

My Family Member Has a Mental Health Issue: How Do I Help?

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A staggering 20% of the adult population will suffer with a mental illness each year. Nearly 50% of the population will have a diagnosis of a mental illness during their lifetime. Only 40% of those who suffer in any given year will actually receive treatment.

Chances are you currently have a family member or other loved one with a mental health issue, if not now, at some point. These are astounding numbers and they appear to be increasing, especially in our youth. Given the unfortunate abundance of mental health issues, having an understanding of how to best support them is imperative, as a lack of support or a dismissive attitude only intensifies their pain.

Consider the following:

- Foremost is acknowledgment of their suffering. Although improved, a societal bias remains which asserts that mental illness is not real and not biological, but rather something that a person can overpower. This is completely inaccurate. Through neuroimaging, brains of sufferers show patterns consistent with a neurobiological process. Denial
- will substantially worsen the already difficult course that your loved one will endure.
- Educate yourself about your loved one's symptoms. Show interest, ask questions and advocate for them to get care. People who are actively suffering with mental illness often cannot think clearly to determine how to get the care they need.
- Help your loved to get to appointments and encourage them to comply with recommendations, such as counseling or medication, even when they are feeling better. Be a part of their team. Do not take control but rather help them to empower themselves.
- Encourage resource use, such as the National Alliance for Mental Illness or support groups that could be beneficial for the family.
- Stay positive and provide encouragement that they will recover. Comment on their strength and determination to fight their illness. Encourage them to stay socially active.
- Remember to keep appropriate boundaries so that your loved one feels dignity and respect and

you do not feel overwhelmed or over involved.

Staying honest, loving, and providing acceptance cultivates an environment that will promote the greatest chance of your loved one feeling understood and supported.