



## The Effect Mental Illness Has on Loved Ones

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When mental illness strikes a loved one, it is shared amongst the family. Living with a loved one such as a parent, sibling, spouse or child who suffers from mental illness can have a negative impact on our own well-being. The stress and fatigue are often carried into the workplace and seeking support for ourselves is critical.

Because of the stigma attached to mental illness and fear of being labeled, my loved one Jamie<sup>[1]</sup> never received proper treatment. After many years of persuasion, Jamie finally sought counselling. Unfortunately, Jamie never received a full diagnosis or completed a proper source of treatment.

Jamie's moods would shift without warning, experiencing outbursts of anger and abusive behaviors daily. Jamie was often tormented by feelings of isolation and loneliness even though the support of loved ones was all around.

Trying to protect others from Jamie's mood swings, all while keeping balance in a volatile environment, became my unspoken cross to bear. It consumed me and took a toll on my own well-being. I fell into depression and suffered from anxiety. It affected my personal and work life. I never shared my pain, especially at work. I wanted to give the illusion that everything was normal, so I suffered in silence.

I lost myself trying to help Jamie find a way out of the black hole of mental illness. In doing so, I allowed Jamie to rob me of myself. Silence is not always golden. Sometimes it becomes our dragon or demon to slough.

For my own well-being, I eventually had to make the difficult choice of walking away.

I realized that instead of helping Jamie, I had become an enabler. It took a long time to overcome the battle scars I suffered and the guilt that I was feeling. When I realized that it was not a battle I could fight on my own, I sought counselling and got help to overcome the pain I felt.

When you can't see the forest for the trees, it is sometimes difficult to make sense of what's happening to you and around you, which makes it impossible to make healthy choices. Conversations have become more open on the topic of mental health; it is not something to be ashamed of anymore.

My advice for anyone living with a loved one who suffers from mental illness is to seek out help and support for yourself. Don't go it alone! You need to help and take care of yourself before you can help anyone else.

I will not be defined by the sadness I am feeling. Instead, I will use this experience to share my story with you about our life on the continuum.

Share your thoughts and be part of the initiative.  
Visit the iService Mental Health site: <http://iservice.prv/mentalhealth>

