

Caring for yourself.

**Self-help for families and friends supporting
people with mental health problems.**



Caring for Yourself contents

Caring for Yourself is a self-help workbook for family and friends supporting people with mental health problems.

It is in eight parts. Each covers a different topic:

Booklet 1 Introduction

Booklet 2 Being a carer

Booklet 3 Information

Booklet 4 Communication skills

Booklet 5 Problem solving and goal achievement

Booklet 6 Relapse management and staying well

Booklet 7 Recovery and hope

Booklet 8 Taking care of yourself

Quick guide icons

Throughout *Caring for Yourself*, you will see these picture icons to illustrate different sections.



**Question /
To think about**



**Stories /
case studies**



Exercise



**Action /
things to do**



**Information
and resources**

Authors: Dr Gráinne Fadden, Dr Carolyn James and Dr Vanessa Pinfold.

To reference this publication please cite 'Fadden, G., James, C., Pinfold, V. (2012) *Caring for Yourself – self-help for families and friends supporting people with mental health problems*. Rethink Mental Illness and Meriden Family Programme. Birmingham: White Halo Design.

Introduction to Caring for Yourself

Rethink Mental Illness and the Meriden Family Programme have created *Caring for Yourself* to help people with mental health problems and carers, family and friends. It is for you if you support someone with any mental health condition. You may have a relative struggling with anxiety, depression or bipolar disorder, a friend with psychosis, schizophrenia or a personality disorder. Whatever the diagnosis, *Caring for Yourself* can help you to develop skills and new ways to cope.

You can use *Caring for Yourself* in two ways:

- Use it yourself independently.
- Use it as part of other training programmes for carers such as the Rethink Mental Illness 'Caring and Coping Programme' or the Meriden Family Programme's 'Caring for Carers' training.

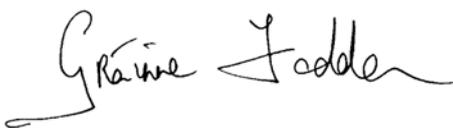
Whichever way is best for you, you can work through it at your own pace, in your own time. Start with Booklet 1, then plan how to use the other booklets and in which order you want to use them.

Everything in *Caring for Yourself* comes from the experiences of others who have cared for people with mental illness or from professionals. There are exercises and activities to help you develop skills to help you cope with your situation, whatever that is.

You will find information about:

- Being in a caring role.
- Taking care of yourself.
- Getting your own life back.
- Finding information about what your relative or friend is going through.
- Dealing with problems.
- Talking about what is going on.
- Supporting your relative or friend.

We hope the exercises and activities will help people who cannot attend training courses or support groups. If it helps you, please get in touch. We want to know how we can help more people who are supporting a relative or friend with a mental health problem.



Gráinne Fadden
Director
Meriden Family Programme



Paul Jenkins
Chief Executive
Rethink Mental Illness

Booklet 5: Problem-solving and goal achievement

There are often times where people come across issues that need to be faced, or challenges to be tackled. This booklet introduces a way of dealing with everyday concerns that can sometimes be difficult to manage. This method can also be used to achieve specific goals. After describing a structured, six step method of problem solving, this booklet will give some examples of problems people have addressed or goals that they have achieved. As with the other booklets, there is an activity to help you think about how you might use this in areas of your own life.

Sometimes it can be difficult to figure out the best way of going about things. This is particularly true when there is a lot going on. One way of tackling difficulties is to set down what the problem or goal is, and then list all the possible solutions. It can then be helpful to look at each solution in turn, thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of each. This can then help to identify a realistic solution and plan of action.

Having a clear way of sorting out problems can be particularly important if you are in a role of supporting a relative or friend with mental health problems. You may have more issues to address than you may have had were you not in this situation. Because you may all feel stressed at times, it can be difficult to decide on what to do for the best with everyone's agreement. Having a structured way of talking about things where everyone's views are heard is really beneficial.

Reasons for using this approach

You may find that some things seem to sort themselves out naturally over time. However, other difficulties may rumble on for a while, perhaps causing stress and disagreements within the family. Some day-to-day problems can end up being a source of real frustration, while bigger issues seem too daunting to tackle. It may also feel like that there isn't the time or space to sit down and talk with others about how to solve a problem and everything seems to fall to one person – perhaps you? Having the option to include everyone concerned can make a real difference, especially when looking at issues that involve more than one person as is often the case in a family or among a group of friends.

In the same way, it may feel difficult to achieve some of the things that you might like to. For example, it might feel like you don't have the time, space or support from others to get out, see friends or have more time to yourself. Setting out a goal and considering ways of reaching it can be really helpful.

Guidelines to using this approach

- Start with a fairly straightforward goal or problem, especially while you're getting used to this approach. It's a new way of looking at things, so don't jump in at the deep end!
- Initially, use this approach when you can find a little space to think through the problem. Once you become familiar with the technique you can use it for more complex issues or goals.
- You can go through this approach by yourself but do think about who it might be helpful to involve...
 - A close friend?
 - Another family member?
 - Everyone affected by the issue, including your relative or friend with the mental health issue.
- Involving others can have a number of benefits. It can help when it comes to thinking about potential solutions, adding variety and perhaps suggestions you would not have thought of. It can also help people feel more involved and included.
- If you are doing this with more than one person, it is helpful if everyone has a role. For example, one person can make notes, another can keep the discussion on track by following the steps and keeping to the guidelines.

Note: There may be times when your relative or friend is not able to concentrate and take part in a discussion about issues or things you would like to do together. What we are introducing in this booklet is an effective tried and tested method, and because of the structure it provides, people are much more likely to be able to take part in discussions carried out in this way compared with those without a focus where conversations can become very heated and end up without a decision or a solution being found.

5.2 Six step method to problem-solving and goal achievement

The method follows six steps which are:



Step 1: Pinpoint the problem or goal

Be specific

As accurately as you can, describe what the problem or goal is so that someone who didn't know you or the issue you were talking about would be able to picture it. For example it may be that you want to problem-solve the issue of leaving your relative so you can go away for a holiday. Does this mean a weekend, a few days, two weeks? How far are you planning on going? Will your relative be left alone? Are you looking at one problem or is it actually several clustered together? Being as specific as you can will help you think about *exactly* what the issue is.

Make it achievable

You may find the problem or goal is quite a large one so it may be helpful to break it down into smaller ones. So a big goal like 'going on holiday' might include three smaller goals of 'going away for one night', 'going away for the weekend' and finally 'going away for a week's holiday'.

Limit the problem or goal

When learning this method, it may be helpful to use it with a problem or goal that is individual to you, for example, making some time to see a friend. Alternatively, if you are doing this with other people, identify a problem or goal that you can *all* agree is an issue.

Choose something straightforward

This may be the first time you've tried problem-solving in this way. You're learning a new skill and so it may be helpful to think about something that is not too complicated. Once you're more familiar with this structured way of doing things, you may want to consider issues that are more longstanding or you feel more emotional about, or that are complex and hard to decide on.

Step 2: List ALL possible solutions

The next step is to think of as many ideas or solutions as you can. Just put them down, off the top of your head, and never mind if they sound good, bad or just plain daft. Even silly sounding solutions can lead you to think of ones that are more realistic, especially if you've got stuck trying the usual things. Try and come up with 5 or 6 possible solutions. Avoid getting hung up on thinking or talking about the good or bad things about each solution at the moment. Just list as many as you can, even if you think they might not work.

If you are doing this with more than one person, try and help everyone come up with at least one suggestion.

Step 3: Consider each solution

This involves thinking about the main advantages and disadvantages of each possible solution. It's important to remember that no single solution is likely to be ideal. All of them may have good things and not so good things about them. As with the last step, try to avoid spending too much time talking or thinking. Just identify the main points.

Important:

Many of us tend to think of the negative things first. In this approach it is essential to say what's good about a possible solution, before talking about the problems with it. Doing this helps you to consider all solutions before dismissing them too quickly. It also respects everyone's ideas, which can encourage people to come up with even more ideas.

Step 4: Choose the 'best' solution

Having gone through each solution, identify the one that best fits your problem or goal. Things to think about here are what you have in terms of finance, support from others, skills and other resources. The solution you choose may not be the ideal one, but is the one that can be used most quickly and effectively in your current situation.

It is sometimes easy to fall into the trap of thinking that once we have made a decision, that decision can't be undone. However, it is important to remember that it is possible to

change your mind about something. Furthermore, if the decision you have made doesn't work out, you can always go back to the process, look at some of the other ideas you had come up with and choose another option.

Step 5: Plan and carry out solution

Work out a plan of action. Again, try to be as specific as possible and describe who will do what, when and how. As with step one, it may be helpful to think about how you would describe it to someone outside the situation. It might also be helpful to think about the things that may get in the way of achieving the solution and identify ways of dealing with these. For example, if the goal is seeing a friend, one barrier might be that you may be concerned about leaving your relative. How might you manage this? For example, it may be that you planned a day out shopping. If it's a really wet day, will you still want to go? What might your back up plan be? You may have decided to go on a trip that involves train travel, but on that day, your relative or friend with mental health problems is feeling anxious. Could your backup plan be that you do something in your local area instead?

Similarly, if you decided to go out for a meal, but one person doesn't feel up to the effort required in going out, could you have a take away instead so that you still have a meal and time together?

Step 6: Review the results of your efforts

It is important to set a time to look back at how you have got on in trying to tackle your problem or reach your goal. For example, if your goal was to go swimming once a week, set a time at the end of the month to review this.

When the time comes to look at the results, spend a while thinking about what went well, especially what you think you did well, *even* if you did not solve the problem or reach your goal. After all, it's important to look at what *did* go well so you can remember to do it next time. If you have gone through this with someone else or other people, it may also be helpful to tell them what you liked about what they did. Then consider what got in the way of the goal or problem being sorted? It may then be helpful to problem-solve this using this same 6 step method.

Before trying it out for yourself, look through the following examples to see how other families have used the approach.

5.3 Other families' experiences

Example 1: Use of computer and phone

Step 1: What is the problem or goal?

Talk about the problem or goal, listen carefully, ask questions, and get everybody's opinion. Then write down *exactly what the problem or goal is*.

Maureen (mum), Caitlin (daughter) and Michael (son) frequently had disagreements about the use of the family computer and telephone. Using the internet meant that the telephone couldn't be used at the same time. They needed to find a way to ensure that everyone gets some time on the computer and telephone to do what they wanted.

Step 2: List ALL possible solutions

Put down *all* ideas, even if you are not sure they might work. Get everybody to come up with at least one possible solution. List the solutions *without discussion* at this stage.

- 1) *Have a timetable that everyone sticks to.*
- 2) *Each person in the family can use the computer and internet one evening a week.*
- 3) *Get rid of the computer altogether.*
- 4) *Enquire about the cost of broadband.*
- 5) *Everyone has a slot, but can negotiate with someone else to swap slots.*
- 6) *Everyone to reduce the amount of time they spend on phone or computer.*
- 7) *Get mobile phones for everyone in the family.*

Step 3: Discuss each possible solution

Quickly go down the list of possible solutions and discuss the main advantages and disadvantages of each one.

- 1) **Advantages** – *everyone will get a turn, this is a fair process.*
Disadvantages – *people may have other commitments which mean that they miss their turn. Some may need to use the computer urgently, but will not be able to because they are not on the timetable for several days.*
- 2) **Advantages** – *everyone will get a turn and this is fair.*
Disadvantages – *someone may need to use the computer urgently but can't because it is not their turn in the week. This solution does not free up the telephone.*
- 3) **Advantages** – *there would be no disagreements, there would be no cost.*
Disadvantages – *no one has an opportunity to use the computer, this could have impact on work and studying, especially with Caitlin's exams coming up.*
- 4) **Advantages** – *this would mean the telephone and the computer could be used at the same time.*
Disadvantages – *it may be expensive.*
- 5) **Advantages** – *this would reduce the impact on work and studying, the slot could mean that you get more than one evening per week to use the computer.*
Disadvantages – *people may be unwilling or unable to swap.*

6) **Advantages** – *this would create more opportunity for other people to have use of the telephone and computer.*

Disadvantages – *people may be unwilling to stop using the computer once they have started, this could cause arguments.*

7) **Advantages** – *everyone would get equal access to a telephone, people would be able to stay on the computer for longer.*

Disadvantages – *this could be expensive – who would pay the bill?*

Step 4: Choose the best solution

Choose the solution that can be carried out most easily to deal with the problem or achieve the goal.

Combination of 4 and 5.

Step 5: Plan how to carry out the best solution

What resources are needed? Work out any major pitfalls to overcome. Practise difficult steps. Plan time for review.

Step 1)

Michael to discuss with others a time that would suit them best and to draw up timetable.

Step 2)

Timetable to be discussed with everyone, and any changes made before agreeing to it.

Step 3)

Maureen to explore broadband and get information on the costs.

Step 4)

Family to discuss together whether or not they can afford the cost of this.

Step 6: Review results

Focus on achievement first – what worked well. Review plan. Make any changes that are necessary.

Family to meet in one week and review steps 1 – 4 in the plan:

Step 1 & 2)

Was a timetable produced? Did everyone have chance to use the computer? If this did not work well, consider revising the timetable taking into issues that might not have been considered when the timetable was first drawn up.

Step 3)

Was information gathered about broadband?

Step 4)

Discuss cost and if affordable, plan for broadband to be connected. If broadband is not an option, do the family need to explore one of the other possible solutions in step 2 of the problem solving method and plan how to implement?

Example 2: Family spending time together

Step 1: What is the problem or goal?

Talk about the problem or goal, listen carefully, ask questions, and get everybody's opinion. Then write down *exactly what the problem or goal is*.

Goal: *Dad, Linval, Mum, Marcia and their children decided that they would like to spend regular time together socialising. This is something that they have not been able to do for several months.*

Step 2: List ALL possible solutions

Put down *all* ideas, even if you are not sure they might work. Get everybody to come up with at least one possible solution. List the solutions *without discussion* at this stage.

- 1) *Identify a regular time each week when all the family could meet up.*
- 2) *Think of a different activity to do each week as a family.*
- 3) *Stay in and get some take away food.*
- 4) *Each person in the family takes it in turn to choose an activity.*
- 5) *Stay in and get a DVD.*

Step 3: Discuss each possible solution

Quickly go down the list of possible solutions and discuss the main advantages and disadvantages of each one.

- 1) **Advantages** – *everyone would know in advance when they were to meet, people could then plan for this time, and plan other activities around this.*
Disadvantages – *people have different activities and could not all meet at the same time every week.*
- 2) **Advantages** – *meeting together would not get boring, people would have something to look forward to.*
Disadvantages – *it might be hard to come up with new ideas, some people may not like what has been planned, it may be the same person who gets to choose the activity each week.*
- 3) **Advantages** – *it would be relaxed, people would get a chance to talk while they are all together if they are not involved in another activity.*
Disadvantages – *this could get boring if it is the same thing every week.*
- 4) **Advantages** – *everyone would get the chance to choose an activity, it would not get boring, people could cope if they did not like the activity planned this week because it would be different next week.*
Disadvantages – *some people may not like a person's choice, an individual may feel frustrated if no one else likes what they have chosen.*
- 5) **Advantages** – *this would be relaxed, it would not take too much planning, it would not cost too much.*
Disadvantages – *it could get boring, not allow on opportunity to talk if everyone is absorbed in a film, it could be boring if you do not like the film.*

Step 4: Choose the best solution

Choose the solution that can be carried out most easily to deal with the problem or achieve the goal.

Solution 4

Step 5: Plan how to carry out the best solution

What resources are needed? Work out any major pitfalls to overcome. Practise difficult steps. Plan time for review.

Step 1)

Family members to discuss and agree a time that would suit them best to get together each week.

Step 2)

Rota for who chooses each week to be discussed with everyone, and any changes made before agreeing to it.

Step 3)

Family members agree a budget for the activity each week.

Step 4)

Family members agree who is going to organise the activity each week.

Step 6: Review Results

Focus on achievement first – what worked well. Review plan. Make any changes that are necessary.

Family to meet in one week and review steps 1 – 4 in the plan:

Step 1)

Were the family able to agree on a time to meet each week? If not do they need to revisit this?

Step 2)

Were the family able to agree a rota for choosing a weekly activity? If not do they need to revisit this?

Step 3)

Have the family been able to agree a budget?

Step 4)

Have the family been able to get the activity organised and have they been able to have a social activity together?

5.4 Your turn to try



The examples on the previous pages will have given you an idea of how you might go about using the six step method. Now it's time to think about how you might use it. It may be that you want to take a break, mull things over and come back to it. Once you have identified a problem or goal, look over the steps again at the beginning of this booklet and start the process as follows:

Step 1: Pinpoint the problem or goal

- Be specific.
- Make it achievable.
- Limit the problem/goal, i.e. make it realistic.
- Choose something straightforward.

1. The goal I want to achieve/the problem I want to solve is:

Step 2: List ALL possible solutions

Think of as many solutions as you can off the top of your head without any thought or discussion.

2. The possible solutions to the goal/ problem are:	Pros:	Cons:



Step 3: Consider each solution

Quickly consider the main advantages and disadvantages to each solution and note them in the above table. As with the last step, avoid spending too much time talking or thinking. Just identify the main points. Remember, always talk about what would be good about it first.

Step 4: Choose the 'best' solution

Identify the solution that best fits your problem or goal.

4. The best solution is to:

Step 5: Plan and carry out solution

Work out a plan of action around who will do what and when, including things you/ others will need, major barriers to overcome and solutions to this.

5. Plan of action:

Step 1 _____

Step 2 _____

Step 3 _____

Step 4 _____

Step 5 _____

Date and time of review _____



Step 6: Review the results of your efforts

What happened? What went well? What did you and others do well? If you didn't solve the problem or achieve the goal, what got in the way? Problem-solve using the same 6 step method.

6. Review

Result:

What went well:

Review plan:

Next steps:

5.5 How did you find it?



Having tried out the approach, take a moment now to note any thoughts you have about how it went:

Does it fit for you?

What are the advantages?

When can you try it out?

Who else could you involve?

Are there any issues you need to think about?

Trouble shooting difficulties with the Six Step Method

It may be, after reviewing how things have gone that you feel as if you haven't achieved your goal or solved the problem. This can be disheartening so it may be worth considering a few things:

It's work in progress:

It is rarely the case that something is sorted out first time around. In the examples given above, people may have gone on to work on several further attempts before things came to some conclusion. It may be helpful to think about the fact that after one try, you're further on than you were if you hadn't tried. The fact that the problem or goal wasn't sorted after one attempt doesn't mean the problem can't be solved or that the goal is unachievable. Neither does it mean that you or the method has failed. Maybe it just needs more thinking or talking about.

Be realistic:

This is a method that can be used by you to address some of the individual difficulties you experience. However, if the problem or issue involves other people as is often the case, it is usually helpful to involve them in the process. In this way they may feel more able to contribute and play their part. It is unrealistic to assume that others will automatically buy into this approach if they have not been involved or have an idea of how it works. For example, if a positive outcome relies on the actions of your relative, it is really important that they are involved right from the start. So you may want to talk to them about the approach and see if they are willing to give it a try.

Life events happen:

It may have been that something came up that made it difficult for you and your friend or relative to carry things out in the way that you planned. Other things may have got in the way, for example, illness, crises, something coming up at work, school or college. If this is the case, it is likely that your attention and energy was taken up with this, as it should have been. As discussed above, it doesn't mean you, or this approach, has failed. It means that life got difficult for a while. Once things become more settled, just pick up where you left off.

If things aren't working quite to plan, here are some questions to consider:

- Were you able to make the goal/problem specific enough?
- Were all key people included in the exercise?

- Reconsider the solutions identified. Are there any others you can think of?
- Do you need to change the steps towards achieving this goal/solving this problem? In the plan did you or someone else find it difficult to do the job that needed to be done? If so, what got in the way? How can you address this?
- Did some things seem harder than anticipated? For example, making a particular phone call, filling out forms, talking to someone? If this is the case then it may be that you need to practice them with someone first.
- Would it be helpful to try out this approach with someone you find it easy to talk to and who is supportive of you in your current situation? For example, could you use this method with a friend, talk things through with a Carer Support Worker, or suggest that people try this approach at one of the meetings of a carers' support group that you attend?

5.6 Summary

This booklet described a structured way to solving problems and achieving goals. The examples given illustrated ways of approaching everyday issues and goals. You also had the opportunity to try the approach out for yourself. By doing this you may have found that sometimes things aren't sorted out in the first attempt but may take a while to figure out. It is often the case that the end of one attempt leads to further ideas that you can try out. After all, life may always throw up further goals and challenges. What you have now is a tool to tackle them. You can find an abbreviated version of this 6-step method on the following page for you to photocopy and use whenever that's useful.

5.7 Key learning points

- We often face problems or difficulties that need to be sorted or goals that we want to achieve.
- When supporting a friend or relative with a mental health problem, there may be more challenges to face, and some can be complicated.
- Having a clear method of discussing issues where everyone's voice is heard and where all ideas are considered is really useful.
- Using the problem solving method covered in this booklet will make it easier to reach decisions that can then be tried out.
- It is easy to get worried about making decisions in case they won't work out, but using this approach shows that if the first thing we try doesn't work, you just go back and try out another idea.
- Planning how to carry out a decision.

Solving problems and achieving goals



Step 1: What is the problem or goal?

Talk about the problem or goal, listen carefully, ask questions, and get everybody's opinion. Then write down *exactly what the problem or goal is*.

Step 2: List all possible solutions

Put down *all* ideas, even if you are not sure they might work. Get everybody to come up with at least one possible solution. List the solutions *without discussion* at this stage.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

Step 3: Discuss each possible solution

Quickly go down the list of possible solutions and discuss the main advantages and disadvantages of each one.

Step 4: Choose the best solution

Choose the solution that can be carried out most easily to deal with the problem or achieve the goal.

Step 5: Plan how to carry out the best solution

What resources are needed? Work out any major pitfalls to overcome. Practise difficult steps. Plan time for review.

Step 1 _____

Step 2 _____

Step 3 _____

Step 4 _____

Step 6: Review results

Focus on achievement first – what worked well. Review plan. Make any changes that are necessary.

Thank you to . . .

Producing a resource such as this relies on the support and contribution of a wide range of people. We consulted widely at the various stages of the development of the material in terms of content, layout and presentation, and would like to thank all of those who gave so generously of their time and ideas.

In terms of initial discussions on content, Thurstine Bassett, Alison Faulkner, Michele Gladden, Becky Heelis, Peter Woodhams and Aiesha Wright were particularly helpful. Martin Atchison and Chris Mansell kindly provided materials for some of the case examples and exercises. Thanks also to Claudia Benzies and the 'COOL' group of carers for allowing us to share some of their material on recovery.

One of the biggest tasks was reading through the earlier versions of the different sections which was a really time-consuming activity. We wanted to ensure that the material is meaningful, helpful and presented in a way that is easily accessible to carers and family members, so we enlisted the help of family members recruited through Rethink Mental Illness and the Meriden Family Programme. We are so grateful to those helped with this task – June Cooley, George Gladden, Michele Gladden, Edward Haslam, Christine Lewis, Philippa Lewis, Philippa Lowe, Maggie Morgans, Jeanette Partridge and Peter Woodhams. A number of other carers who equally spent hours reading through drafts and providing feedback did not wish to be named in person, so our heartfelt thanks to those 'anonymous' family members for all their time, commitment and valuable comments.

Special thanks to Peter Woodhams for his help in preparing the final version of the booklet 'Being a Carer', to Paula Conneely for help with the final versions of the sections on Relapse Management, Communication Skills and Problem-Solving, and to Sam Farooq for all her attention to detail in proof-reading the material, and all the other administrative tasks such as liaising with family members and the design and printing team. Finally thanks to Mark Teagles from White Halo Design for design and layout, and for his patience and flexibility in producing the finished product.

About the authors

Gráinne Fadden is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist based in Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust, Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham and Director of the Meriden Family Programme. The cascade method of training and system of organisational change for improving services to families developed through the Meriden Programme have been adopted by several organisations within the UK and abroad. The Programme has been the recipient of numerous awards for 'Modernising Mental Health Services' and for 'Mental Health Innovation'. She was awarded the prestigious Marsh Lifetime Achievement Award by Rethink Mental Illness in 2009 for her outstanding contribution to mental health. Gráinne has been involved in family work and research throughout her career, and has written extensively on the effects of mental health problems on families, on how family members can be supported, and the training of mental health professionals. She links with a range of national bodies on issues relating to families and carers and has delivered training around the world.

Carolyn James qualified as a Clinical Psychologist in 2003. Currently she works in clinical health psychology and training, and prior to this she was part of a child and adolescent mental health team in East Birmingham. Before training Carolyn worked as a Research Assistant on a number of projects, including the Meriden Programme. Carolyn is proud to have been part of the Programme since the very beginning. She has maintained her links with the team since that time and returned to talking with families and therapists as part of her doctoral research. Carolyn was interested to find out what helped engagement in family therapy and, as a result of her work, developed a theory about some of the factors that therapists may need to consider when talking with families about Behavioural Family Therapy (BFT).

Vanessa Pinfold is a health services researcher. She joined Rethink Mental Illness in 2003 to establish a research team within the charity. Previously she worked at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London. She is currently working as a part time research fellow at Rethink Mental Illness and is chair of The McPin Foundation – a small family charity that supports mental health research and promotes mental well being through innovative projects.

Vanessa has always had an interest in mental health carers and through research programmes has sought to develop practical tools to assist families and relatives of people with mental illness. She has been involved in the Time to Change campaign to end mental health discrimination and the re-development of Rethink Mental Illness 'Caring and Coping' training programme. Vanessa has also led the development of an online package to assist practitioners to work with families through timely and appropriate information sharing in mental health.

Notes

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The Meriden Family Programme
Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
Tall Trees, The Uffculme Centre
80 Queensbridge Road
Moseley, Birmingham
West Midlands B13 8QY

Phone 0121 678 2896
Fax 0121 678 2891

www.meridenfamilyprogramme.com



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For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0300 5000 927
Email info@rethink.org

www.rethink.org