

Aging Well

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Tips for Caring for Someone Who has Mental Illness

1. Look for Signs of Mental Illness
 - Mood changes, irritable, easily angered, teary, etc.
 - Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
 - Withdrawal and isolation from others
 - Changes in appetite and/or weight
2. Talk about Mental Illness (set aside time to talk without distractions)
 - Ask open-ended questions (How are you doing? Is something bothering you?)
 - Use "I statements" (I am worried about you. I have noticed, etc.)
3. Encourage Treatment (Encourage and normalize getting help)
 - It's just like going to the doctor when your body is not working properly, it's the same for when your brain isn't working properly.
 - Treatment is usually temporary but can also be long term.
 - Go to appointments with them when possible. When you have a mental illness, it's difficult to be fully present and it's helpful to have a second pair of ears to listen or ask questions.
4. Educate Yourself (About their mental illness diagnosis)
 - Ask their Mental Health Professional for information or resources about diagnosis
 - Don't GOOGLE Search! (There's a lot of misinformation out there. Use reliable websites and resources: (psychiatry.org, Psych Central, Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, WebMD, etc.)
5. Be Patient (There will be good days and bad days)
 - Reassure them that you are there with them on this journey and that you are not going anywhere.
 - Give it time: Finding the right treatment combination of therapy, medications, etc can take time before you notice a change or symptoms improving.
6. Take Safety Precautions (If they are suicidal or self-harming)
 - Contact their mental health provider and let them know of your concern of suicidal thoughts (possible medication adjustment is needed or hospitalization)
 - DO NOT leave them alone
 - DO NOT keep sharp knives, objects, or weapons that could be used to self-harm in their home.
 - Call 9-1-1 or 9-8-8 if you are concerned for their safety. 9-8-8 is the Suicide and Crisis Life Line (available 24 hours, 7 days a week).
7. Take Care of Yourself (YOU CAN'T POUR FROM AN EMPTY CUP)
 - Self-care is so important when taking care of someone who has mental illness so you don't experience Caregiver Burnout.
 - Caregiver burnout is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion from taking care of someone else.

- Signs of caregiver burnout are similar to Depression or Stress:
 - Irritability, frustration or anger towards others
 - Withdrawal from friends, family and other loved ones
 - Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
 - Feeling hopeless and helpless
 - Changes in appetite and/or weight
 - Changes in sleep patterns
 - Unable to concentrate
 - Getting sick more often than usual
- How to avoid caregiver burnout by Taking Care of Yourself:
 - Physical Health
 - Healthy diet (Take snack and food breaks, eat when they eat! Stay hydrated.)
 - Exercise (Walking in the neighborhood, gym, workout YouTube videos, etc.)
 - Get rest and sleep (Sleep at reasonable hours, nap if you need it, nap when they nap! It's okay to take breaks!)
 - Get a physical (if you haven't had one in over a year)
 - Mental Health
 - Seek support from a mental health professional for yourself, just venting to a therapist can be beneficial
 - Support groups, there are online and in-person options
 - Interests/hobbies (art, gardening, sewing, cross-stitch, etc.)
 - Supportive people (coffee or meal dates, etc.)
 - Journal: getting your thoughts out on paper can help release it
 - Find Your Voice!
 - Please ask for help! (It's okay! It takes a village!)
 - Say YES when offered help! (If someone offers help, they want to help!)
 - Say NO! (It's okay to say no to adding more work to your plate!)
 - Respite care (Website: ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center. This is a resource directory.)
 - Caregiver: Agency part-time/full time professional help
 - Babysitter: Ask childcare workers at the church if they can babysit (They already know your child and usually are fingerprinted and trained in CPR.)
 - Spiritual Health
 - Church: weekly focus on Jesus in community is helpful
 - Read: 1-minute devotionals or "Verse of the Day" on YouVersion Bible App
 - Bible Studies: Being with other believers is encouraging and they can pray for you
 - Read Scripture Out Loud: for yourself or to the person you're caregiving

- Devotional or Bible Study: alone or with the person you're caregiving if able

Discussion Notes:

The reality is different for a person with anxiety or depression, similar to the case with someone with dementia. This can result in an argument. To solve this, suggest doing something with them. For example, let's go for a walk. This can help pull them out of their anxiety or depression. The underlying message should be: let me come alongside you. Empathize with them. For example, I know you've been feeling this way for a few days. Let's try something new. Changing the setting can be very helpful. Usually mornings are the hardest. Try to plan something the day before for them to do in the morning. That can help them get their day started. Stick to structure and routine where possible.

Anxiety: involves the amygdala. Psychologists can provide tools to help the person deal with anxiety. Ask them "what are you worried about?" "What is your fear?" Usually, anxiety is fear-based. Encourage them. For example, "You got through this other thing, you will be able to get through this next thing if it happens." "What is the worst thing that could happen? Can you handle that?" If they are a Christian, remind them that the Holy Spirit is with them.

Dementia can lead to depression. They may want to go home. Say "I know. I understand. I know I would want to be home." Empathize. "This place will help you to stay safe."

How do you help someone who doesn't want to get help? What if they believe that psychology is anti-christian? Resistance to psychologists. Remind them that everything is confidential with psychologists. Tell them the analogy with being physically ill. Or suggest "Let's try it 3 times." Remind them that God did not create us to be in a hopeless state. God provided helpers and medications to help us get into a better state.

If an adult child is feeling hopeless: Help them find a support group. They will see others having breakthroughs, which creates hope.

The person needs to live in the day, not have regret for the past and worry of the future. It can be helpful to ask them "What are your goals?" This allows the person to feel participatory in the process.

Are there tools for knowing when the person is recovered? Healing is not necessarily a linear process. It is possible to test your metabolism to know which medications you metabolize best. What worked for your other family members?

There is power in sitting with someone in the dark and listening to what they have to say. They may sound like a broken record, but keep listening and allow them to be stuck.

How do you help someone who is stuck? Limit your time if it affects you negatively. Mention to them "It sounds like you've been stuck for a while." Sometimes they need the truth. Be gentle. Some people don't realize they are stuck.

Personality disorder is narcissism, control-dependent, borderline personality disorder.. These are usually the result of a bad upbringing.

One audience member described her journey of healing from depression. She tried different anti-depressants. She tried various therapists. She couldn't find a therapist that worked for her. She tried reading several books on depression. The books and the anti-depressants were helpful to her, but everyone's healing journey will be different.