

What's happening to my family?

For children aged 9–12 years

What's going on?

Sometimes bad things happen to people, and it really shakes them up. It's like their body and mind have had a big shock, and it takes time for it all to calm down again.

If your Mum or Dad has gone through something bad, they might be behaving differently, and you might feel confused and worried about that.

Are any of these things happening to your Mum or Dad?

Do they keep having bad dreams?

Do they get really scared all of a sudden, for no reason?

Do they get angry, or annoyed by small things?

Are they tired all the time because they can't sleep?

Do they sometimes look sad, angry, or scared for no reason?

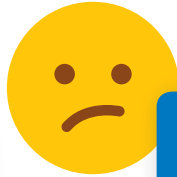
Have they stopped doing things they used to do with you or your family?

Do they want to be on their own, and not be around other people?

Have they started drinking a lot of alcohol, or taking drugs?



He yells
a lot!



He shouts out
in his sleep!



He doesn't seem
to care about
me anymore.

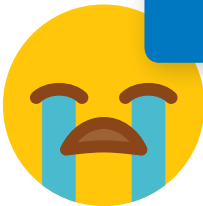
She's always
tired.

She stays
in bed
sometimes.

She doesn't want
to do anything
anymore.

She cries all
the time.

He looks
sad.





"I forgot to tell Mum I was going to my friend's house after school. When I got home, **she was really angry**. So angry, **she scared me**. She said she was worried to death about me. Later, I heard her crying in her bedroom. **I felt so guilty**.

The next day I talked to Dad about it because **I was still really upset**. He said she was only worried because she loves me so much. He said **they weren't angry with me at all**. He said that Mum got really angry because she has lots of feelings bubbling around inside her right now, and they sometimes burst out of her when she doesn't mean them to."

It's not your fault.

What's happening in your
family is not because of you.

These problems happen to lots
of people, and your Mum or Dad
can get help.

Will my parent get better?

Most grown-ups who have these problems feel better after a little while.

Sometimes it can take longer and they might need extra help to feel better.

It's not your job to fix the problem.

There are other people whose job it is to help your Mum or Dad.

*I started to feel worried. When will she be better?
Will she be OK?*

So what can I do?

One thing you can do is find a way to tell your parents how you're feeling. This can help you, but it can also help them.

How I am feeling

All good!

Fine

Been better

Not so good

Really bad

How you could help me

Just listen

A hug please

Any advice

I need your help

Some time alone

I feel rotten too

When one of your parents is having a hard time, it can be hard for you too. You might feel upset, sick or just sort of weird.

You might have these feelings in your mind or in your body.

It was really hard. I wanted to spend time together like we used to. But Dad never felt up to it.

You might have upsetting thoughts and uncomfortable feelings, and find it difficult to think and concentrate. You might feel unloved or unsafe.

MIND

You might notice your heart pounding, your muscles feel tight or sore, your palms are sweaty, your breathing is fast or difficult, or you have pain in your head or belly.

BODY

It's OK to have feelings like this

Even though they are uncomfortable, these feelings are not bad or dangerous. Everyone has unpleasant feelings at times. The good news is that feelings come and go, and there are ways you can help yourself feel better.

Have you had any of these feelings?

Angry

Embarrassed

Sad

Confused

Hurt

Sick

Worried

Nervous

Guilty

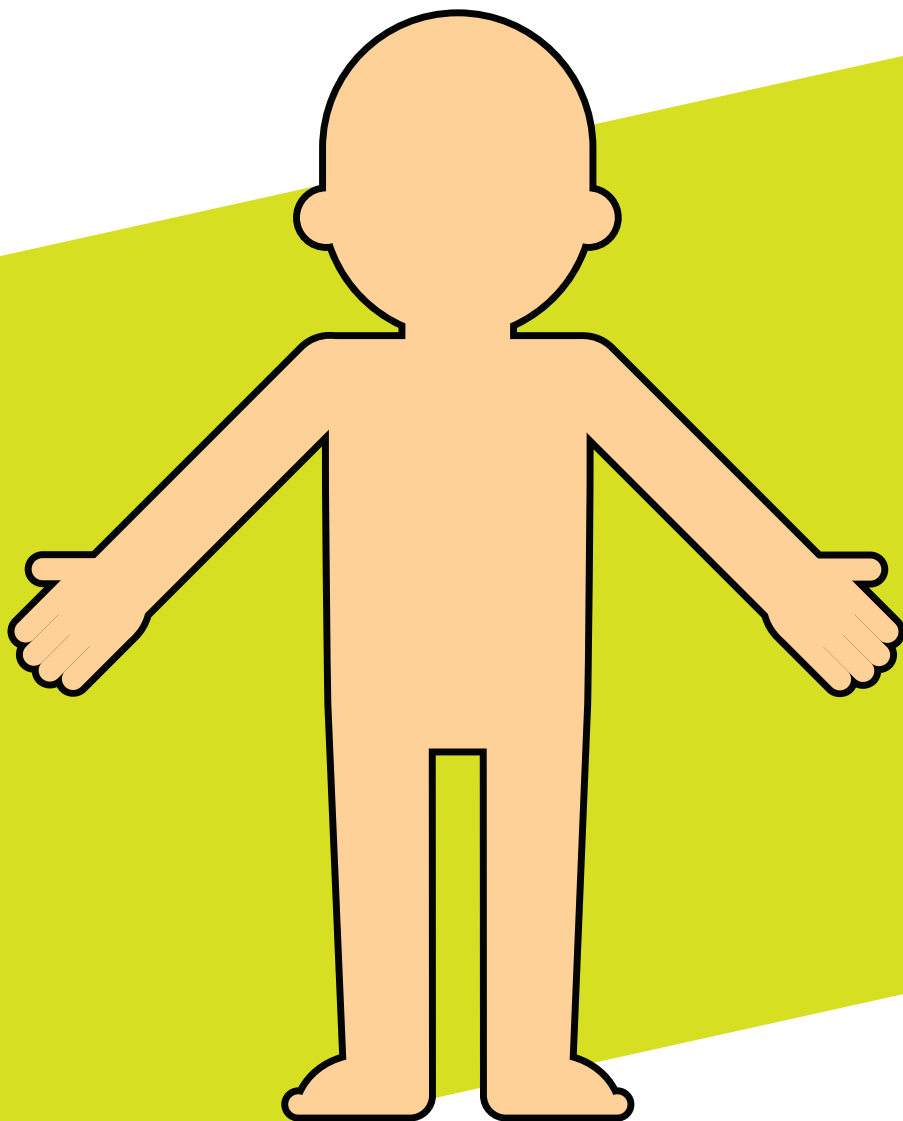
Stressed

Scared

Or any other feelings?

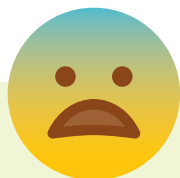
Where in your body have you felt these feelings?

From the sticker sheet at the back of this booklet, choose some feelings that you have had and put them on the body to show where you felt them.



What can I do to feel better?

When you have strong or uncomfortable feelings, here are some ways you can start to feel better.



Worried?

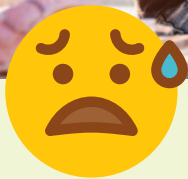
- Take 3 deep slow breaths
- Listen to a happy song
- Think of something happy
- Talk to someone you trust about your worries.



Angry?

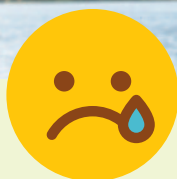
- Colour in really hard with a red pencil
- Rip up paper
- Shout into a pillow
- Tense and relax each muscle in your body, one by one.

I felt SO stressed out.
My head was spinning,
and I felt really sick in
the tummy.



Stressed?

- Go for a run, jump around or play to let the energy out of your body
- Talk about your worries with someone you trust
- Spend some time in the garden or ask someone to take you to the park
- Listen to some music
- Try belly breathing (instructions are on the next page)



Sad?

- Write in a journal
- Do your favourite activity
- Talk to someone you trust about how you feel
- Hug a pet, family member or friend
- Remember a time when you felt really happy and recall how you felt, and the smells, sounds, and sights around you at that time.

Pick one activity to try the next time you're feeling an unpleasant emotion.

What will you do?

Who could help you?

Belly breathing

Try this exercise when you feel tense or upset
– it will help to relax your muscles.

- 1 Lie down
 - 2 Imagine there is a balloon in your belly
 - 3 Put a hand on your belly
 - 4 Breathe in slowly through your nose and imagine the balloon filling with air
 - 5 As you breathe in, feel the hand on your belly rise up
 - 6 Breathe out slowly through your mouth and imagine the balloon getting smaller
 - 7 As you do, feel the hand on your belly sink down
 - 8 As the breath leaves your body, imagine all the muscles in your body relaxing and letting go of tension.
 - 9 Repeat.
- You can add a count to your breath as well. Start by breathing in for 3 counts, and out for 3 counts. Then in for 3 and out for 4 counts. Then in for 3 and out for 5, then in for 3 and out for 6. Keep going, in for 3 and out for 6.

My favourite place

Try this activity when you're feeling stressed, worried, or sad.

1

Think of a really good memory, a time when you felt safe and happy.

2

Once you have a memory in mind, lie or sit down somewhere comfortable and quiet and close your eyes.

3

Think about this memory. Remember the details:

- What you were doing?
- Where you were?
- Who was with you?
- What was the weather like?
- What objects were around you?
- What colours could you see?
- What smells could you smell?
- What sounds could you hear?

4

Imagine you're there right now, doing the same thing, feeling the same way.

5

Notice what it feels like to imagine this.
Is your body relaxed?
Does your breathing feel easy?
Does your mind feel lighter?

6

When you're ready, put the memory aside and come back to the here and now.

7

Re-visit this memory in all its detail whenever you need to.

When things are hard at school

When things are hard at home, or you're worried about Mum or Dad, it can be hard to think and pay attention at school.

Here are some ideas for making things easier at school.

- Talk to your teacher about what is going on for you at home. They can look for ways to help you.
- Tell a friend who you trust.
- Speak to the school counsellor or welfare worker.
- Keep to a routine. Regular meals, sleep and exercise help stop stress and can help you sleep.
- Do something relaxing before going to bed: kick a ball around the back yard, find your favourite thing to play with, read, play with a pet, listen to music. Screen time before bed makes it harder to get to sleep.

The teacher got angry at me.
She said I wasn't paying attention

"I worry at night.
What if Dad gets worse? What if Mum leaves? The **thoughts crowd my head** and I can't sleep. Then at school **I'm so tired.** I try to read but the words go fuzzy and my mind goes blank."



“One of the kids said something mean about Mum. **I got angry. It was like a flash of heat.** I snapped and hit him. I got in trouble, but I didn’t care. I hate school. I want to be home with Mum. **I worry about her when I’m away.**”

My teacher told Mum I’d been in trouble. Mum asked me what happened. I told her **I feel worried and angry all the time.**

Mum spoke to my teacher. After that **the teacher was nice to me.** She told me what she does when she gets angry, like **counting down from 10 in her head,** and going to a spot in the staff room where she feels calm. **I have a favourite spot at school now,** and she lets me go there when I need to.”

It's OK to ask for help

I told my auntie
how I was feeling.
It worked out OK.

Everyone needs a little help sometimes.

It's always OK to ask for help.

But sometimes our thoughts get in the way and stop us from telling someone that we need help.

They'll think
I'm crazy

They won't
understand

They'll say I'm
making it up

They'll laugh
at me

They'll say
I'm weak

I'd feel stupid

Most of the time people feel better when they've shared their feelings.

Try it for yourself and see what happens.

She was
really kind

He didn't
judge me

I felt relief

I felt better
afterwards

She's been through
a similar thing

Who can I ask for help?

Ask a grown-up you trust to do this activity with you.

1

Cut out 4 circles of coloured paper. Each circle should be 2 cm bigger than the one before.

2

On the circles write:
my family
my school
my friends
my community

3

On each circle, draw or write down the names of people who:

1. you trust
2. you feel comfortable with
3. you know you could go to if you needed help.

4

Keep this somewhere safe.

Whenever you feel alone, or unsure what to do, speak to one of the people whose name you've written down.



What if I need more help?

- Find out if your school has a **counsellor or welfare worker**
- Speak to the **Kids Helpline** on 1800 55 1800 or via email or web chat.
- With an adult you trust, look at the tips, tools, and stories from other children on the website **Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI)**.

You and your family can also speak to someone who knows what it is like for children who have a parent who is part of the Australian Defence Force.

Your Mum or Dad can call **Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling** to organise family counselling to help you start feeling better (call 1800 011 046) or **Defence Family Helpline** (call 1800 624 608).



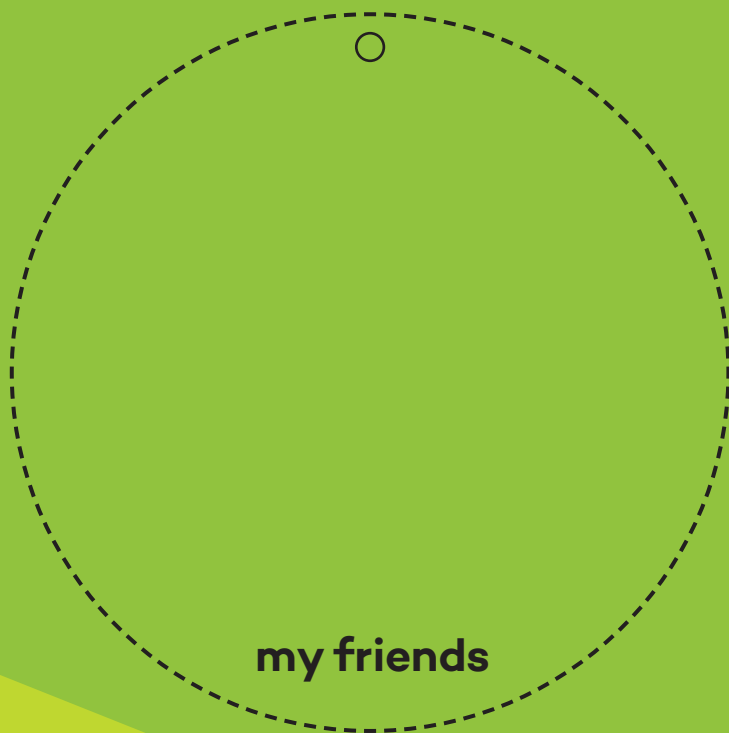
Who can I ask for help? Activity cut-outs

Follow the instructions on page 16 to create a booklet.



my community

my family



my friends



my school



Coping with trauma in a military family

This booklet is intended for children 9–12 years of age with a parent or care-giver who is a serving, transitioning, or ex-serving member of the ADF experiencing mental health difficulties following trauma.

This booklet was developed by Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health with input from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling, Defence Community Organisation (DCO), and the Australian Defence Force Mental Health Directorate. Phoenix Australia wishes to express appreciation to the current and former ADF members, family members, and ex-service organisation representatives who provided feedback on this booklet.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY FAMILY?

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PHOENIX
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Posttraumatic
Mental Health