



Signs in your family



Within your family, changes for one family member can mean changes for all. You may notice changes in your loved one's mental health when they are no longer doing activities they like, arguing more, losing their temper, or closely controlling family members. This can indicate that your loved one may be struggling behind the scenes.

Sometimes the first signs of a Defence member needing help can be seen in children, a person's partner, parents or siblings.

Some signs that a family unit needs support:

- » If you notice having more fights or arguments than usual, or that smaller issues are leading to arguments
- » If you find communicating is more difficult and this is not improving over time
- » If you no longer enjoy being together as a family, especially if this is different from how it used to be
- » If it's becoming harder to feel physically and emotionally close
- » If you notice your loved one no longer engaging in family activities or refusing to see people who used to be part of your life
- » If you notice your loved one being more controlling over you and family members, e.g., restricting social outings
- » If you see some changes in parenting style, like becoming less tolerant, over-protective or disengaged
- » If your children are suddenly changing their behaviour or regressing because of what is happening, like bedwetting again, refusing to go to school or becoming withdrawn

Impact on your family and the way you relate to each other

If you are beginning to feel scared of your loved one, call 1800RESPECT on **1800 737 732** or the Defence Member and Family Helpline on **1800 624 608**. If you feel you or others are in immediate danger call 000.

If your loved one is experiencing mental health difficulties, it can have knock-on effects for you and other family members, including children. Here are some examples of how it can impact on family members.

Signs in your family from an adult perspective:

- » you feel unsupported and feel that your loved one does not connect with you enough, emotionally or physically e.g., *"He became much more withdrawn and didn't really talk much to me anymore. He would flinch and brush me away if I tried to hug him."*
- » you feel like you have to take on full responsibility for day-to-day family life e.g., *"I knew she was going through a tough time, so I tried to make things easier by taking on extra tasks around the house. I felt like I was a single parent, and it was a lot to take on."*
- » you take on the role of peacemaker if family life feels like one crisis after another e.g., *"I'm trying to keep the peace between the kids and my husband, but they keep clashing. James is more and more irritable with them and he doesn't*

understand that they need to make their own choices. I know he wants to keep them safe, especially after what he saw overseas but I feel like I'm always putting out fires."

- » you feel isolated because you're not doing the things you used to do as a family e.g., *"We never go anywhere as a family anymore. Ever since her diagnosis, we've stopped seeing our friends"*
- » you feel scared or like you're walking on eggshells because your loved one is angry or aggressive e.g., *"I'm always mindful of how he is going to react. There are things I know not to do, or he will lose his temper. It's like walking on a tight rope some days and it's exhausting."*

From a child's perspective:

- » they can feel confused and angry if a parent is physically and/or emotionally absent e.g., *"My youngest asked, 'Why is daddy always doing stuff in the shed by himself and not doing stuff with me anymore?' I explained, 'He's feeling a bit sad at the moment, but not because of you. He loves you very much and is talking with the doctor to get some help with his feelings.'"*
- » They can blame themselves or feel not good enough if they are unable to meet their parents' expectations e.g., *"I forgot to tell Mum I was staying back after school to get in some extra practise for our upcoming netball competition. When I got home, she was really angry with me and said that she was worried to death about me. Later, I heard her fighting with dad about it. I felt like it was my fault."*

- » they can struggle to become independent if a parent is overly controlling e.g., *"My teenage son got really upset when we stopped him accessing social media. He kept saying that's how he contacted his friends, but my partner feels like it's too dangerous"*
- » they care for their parent at the expense of some of their own needs
- » they feel like home is not a safe and caring place

For more information about helping your children, visit:

- » for 9-12 year olds: https://www.openarms.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-12/whats_happening_to_my_family.pdf and
- » for 13-17 year olds https://www.openarms.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-12/when_your_parent_is_having_problems.pdf

If you have noticed new difficulties in the way your family members are behaving with each other, it is usually a sign that the family does need support. Use the above contact numbers to start getting the support you need.

To access DMFS support services or products:

-  1800 624 608
-  MemberAndFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au
-  www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families
-  @DefenceMemberandFamilySupport
-  @dmfs_ausdefence
-  www.forcenet.gov.au