

Supporting a Friend with a Mental Health Issue

Chances are you know one or more people with a mental health issue, such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, PTSD, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. If a family member, friend, or colleague has one of these medical conditions, keep these tips in mind:

- ▶ **Offer support.** Whether a friend is experiencing a bout of depression or coping with a lifelong condition such as schizophrenia, it's important he or she knows that you have his or her back. Remind the person that you are available to provide support.
- ▶ **Encourage treatment.** A person who has a mental illness often needs to adhere to a medication or therapy regime. If your friend expresses reluctance to stay on schedule, gently remind her or him of its importance in staying healthy and on track.
- ▶ **Adapt to the new normal.** A friend who has been diagnosed with a mental health condition may need to make some lifestyle changes. If a favorite activity is no longer an option, look for other common interests that you can share.
- ▶ **Be compassionate.** A person who is struggling may say or do things that are damaging to relationships. Respectfully address any hurtful behaviors, while also reminding the person that you care for him or her. If you feel able to do so, offer forgiveness.

- ▶ **Stick to a routine.** Having a steady routine can be comforting to someone who is coping with a mental health issue. If you and your friend frequently share movie night or Sunday brunch, continue the tradition. This will help your friend maintain a sense of normalcy during difficult times.
- ▶ **Be a friend first.** Avoid blurring the line between friend and caregiver. If your friend wants to share details about his or her condition or treatment, listen and be empathetic. Avoid becoming overly involved in your friend's treatment or care unless she or he specifically asks you to take on an official role.

If a colleague, friend, or loved one seems troubled, encourage her or him to seek assistance from a doctor, therapist, or community resource. LifeMatters is also available to provide suggestions and helpful resources. Call 24/7/365.

The above information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of medical advice.



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