

information

HAVING A PARENT WITH MS: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO CHILDREN?

We will never be able to know or understand the full impact felt by children who have a parent with MS. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, children are constantly growing, changing and developing. Secondly, MS is a chronic, degenerative neurological disease, each day will bring different challenges to each person with MS. The wide variations in the physical and cognitive changes brought on by MS always cloud the issue of “what caused what” in a family’s situation.

Staff at MS Australia can help and support each family member. We have several ways of providing parents and their children with opportunities to explore the impact of MS on everyone in the family. These opportunities are based on the belief that communication within families of the impact of MS on individuals’ lives is, despite the initial pain, vital and ultimately a positive experience. MS Australia staff involved in these activities are acutely aware of how complex and sensitive is the issue of MS and the family.

Often when we ask parents, “*What do your children think about your MS?*”, the answer is, “*Oh, not a lot*”, or, “*They seem to be coping*”. When we push a little, many parents comment that they “*don’t really know what the children think*”. Adolescents, in particular, may not speak about their reactions but may express some of their thoughts through their (often difficult) behaviour. It would seem that many parents form a view of their children’s attitudes to MS through the behaviour they see rather than as a result of communicating with them.

FAMILY CAMPS

MS Australia ACT/NSW/VIC conducts Family Camps each year. At these camps, up to six families with children between the ages of 12 and 15 travel to a camp destination, often in a rural location, to join MS Australia staff members for social activities.

There is, however, a serious side to the weekend. The children come together, away from their parents, and

share with each other their thoughts about MS. This is proving to be a most positive experience for the children, where they can speak with other children facing similar issues.

The parents, as a group, also come together and share their thoughts about parenting and MS. The discussion sessions are led by social workers and other health professionals from MS Australia.

KIDS DAYS

These days bring together children aged between six and 12 years. The aim is to very gently introduce the topic of having a parent with MS to these young children. To do this, MS Australia health professionals work with the children on art and other fun activities.

For more information about Family Camps and Kids Days, please contact MS Australia.

PEER SUPPORT – WOMEN IN THE EAST

This vibrant group is for women with MS. The group meets at the Nerve Centre on the first Thursday of the month from 10am – 12.30pm.

Group members come together to meet and provide mutual support on a monthly basis. Contact the Peer Support Coordinator on 03 9845 2700 if you are interested in making contact with the group.

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The Nerve Centre

54 Railway Road
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