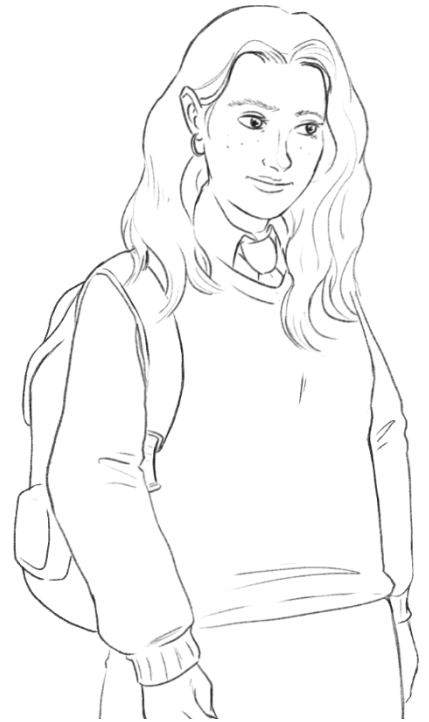
Writing a letter to Harper

When we are struggling, sad or stressed having a close friend to offer us support can make a big of difference to our overall mental health and resilience.

While Harper has **Andy** as a close friend in the end they won't always be there to offer support.

Imagine that you are another close friend of Harper's who has heard what she is going through and that her dad is in hospital again. Try writing her a **letter** or message of support below, continuing on a separate sheet if you need to.

In it, consider what words of kindness and understanding are most likely to make Harper feel better and make her feel less alone in her difficulties.



Dear Harper,

From -----

Writing a letter to Andy

Andy faces a lot of struggles both at home and at school, but support could make a big difference in his life.

Harper helps him a lot as she has relatable problems and is the friend he needs. However, Harper may not always be there to support him through tough times.

Imagine that you are another close friend of Andy's who has heard that he is struggling again. Try writing him a **letter** or message of support below, continuing on a separate sheet if you need to.

Consider how you might reassure him about struggles at school, people saying mean things about his mum or general feelings of loneliness.



Dear Andy,

From -----

Scriptwriter activity

Just as in everyday life, within the play there are various moments where characters disagree or have a misunderstandings.

Having a misunderstanding or argument can be stressful, but it also has the benefit of letting us **reflect** on the things we said that may have been hurtful or poorly considered in the moment.

Running with this idea, **consider one or both** of following scenes from the play as if you were a professional **scriptwriter** or script editor. Imagine you are rewriting these scenes to be more positive where the people in question find common ground and part on good terms.

You may even write these as if they were a **sequel** to the play where the characters meet again after its events but this time have grown and reconsidered what they said previously.

Harper and Dean in the English lesson

When **Dean talks to Harper in the English lesson** the conversation is quite uncomfortable, particularly on the topic of her spending time with Andy.

Look at the script excerpt on the next page and try **rewriting** them in the spaces overleaf to make Dean more considerate of her feelings and Andy's. Give thought to where Dean spreads unfounded rumours, makes assumptions or exaggerates.



Looking at the original script, what specifically do you think is problematic about what Dean says?:

Why do you think your rewrite is more positive?:

Millie and Andy talk about football

Millie's conversation with Andy starts off friendly but quickly breaks down as Andy becomes irritable over the topic of his mum and quitting the football team.

The emotions and missteps in this conversation along with who is actually at fault (if anyone) are perhaps not as clear as in the previous example.

Looking at the script on the next page, give careful consideration to how **both parties** could take different approaches for a more positive outcome. For example; could **Millie** have worded her suggestion for Andy to rejoin the team more carefully? Did she raise the topic of his mum having a mental illness with enough sensitivity?

Meanwhile, was **Andy** too quick to assume how Millie and other people on the team feel about him? Did he not give Millie enough of a chance?



Millie: "I was glad to hear about your mum... That she's doing better, I mean."

Andy: "How do you know about that?"

Millie: "My mum popped by, the other day. Said she's looking really well."

Andy: "Yeah. Well. It never lasts."

Millie: "Oh, come on. You should try and stay positive..."

Andy: "Good one..."

Millie: "I mean... We all feel a little low sometimes, don't we? Maybe this is just one of those times."

Andy: "Leave it out, Millie. You don't have a clue."

Millie: "I know that you loved being on the team. And then you just gave it up."

Andy: "It's complicated, ok."

Millie: "We'd have given you a lift. We still can, if you like."

Andy: "Oh, come on. You telling me they'd all welcome me back?"

Millie: "Well, there are some who might struggle..."

Andy: "Exactly. You're better off without me."

Millie: "Look. Why don't you focus on the good stuff, then the bad stuff won't seem so bad. Like with your mum—"

Andy: "Right, Cause I forgot you were the expert."

Millie: "I was just trying to say that it can't be that bad."

Andy: "Are you serious?"

Millie: "That didn't... I was just trying to give some advice."

Andy: "Listen. If I want your advice, I'll come ask you for it. Until then, why don't you just stay out of my way. How does that sound? Great. Glad we're on the same page."

Make a playlist

During the play's story **music** plays a significant role in Andy and Harper's friendship. They listen together during their first meeting at a bus stop (though they differ in tastes) and it accompanies the dance routine they work on.

Music for many can be a great way to relieve stresses or express themselves, whether it's listening, making their own or just sharing a playlist.

Make your own playlist

What music makes you happy or relieves stress?

In the **playlist overleaf** write the **three top tracks** that make you feel good along with a **reason why**.

If three tracks isn't enough there is also space to write in an additional seven tracks below if you like, turning it into a **top ten playlist**.

Once you have created your playlist, **consider and discuss** the following as a group:

- If you had written this playlist a year ago, would it have been very different?
- What do you think musical interests can tell you about a person? Are you ever surprised about a person's musical tastes in relation to their personality?

Please remember during your discussion **to be respectful** of how other people's musical tastes differ from your own. We all have different preferences and while it's fine to not like something please be mindful of their feelings, even when you disagree completely.



#	Title	Artist/album	Why?
1	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----
2	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----
3	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----
4	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----
5	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----
6	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----
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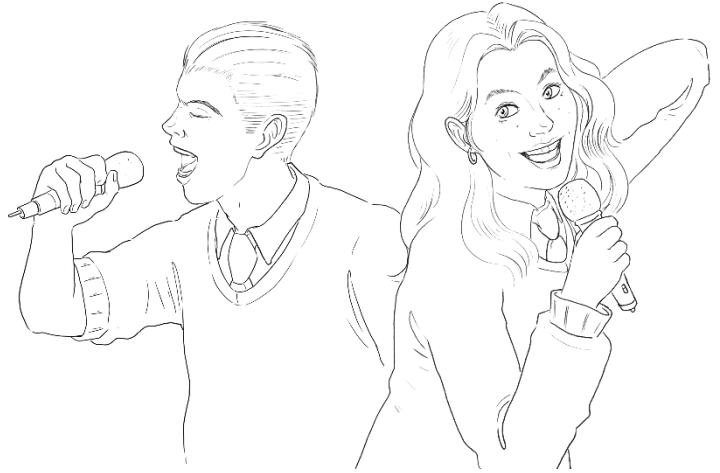
Carry on the song exercise

In the play Harper and Andy have a **song** to go with their dance routine. To refresh your memory here are the lyrics:

*Oh you know we can't give up,
This is not the time to leave it all behind,
And we're helping each other,
In the sunless sky you have the
brightest light*

(Lyrics written by Lara Jones)

Discuss this song as a whole group or in smaller ones for a moment, consider:



- What the lyrics add and what you generally feel lyrics add to music.
- Do you prefer music with or without lyrics? Why is that?
- What do the best songs make you feel? What kind of lyrics get you invested in a song and make you want to hear it again?

Extend the song

In **small groups of 2-4 people** look at the song and imagine you are a team of professional songwriters who have been hired to extend the song with a new verse. Consider the existing style of the song and what it expresses, asking yourself:

- How is what you've written a continuation of the style and themes?
- What do you want to express in this new verse? How might you tie it to mental health or tough feelings?

Spend about **15-20 minutes** creating your new verse. You might also want to **rehearse and sing** it for the rest of the group if you feel confident doing so.

Dance routines exercise

In the play Harper and Andy's dance routine helps with their mental health, being a project for them to collaborate on and express themselves through. Creative projects, music and dance can be beneficial to all of us in releasing tension and doing what we enjoy.

Try to remake Harper and Andy's dance routine

In a smaller group or one large **one try recalling and copying Harper and Andy's dance routine** from the play as well as you can. Discuss the following:

- **How did the dance make you feel?**
- **What do you think Harper and Andy were trying to express in these dance moves?**



Create your own dance routine

In **groups of 2 to 4 people** collaborate together on your own **eight step dance routine** using the template on the next page. If you have done the **Make a playlist** exercise you could also use it for a track to dance to.

First, discuss **what do you want to express with this dance** giving it a **theme** which can be communicated through movement. Consider perhaps giving it a focus similar to the play, expressing something about mood, mental health, school stresses or mental illness.

You may also use the last column to draw a **thumbnail illustration** of each dance move if you think this will help you visualise and rehearse the sequence.

Spend about **15-20 minutes** rehearsing this then show the rest of the group your dance for further discussion.

#	Move description	Illustration
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Mythbusting worksheet

Mental health and **mental illness** can be complicated topics. Not everything you hear about them is necessarily true as many people are misinformed or have taken on opinions that have no basis in fact.

But what do you think about them?

For each of the following statements place a tick in the box for **'true'** or **'false'** based upon what you think. If you're uncertain and don't want to guess tick the **'not sure'** box instead.

		True	False	Not sure
1	Mental illness and mental health are the same			
2	Mental illness is contagious and can be passed on			
3	Only adults can develop a mental illness			
4	People with mental illness are sad all the time			
5	If you look after your mental health, you will never become stressed or upset			
6	A person with mental illness can be completely cured			
7	Mental health is as important as physical health			
8	Having a mental illness doesn't mean you're a bad person			
9	A person can choose whether to have a mental illness			
10	Parents with mental illness are rare			

When you are done, you can ask for the **answer sheet** to see how you did.

NOTE FOR TEACHERS: Keep the following pages separate from the main worksheet until students have given their answers.

Mythbusting answer sheet

- 1. Mental illness and mental health are the same** – This is false. We all have mental health which can be good or bad depending on how we are made to feel. Having a mental illness can change how we feel, behave and how we experience the world regardless of what is going on around us. For example; you could say that **Andy** has poor **mental health** at a few points in the play when he has outbursts, caused by how he is treated in school and having to shoulder family responsibility. However, **his mum** and **Harper's dad** are both unable to fulfil responsibilities for long periods of time, often needing to stay in hospital without necessarily having an obvious trigger.
- 2. Mental illness is contagious and can be passed on** – This is false. You cannot *catch* a mental illness by being in contact with someone who has one.
- 3. Only adults can develop a mental illness** – This is false. While it is typically more common in adults, children can also develop a mental illness under some circumstances.
- 4. People with mental illness are sad all the time** – False again. All mental illnesses are different and the symptoms they cause can vary a lot between people. There is no "catchall" set of symptoms.
- 5. If you look after your mental health, you will never become stressed or upset** – This is false. Mild stress and sadness are a common part of life in balance with all our other emotions. No one lives a stress free life and eventually something will make you sad. While looking after our mental health is important, we should also recognise that a balance of happy and sad feelings is normal.

- 6. A person with mental illness can be completely cured** – Largely false. A person with a mental illness can ideally find ways to *manage* it through medication and lifestyle changes, making occurrences of symptoms less commonplace or negligible in the best case scenario. It is unlikely however that they will ever be completely cured with no further use of medication, therapy or specific support.
- 7. Mental health is as important as physical health** – This is true. Just as we might exercise or watch what we eat to take care of our physical health, we should also care for our *mental* health by finding time to relax and reduce stress. Caution should be directed towards things which may impact our mental health such as irregular sleeping patterns, self medicating through substances and alcohol or fostering toxic relationships which consistently make us feel bad.
- 8. Having a mental illness doesn't mean you're a bad person** – True. Just like any other illness, having a mental illness *never* means you are a bad person. It can potentially affect anyone and has no bearing on their life or personality.
- 9. A person can choose whether to have a mental illness** – False. No one chooses to have a mental illness. Mental illness develops due to a variety of complicated factors. It is not self inflicted.
- 10. Parents with mental illness are rare** – This is false. Parents with mental illness are quite common throughout the UK and the world. As highlighted in the play, families may be reticent to talk about it with others meaning it only seems uncommon. It very likely that someone you know has been affected by this.

How did you do?

Remember, that if you got some answers wrong or weren't sure that's fine. Mental health and mental illness can be tricky topics to navigate and there's nothing wrong with admitting you're not sure about something.

It is important though to question what people may tell you about mental health and mental illness though. If you're not sure about whether something is true or not, refer to other trustworthy sources to make sure you are not spreading harmful myths.



Always consider whether an opinion on the topic is unfounded or cruel.

As shown in the play, people like **Dean** can make assumptions or exaggerate based on a grudge rather than what's actually true. These myths can also needlessly hurt and make life difficult for others as they did for Andy.

The internet and social media may not be reliable either as shocking statements may be made on mental illness simply to drive engagement, essentially being "click bait" with little thought given to facts or empathy.

If you want questions answered reliably consider sources such as the NHS website (www.nhs.uk) or other established charities.

Carer's resource

The following resource can be used to inform recognition and support for people like Andy and Harper who have a parent with a mental illness who they care for.

According to **York Carers Centre**:

Carers provide regular, unpaid help to someone close to them due to frailty, physical or mental illness, addiction or disability. Carers may help with personal care (washing, bathing, dressing, feeding), medication, cooking, shopping, housework and giving emotional support. Many carers do not recognise themselves as carers. Carers can be any age.



Noticing and supporting

It may not always be immediately obvious that someone is in this situation and struggling with it, but there may be signs that together suggest so.

Young adult carers have contributed the following thoughts on how you might both notice and understand their circumstances:

- **Tiredness** could be a sign of something else.
- **Forgetting deadlines and not turning in homework**, doesn't mean we didn't want to do it, it just didn't make it onto the already very busy list of jobs we have to do at home.
- **Being a young carer might show up in lots of different ways at school**; we might need to be on our phone or checking it a lot, we might have forgotten things, be a bit untidy, can't do clubs, attend late or need to leave early.

- **We wish everyone at school could understand the physical and emotional strain of being a young carer.** We may have to get a parent out of bed every morning before leaving for school, and then worrying about them during the day.
- **Rather than telling us off or picking up on things we've done wrong,** asking about our wellbeing or how you could help could be an opening to make our lives easier.
- **Many of us found it helpful when our school gave us tools to communicate our needs to others.** For example; a 'Time Out' card so that if a parent phones for help we can step out of class or a similar card to leave next to a phone to show agreement on receiving urgent calls. It gives a shorthand so we don't have to repeat the same thing over and over again.

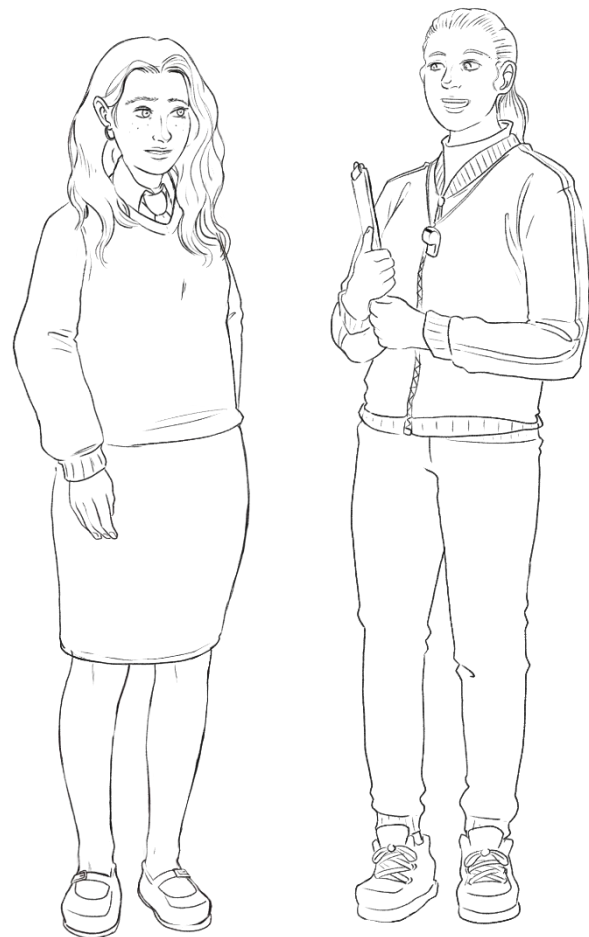
Always keep in mind that circumstances can vary a great deal and that the kind of support needed will also differ. In the end, it's important to listen to the people affected first and foremost to find out what would help them.

Teacher's resource

This short resource has been made for **teachers and other professionals** in similar roles to help in supporting children, young people and their parents who have a mental illness. It is based on the advice provided in *Building Children's Resilience in the Face of Parental Mental Illness* edited by Our Time Charity founder Alan Cooklin and Gill Gorell Barnes.

Please note that these are broadly applicable suggestions and should not override or interfere with specific safeguarding requirements.

8 Helpful tips



1. **No one professional group has complete responsibility for or expertise to support these children** – Even a small investment of time by any one of them can make a massive difference and should not be dismissed on the basis of being too small an intervention.
2. **Do not be afraid that you are not an 'expert'** – Whatever role you may be in, take the opportunity to talk with a child and their family if the opportunity is available.
3. **Try to become aware of and connect to other professionals in the child's life** – This could help build a network of understanding and support for them. Also be sure that children and their views are included in any planning made among you.

4. **When speaking with parents do not be intimidated into avoiding important questions** – When meeting a family be sure to ask questions and be curious enough about the answers to use them as a basis for further queries. In particular, be sure to ask about how children may have responded to illness and what support (if any) they have received.
5. **Try to bring families and resources together** – It is important to not feel constricted by your particular role. Brushing off children and parents who have a mental illness as the responsibility of some other agency can be a large part of what sees them fail to connect with support. Any service recommendations could make a crucial difference.
6. **Simple suggestions could be transformative** – Suggesting things which can help build resilience for both parents with a mental illness and their children can ultimately make a big difference. Perhaps note what small things either of them said helped and highlight this as part of an ongoing strategy or encourage communication over certain topics.
7. **Try to make sure that children have an adult who will keep them in mind and be an advocate** – This could be yourself or someone else in an appropriate position who has regular contact and can be supportive.
8. **Always remember that young people are the experts on their parent's illness** – Their concerns and observations should always be taken seriously with clear communication and emphasis that their voice is being heard.



**Play written by
Ant Stones**

**Resources
Created by
OUR TIME
CHARITY**

**Find out more
about our work at:
ourtimecharity.org.uk**

**NEXT DOOR
BUT ONE**
COMMUNITY ARTS COLLECTIVE

www.nextdoorbutone.co.uk