



# The Wellness Pod

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## Silly Nilly

Mum is not the same person anymore. I love nanna a lot and I like to go to her house and play with her dog Nilly but I miss home. Mum says that sometimes she feels very tired and has to sleep in the afternoon. A few days ago she was very angry with me but I couldn't understand what made her so angry. She still came to kiss me goodnight though.

I pretended to be asleep. I knew she was crying. I think a lot about her in class and at times, the teacher has to come near me to get my attention. I think mum is sick. It has been going for a long time now. I am not sure if it's my fault. Perhaps the medicines are not working. I don't feel like going to school anymore. Mum might need me to help her. I don't want to go to Nanna's and I don't want to play with Nilly. She is silly anyway. I want to play with my cars and make a lot of noise. Nanna tells mum that I'm not the same boy anymore.

## The Impact of Parental Illness on Children

Up to 12% of parents worldwide have been diagnosed with a medical chronic illness. Most support is directed toward the patients, so this unfortunately means that their children often don't receive the support they need. The impact of parental illness on family life, and especially the children within the family, is significant and is a complex and dynamic issue. Children and adolescents of chronically ill parents may need to cope with decreased parental availability and changing routines and daily habits. These children might also face increased household duties including taking care of the ill parent, the potential decrease of social and financial resources and the fear of possibly losing a parent.

Current research highlights various responses of children to parental illness (Chen, 2014; Pakenham and Cox, 2014). For example, in comparison with their peers, children whose parents suffer from an illness tend to experience more emotional distress (e.g. anxiety, depression, somatic complaints...) and behavioural problems (anger, withdrawn behaviour...). Their distress might also affect their schoolwork, relationships with their peers and hopes for the future. These children often experience a flood of concerns about their parent's illness. As highlighted in the story "Silly Nilly", children worry about being the ones who caused the illness, the side effects of treatment, changes in the parent's appearance and functioning, and fear of separation from the parent. Moreover, older children might have concerns about their own risk of getting the disease. Studies have shown that these children have a desire to be given an accurate picture of their parent's illness, even though such conversations could be difficult (Rauch and Muriel, 2006).

It is important to state that not all responses to parental illness are negative. Positive outcomes can emerge. With the right support, these children can adapt to their parent's illness, becoming more resilient and developing strengths such as empathy and independence.



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Here to Care

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## A Few Tips

- Inform children about the illness and treatment and what changes to expect
- Let them know that they do not need to 'be strong' and 'feel ok'
- Encourage healthy ways to express their feelings, for example through art, music, dancing, sports, writing, or talking to someone they trust
- Try to maintain their daily routine. If this is not possible, offer choices about changes in their routines
- Reassure them that nothing they did or thought caused the illness or the side effects
- Discuss with them who would take care of them if the ill parent would no longer be able to

KVF promotes the wellbeing of children dealing with a loss or a serious illness of a family member. It helps children, aged between five to sixteen, maintain a sense of continuity in their lives by offering educational and psychological support. KVF Centre is located in the President's Kitchen Garden in Attard. All our services are free of charge. Due to Covid we are presently offering our services online.