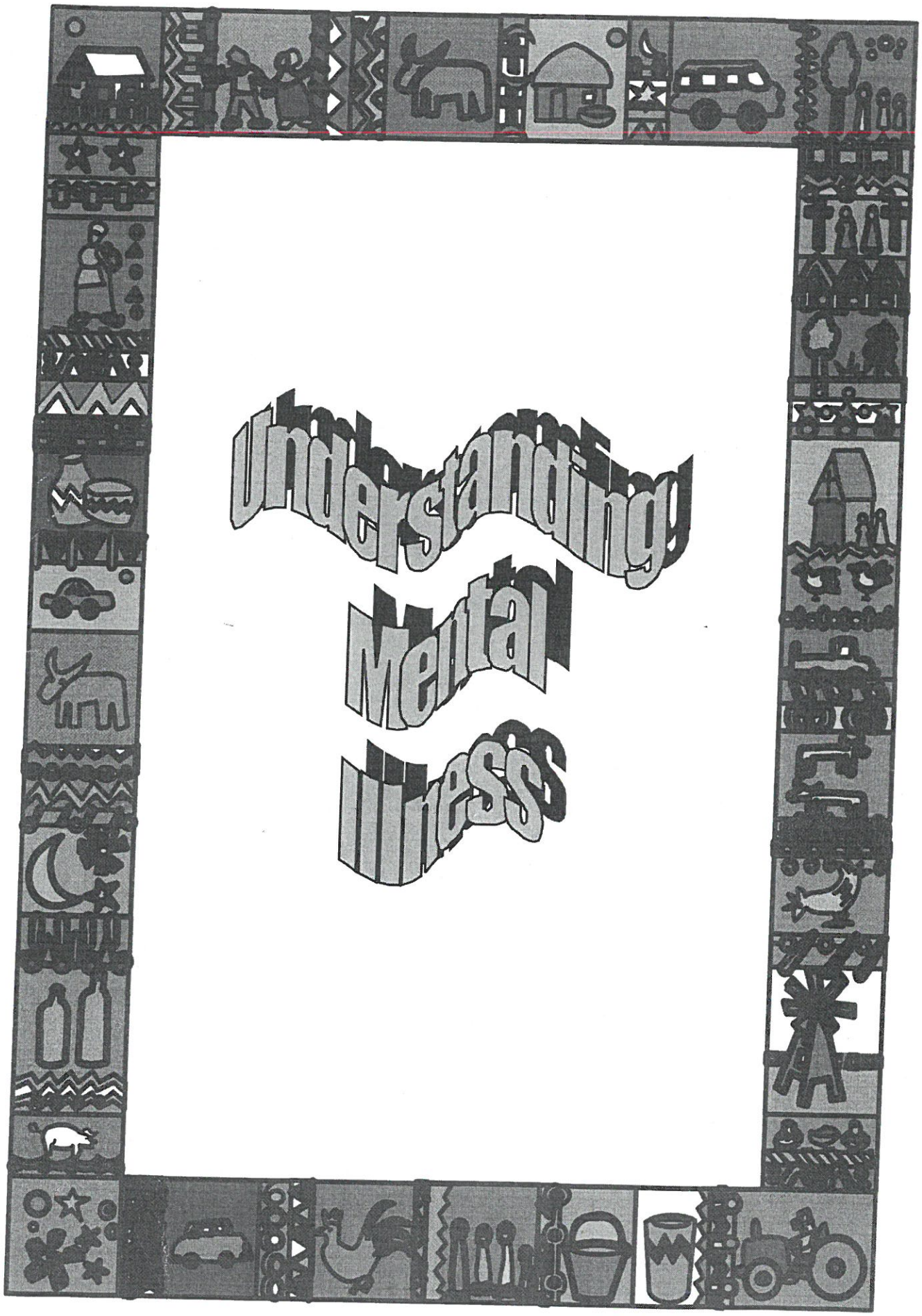
Understanding
Mental
Illness

Foreword

The idea for this programme arose when Vicky Somers, Senior Psychiatric Social Worker with the Northern Area Health Board who had completed a research thesis in the area of children whose parents are mentally ill, approached Claidhe Mór about setting up a group to explain mental illness to children.

Angela Walsh and Pauline Dobbs, Family Workers, had already developed effective ways of working with children in this area; so between 1999 and 2000 a team of professionals from Claidhe Mór met with Vicky Somers and created this workbook.

The first group commenced in September 2000 and was facilitated by Angela Walsh and Pauline Dobbs.

We hope this programme will help children to have a better understanding of mental illness. We also hope that it will improve their coping skills where mental illness is a difficulty in their family.

Claidhe Mór would like to thank Valerie Guerin for her notes and records of meetings, and contributions to the programme.

Thanks also to Vicky Somers for her invaluable contribution and guidance and her professional knowledge and expertise.

Thanks to Pauline Dobbs and Angela Walsh for sharing their knowledge and skills.

Thanks to Liam Ó Dálaigh who chaired the meetings and compiled this workbook from the ideas of the committee.

Thanks to Stella Owens for her contributions support and guidance.

Sr. Goretti Butler D.C.
Director
Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service

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Understanding Mental Illness

Devised
By

Pauline Dobbs
Angela Walsh
Valerie Guerin
Liam Ó Dálaigh
Vicky Somers

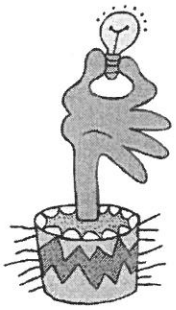
Produced by Claidhe Mór Family Centre in partnership with the
Northern Area Health Board

Daughters of Charity, Claidhe Mór Family Centre, 2001

The Programme

Session 1

Why are we here?



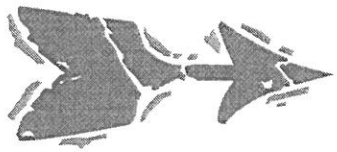
The purpose of the programme

Rules of the programme

My name is :

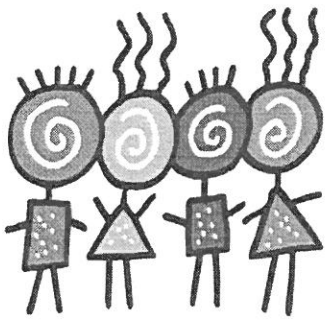
I am years old

My favourite things are:

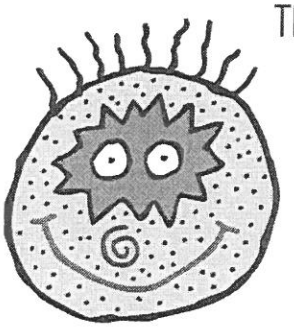


This is a picture of me

This is a picture of my family doing something together

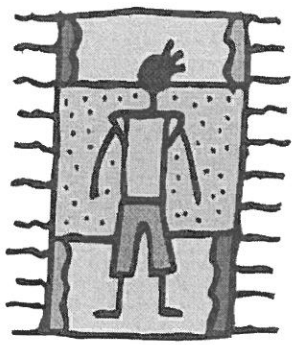


Things we like to do as a family

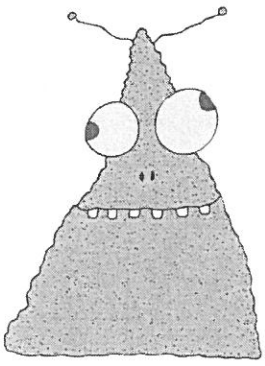


The people in my family are

People I am close to;
E.g. Friends and relations



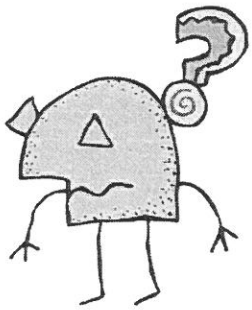
Drawing and stuff



What I like about my family?

What I'd like to be different?

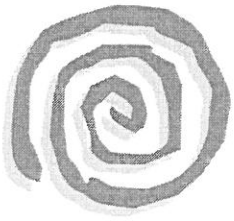
Session 2

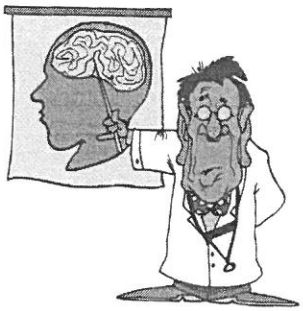


What is mental illness?

What have you been told?

What would you like to know?

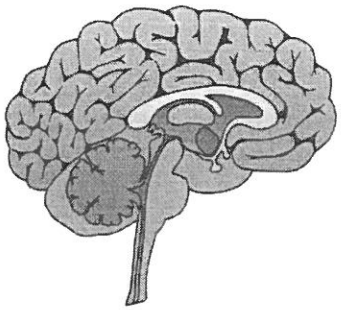




What is Mental Illness?

There are all different types of illnesses. The illness we call mental illness is different from other illness because you can't see it like a broken leg or the person does not look sick with a runny nose like a cold. Sometimes when a person has a mental illness we don't know that they are sick and that they have a mental illness. It can be really hard to understand what is going on; even the ill person may not understand what is happening or believe that there is something wrong. All of this can cause confusion and upset.

Most people from time to time feel very sad, irritable, afraid, have no energy or feel that things around them have changed. These feelings and changes in behaviour usually pass with time. If not, a person may need to see a doctor as they may be suffering from a mental illness.



Mental illness is not the same for everybody. These are some of the symptoms:

Thoughts are all mixed up and the person finds it hard to think straight

The person is very quiet, does not speak a lot and wants to be left alone.

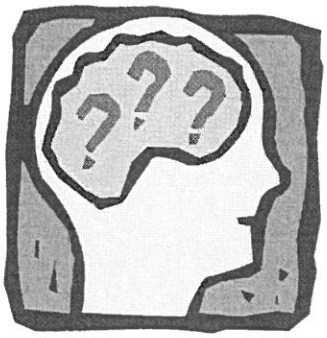
Spends a lot of time in bed and always seems to be tired.

Hears a voice speaking that no one else can hear.

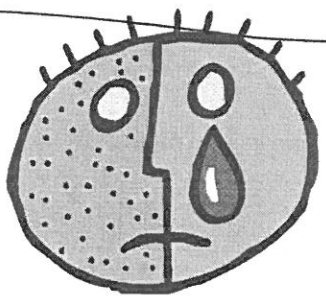
Believes things that nobody else believes.

JR

Other things that can happen...



If you get a fright, your heart starts to beat very fast, and you feel afraid. This is what happens when an adult has a panic attack, except they have the feeling of fright without anything making them afraid. Remember it is a fright - it is not harmful. Your mum or dad will get over it in a short time.



A person suffering from mental illness can feel so bad that they don't want to live anymore. They may even talk about attempting suicide. Should this happen in your family it is important that you let an adult you can trust know.

Read p11&12 first then this paragraph

AFTER PG 9