Helping a Loved One

Helping a Family Member or Friend

It can be particularly distressing to have close friends or family members suffer with a psychological disorder. Not only can the illness cause them pain and disrupt their lives, but it can also damage your relationship with them. There is reason for hope, however, both for your loved ones and for you. While you can't control their illness, you can take steps to ensure that they receive the help they need, that their recovery is as quick as possible, and that you don't get burned out in the process. To that end, there are three critical things to consider as you learn more about mental illness and what you can do to help your loved ones:

- Mental illness is remarkably common. The National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates that more than 25 percent of the population in the United States will suffer from a psychological or substance abuse disorder this year. The stigma of mental illness keeps many people silent about their illness or the illness of a loved one, but chances are that you already know at least one person who has dealt with a psychological disorder personally or in a family member.

- Treatment for mental illness works. If your loved one is ill, he or she might get worse before getting better, but up to 90 percent of people who receive appropriate treatment (meds, therapy or both) will experience improvements in their symptoms.

- The family and friends of people with psychological disorders need help and support too. Dealing with a loved one's mental illness can strain you emotionally, physically and financially. There are resources to help you deal with the challenges in front of you, and it is important to seek them out at the same time as you are seeking care for your loved one.

Though it can be challenging, it is possible to help your loved one while also taking care of yourself. The following information sheets cover some of the most important things you can do to help yourself and the person you love.

- When someone you care about has a mental illness
- Knowing what to say or do when your loved one is ill
- What to do if your loved one is in emotional crisis or is suicidal

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