

What Helps Family Members and Friends

Here are some suggestions collected from people who have loved ones with a mental health problem:

Professional / Peer Help

- If someone is suicidal, get immediate attention for him or her. Call 911 if there's an immediate danger.
- Make sure that the person gets the help needed, for example, a therapist or a hospital stay. You may have to help make the appointment and go with him or her.
- Get professional help for yourself to learn what your own responsibilities and capabilities are.
- Join your own support group, formal or informal.

Learn about Mental Health

- Read and learn all you can about the mental disorder that your loved one has.
- Be flexible and patient. Cures are rarely instantaneous.
- Learn to recognize the signs of the mental disorder.

Communicate with your loved one

- Tell the person that you love and care about him or her.
- Visit him or her, especially if hospitalized. A smile, a flower, a picture or a short hug can make all the difference.
- Avoid doing things that trigger the person's disorder, ex: if the person become anxious or depressed when he or she is pressured to hurry, don't try and rush things.

Help your loved one live with their mental health problem

- Help the person to keep his or her days structured.
- Support efforts to find the medicines and therapies that work best.
- Monitor medicine intake.
- Encourage physical exercise, good diet, plenty of sleep, creative activities, and sunlight.
- Learn to recognize the warning signs that an episode is going to happen, and help your loved one to take action to head it off or minimize it.
- Plan future activities for both of you to look forward to.
- Maintain some kind of social activity with your loved one, such as going to the movies.
- Make the best of the person's good days. Drop the housework to enjoy time with your loved one.
- Keep guns out of the house.

Have a life of your own.

- If the depressed person needs monitoring or assistance, get help.
- Plan future activities for yourself alone.
- Live one day at a time.

* **Disclaimer:** These suggestions are not professional medical advice, just things that have worked for real people living with mental health problems and their families.